

## **IRE Board Meeting June 16, 2016, New Orleans**

In attendance: Sarah Cohen, Matt Goldberg, Josh Meyer, Ziva Branstetter, Chery Thompson, Phil Williams, Steven Rich, Jill Riepenhoff, Ellen Gabler, Chrys Wu, Nicole Vap, T. Christian Miller, Andrew Donohue (arrived mid-meeting), Mark Horvit, Tricia Morgan, Lauren Grandestaff (arrived mid-meeting)

Cohen calls the meeting to order at 2:10 p.m.

Cohen notes that this is Horvit's final meeting as executive director.

Horvit gives the executive director's report. He notes that membership has been averaging new highs the past several months, ending each month at or above 5,500 members.

Retention of student members has been good.

IRE's podcast is building a strong audience, with about 30,000 listens in the past year. The first Spanish-language podcast was recorded recently, and the IRE en Espanol page relaunched.

Also, the Spanish-language listerv, NICAR-L ESP, is doing well.

NICAR-Learn, our new online data-training platform, is building slowly but steadily, and has already earned back more than the costs for creating and hosting it. Members pay \$25, nonmembers pay \$40. Cohen thanked Mary Jo Webster and all the other members who have donated their time to create content for NICAR-Learn. Sarah Hutchins is overseeing this project.

Horvit told the board that it's time to look at creating a new website for the organization; this one was built in 2009. A new site, likely built in Wordpress or another platform that would be easier to maintain than our current site, would be beneficial, and the goal if possible is to link the site with the back-end membership program. Horvit said he'd talk about the cost when discussing the proposed 2016-17 budget.

Cohen asked if students were the main driver for the increase in membership. Horvit said that was one reason, but that many factors are at play, including the growth of the NICAR and IRE conferences.

Miller asked what registration is for this conference. Horvit said that staff still hasn't logged everything, but that we're at about 1,820 so far, making it highly likely that we'd meet or surpass the previous record, set last year in Philadelphia. Horvit said the international lunch would be the largest ever, and that many companies, including Gannett, NBC, Tegna and others, have large contingents at the conference.

Horvit said that hitting new record high's should not be an automatic goal, and that there are pluses and minuses to growth, including changing the nature of the event. A conference with 2,000 attendees is a different kind of event than one with 800, which is where attendance was when he started in 2008.

Horvit noted that the Resource Center has published an updated version of the Crime Stats book, thanks to author Ted Gest. Horvit asked board members to thank Gest for all of his work on the book. He updated the board on the research project being done for Reuters, in which students do research work for the news service's journalists. He also said we've got a contract to do some work for freelance journalist, and have gotten requests from others. Lauren Grandestaff is overseeing this project, which Horvit said has a lot of potential to generate revenue. Grandestaff has been looking at ways to expand the project. Cohen noted that this project is a perfect fit for the kind of services IRE provides. Williams asked about liability, and

Horvit said that we have created a form modeled after the one used for data analysis work that organizations must sign before IRE performs research work.

Horvit updated the board on several training projects, which are overseen by Jaimi Dowdell, including the first data boot camp for Dow Jones interns, which has a lot of potential for the future. He said the TNT training program was renewed with a \$150,000 grant; that program is overseen by Megan Luther. He said the possible program being done with the Asian American Journalists association may be partially funded; IRE would do a small part of the overall program, focusing on training.

Cohen asked Horvit if he was concerned that more organizations are providing data journalism training. Horvit said that it's inevitable, and that as long as IRE continues to do the best training available, competition should not be a problem.

Horvit gave a short update on the Arizona Project movie project, saying the contract continues to be negotiated. The initial payment would be \$35,000 which would more than cover our attorney's fees; the next payment, if the movie begins filming, is much larger and the board's discussion to this point has focused on placing future payments in the endowment. Meyer asked about Horvit's role. Horvit said Miramax executive heading the project requested that Horvit continue to be the company's contact with IRE even when he leaves, for consistency's sake. Horvit said he would do so. There is a "producer fee" that Horvit would donate to IRE, increasing the total amount IRE earns from the project. Horvit said a screenwriter has been hired and has spent time in Columbia going through the archives and has been talking to former Arizona Project journalists.

Horvit said several grants have come through for the coming year, including a \$100,000 general operating grant from Ford, and that the \$100,000 Watchdog grant from Ethics and Excellence in Journalism also in place. He said that the fundraising goal for the two 2016 conferences was \$180,000, but that more than \$300,000 has been raised.

Horvit told the board that the fundraising consultant hired by IRE did not recommend creating a full-time development position, but did recommend moving some duties within existing staff. Several other recommendations are outlined in the report given to the board; brief discussion ensued. Cohen asked if the consultant thought IRE was missing out on large donations from individuals; Horvit said that the consultant does not believe that is the case. Recommendations in her report would generate some increased money, but not large amounts.

