

## **IRE Board Call April 30, 2015**

In Attendance: Andrew Donohue, Matt Goldberg, Len Downie, Jill Riepenhoff, Chrys Wu, Josh Meyer, Phil Williams, Sarah Cohen, Nicole Vap, David Cay Johnston, Ziva Branstetter, Ellen Gabler, T. Christian Miller  
Staff: Mark Horvit, Amy Johnston

Meeting called to order at 10:05

### **Executive Directors Report - Horvit**

#### **Conference**

- Registration numbers look good; we are running ahead of where we were for Boston and San Antonio.
- Fundraising has gone well.

Cohen asked who the hosts are. Horvit replied that the hosts are NBC News & NBC owned TV stations along with NBCUniversal & Comcast.

- The Institute for Nonprofit News (formerly the Investigative News Network) will be holding its conference in conjunction with ours again this year. Denise Malan, an employee of both INN and IRE, is currently the interim acting director of INN after the departure of Kevin Davis.
- Reynold Business Journalism will sponsor a session again on Wednesday.
- CIR will be doing a Techracking session. (Note: This was later canceled)
- A three-hour workshop will be offered Sunday tied to the Merchants of Doubts documentary about questionable experts that the media uses for climate change issues. The Poynter Institute is involved in the training.
- There will be two showcase panels on Friday, New Muckrakers and a session on issues related to investigating sexual assault cases.

#### **Membership**

- Last month we had a record high for membership and this month is already higher than last month.

### **Budget – Horvit**

Today we are just discussing the budget proposal. The board will vote on the budget at its June meeting. We will take any feedback from today and incorporate it into the final version. A few notes:

- DocumentCloud will be a line item in the big budget and we will have a separate budget that breaks it out.
- There is no plan to add any new positions next year.
- Membership projections are based on the past two years.

Miller asked about the cost of Journal going forward. Horvit replied that a few years ago IRE switched from a bi-monthly (6 issues) to a quarterly (4 issues). We significantly reduced the cost a year and half ago by contracting the work out rather than having someone on staff do the work. Only a small portion of the overall cost of offering the Journal is related to printing and mailing; a big part of the budget is a portion of Megan Luther's salary, who serves as editor.

Johnston noted that he thought it was a good idea to maintain a print journal. He also noted that there have been studies that show that it helps with membership retention.

There was discussion of how IRE makes tip sheets and stories available, and whether more revenue could be generated from this. Cohen and Horvit noted that while on the budget document the Resource Center does not generate much income, it contributes to the membership income because a number of members maintain their membership for access to resources such as the tip sheets.

### **Database Library**

Horvit said he has previously informed the Board that the library would operate at a loss in the coming year because a couple of one-time jobs that were done in the past two years were not in the budget for this coming year.

Cohen said a more detailed conversation about the data library could be held in June.

Williams said he would like to talk about how marketing of the data is done.

### **Conferences**

Horvit said that while, for a second year, the conferences are exceeding budget, he recommends budgeting conservatively for 2015-16. Some increase has been built in, but not one that matches current revenue, as that is very hard to predict.

Cohen asked what companies are doing training days during the conference. Horvit replied Gannett, Scripps and NBC are holding their own events or meetings. Cohen asked if we get money for those and Horvit replied that we don't get money but we get registrations. Horvit also noted that with structural changes at both Gannett and Scripps, it's not clear what impact that might have going forward.

### **Investments and Returns**

Williams asked about where things stand regarding another endowment push.

Horvit said that there had been talk about not doing a big public drive but rather approach select individuals, but said that no progress has been made. He said he has spoken with some donors about planned giving, and that two efforts are in the works, including a donation that could exceed \$200,000 and that would be targeted to holding training at colleges and universities with diverse student makeup. This would be a named fund and would be endowed.

Horvit then discussed some of the other possible donors. He also noted that he didn't think a public drive to build the endowment would make a significant difference, because he believes what's needed are a few large donations.

### **Other items**

- Salary and personnel cost will not have a major change, beyond the 2-3 percent raise built into the budget. Fiscal officer Heather Feldman Henry moved some of our salaries into different categories this year to better reflect actual expenses for running certain programs. Johnston praised this decision.
- Legal fees exceeded budget this year because of negotiations related to ongoing discussions of a movie version of the Arizona Project.
- Donohue will be bringing a proposed policy to govern the Reserve Fund to the June meeting.

Horvit asked if there were any other questions