### **Committee Reports**

Branstetter said that the IRE Contest drew 558 entries, making it one of the organization's larger contests. She said expanding the student category worked well, a change made this year. She said other changes also worked well, but recommended adding language to better explain that the Gannett innovation award is looking for.

Branstetter said another suggestion is to limit the number of names that organizations can submit for an individual entry. Several other suggestions were made by Contest Committee, including creating a new international category and considering limitations on the number of finalists in each category. Discussion of these and other issues ensued.

(Donohue arrived at the meeting during the discussion).

Gabler brings up an issue that arose when she was screening and asks if every category could have at least three screeners. Horvit said it's not easy to recruit as many screeners as we

already have, noting that many categories already have three or more, depending on the number of entries. Riepenhoff supported the idea of having at least three screeners. Horvit said it can be done if it's what the board wants; Gabler pledged to help find the additional screeners.

Cohen asked if the committee could bring specific recommendations to the board at its fall meeting.

Williams discussed future fundraising for the endowment. He talked about the value of planned giving, and noted that while it won't help the organization today, it could make a significant difference in the long run. Williams discussed several options, including putting up a page on the IRE website promoting planned giving, asking two couples who have already committed to significant planned gifts to make video testimonials if they are willing, creating an ad for the IRE Journal promoting planned giving and doing other promotional things on social media. Williams noted that many longtime IRE members are getting to the age where making such decisions is important.

Horvit noted that he has brought the concept of promoting planned giving to the board in the past. He said he supports the idea but that in the past the board had wanted to focus on raising money that would be available immediately. Cohen said that in past years IRE's finances were more precarious and that could have accounted for the priorities being different. Discussion ensued about planned giving, and the board agreed that the Endowment Committee could pursue Williams' ideas.

### **Budget**

Horvit noted that the budget was initially presented to the board on a call in May. The only significant change in the new draft is that, at Cohen's request, \$10,000 was added to cover any additional costs for the executive director search.

Horvit said IRE is poised to end the year well ahead of budget and with significant cash on-hand. He said that the Reserve Fund now stands at \$300,000. The board's ultimate goal for that fund is \$600,000. While plans had called for small steps, Horvit said the organization can afford to put \$200,000 into the fund now, to bring it to \$500,000.

Donohue said the goal is to have between 3-6 month of operating expenses in the reserve. This move would take the organization much closer to the six-month goal.

Horvit also said he would like to add \$70,000 to the coming year's budget to allow for replacing IRE's website. The funds may not need to be spent entirely in 2016-17, but if they aren't, they could be carried over to the next year.

Horvit said these plans would still allow IRE to begin the new fiscal year with \$85,000-\$90,000 cash on hand.

He also noted that once a contact is signed with Miramax for the Arizona Project movie, IRE will get \$35,000, which could go into operating revenue. If things proceed, that should occur in this current fiscal year, but that money is not now included in the budget.

Cohen asked if an extra \$10,000 in the budget for the search is enough. She said they may need to pay a new director a signing bonus, for example. Horvit said the \$10,000 mentioned earlier was in addition to \$10,000 already available.

Miller asked how the end of the fiscal year was looking. Horvit said the budget called for ending the year about \$35,000 in the black, but it now looked like that amount will be at least \$150,000. Horvit said there is additional cash available that has not been budgeted.

**Rich made a motion to move \$200,000 into the reserve fund and to add \$75,000 for the new website project. Donohue seconded. The board voted unanimously in favor.**

Cohen thanked Horvit for the organization's strong financial situation as the year ends.

**Donohue made a motion to approve the 2016-17 budget as amended. Goldberg seconded. The board voted unanimously in favor.**

### **Code of Conduct/Statement of Principles**

Gabler said the board previously discussed adopting a statement of IRE principles and agreed informally to language that would be adopted. The statement would apply to all IRE activity, and sets parameters for treating others. She also noted that there is a short statement that Horvit and the staff created for use at NICAR and IRE conferences this year, which includes a phone number and other ways to contact staff in case of a problem or emergency.

Cohen said that one important aspect of the statement is that it lets attendees know what to do if they have a concern or problem.

**Gabler made a motion to adopt the Statement of Principles; Riepenhoff seconded. The board voted unanimously in favor.**

### **Moral Courage Award Proposal**

Williams said the issue is not up for a vote at this meeting, and is something he brought up previously at the fall retreat. He has been discussing it with the Public Engagement Committee and Horvit. The idea is an award that in some way honors a journalist who has shown great courage in their work. Williams said the 2017 conference in Phoenix would be a great place to start such an award. He said it would provide IRE with a public way of making a statement in support of such journalists. Williams said he would like to bring the matter to the board for a vote at the fall retreat. He said he would put together a formal proposal, and asked for any feedback in advance of that.

Cohen repeated a concern she brought up during the previous discussion, that journalists elsewhere in the world face so many threats that looking at a U.S. reporter for an award like this could look like the board is unaware of the global situation. Williams said the first recipient could be an international journalist.

Riepenhoff asked if the award is only for IRE members. Vap said it would be for any investigative journalist. Goldberg said anyone could submit a nominee. Branstetter asked who would handle nominations; Williams said the engagement committee would. Cohen said this could be like the Founders Award, only given by the board when an appropriate nominee is found.

Wu said she doesn't like calling it an award. Donohue said he is concerned that IRE already gives a lot of awards. He asked how much traction the Golden Padlock has received.

Horvit said last year's award, given to a local government agency, got a lot of attention, but he predicted that this year's, going to a federal agency, might not. He also said we got fewer nominations this year than in the past few years.

Donohue wondered if this could be something IRE issues a statement about, rather than award. Discussion of the award continued. Williams said he would take all the feedback and put together a proposal. Vap thanked Williams for all of his work and passion on the issue.

### **Audience members**

Two audience members want to address the board.

Jeff Burnside, president of the board of the Society of Environmental Journalists. He thanked IRE for giving SEJ the opportunity each year to program sessions for the IRE Conference. He said that SEJ is also looking for a new executive director and it's search will be still be ongoing after IRE has made its selection. He asked if it would be possible to get information on candidates who ultimately are not selected for the IRE job. Cohen said that IRE can notify our candidates about the SEJ job.

Horvit thanked Burnside for all of his help in programming sessions for the IRE Conference.

Horvit then introduced Linda Shockley from the Dow Jones internship program.

Shockley thanked Horvit for recruiting the first class of Dow Jones interns and thanked IRE for providing training for them. She said she's heard great things from the news organizations where the students have been placed. She said Dow Jones wants to continue the program and encouraged IRE to remain involved.

Cohen thanked Shockley and Dow Jones for working with IRE.

The board took a break at 3:50 p.m. and reconvened at 4:10 p.m.

### **Future Conference Locations**

Horvit said it's time for the board to consider locations for future IRE and NICAR conferences.

He asked Director of Events Stephanie Sinn to discuss possible locations.

### **Data Library**

Horvit asked Data Library Director Liz Lucas to discuss a proposal for changes in the library, which was also included in the information sent to the board in advance.

Lucas said the proposal involves maintaining fewer databases from year-to-year, but adding in new data sets that make sense at a given time. Those new data sets would not necessarily be maintained in the future. This would allow the library to be more proactive on getting data sets and to focus more time on data analysis and other tasks. And she said that many data sets receive little use.

Cohen said there is value in keeping the historic data that IRE now has. Gabler said the data library should not spend a lot of time working on data sets that are not being used by journalists.

Lucas also said ProPublica has proposed hiring the data library to do work on data it sells from a new store. The work is the kind of thing that the library's graduate students could do. Many of the customers who request data from ProPublica are not journalists, so IRE would be doing work for such customers (but only working as a subcontractor, through ProPublica).

Cohen said that these issues are staff issues, and do not need board approval.

Horvit said that ProPublica is creating a data story and has offered to sell IRE data through the story. Cohen said IRE needs to check on liability issues.

### **DocumentCloud**

Horvit reminded the board that Anthony Debarros quit. He said the current Knight grant funds the program through December. He updated the board on work toward beginning to charge journalists and others for using the platform in many cases. He said that Miller contacted someone who has worked on start-ups and with venture capitalists, who is reviewing DocumentCloud and its potential.

Horvit said that if no more money is raised or earned, on Jan. 1 there should be enough funding to keep DocumentCloud running, without taking new submissions, for some time. But he said that, in that scenario, at some point the platform would cease to operate. Horvit also said he would continue to work on the project through the end of the year, even though he will no longer be executive director.

Donohue and Meyer said IRE needs to be transparent about DocumentCloud's future to its users. Horvit said users have been notified that there will be a pay version of DocumentCloud, and also will be some kind of free version available.

Discussion ensued about the platform's future. Miller said it is a positive for the service that large media organizations use it, but also noted that big companies like DropBox have the resources to create competing platforms that DocumentCloud could not keep up with.

### **Executive Director Search**

Cohen said the search has taken longer to get started than initially hoped, but that a search committee is in place and is working with the university. Among the issues that have arisen is that some candidates will not apply if they must move to Missouri. She said the next step in the process will be board interviews with candidates who are selected by the search committee. She said she is not sure whether the board will have a new director by the time Horvit begins his new job in mid-August, but that he has agreed to continue to do work for the organization until a successor is in place.

Donohue said some strong applicants have expressed interest; the question is whether they are truly interested in moving to Missouri.

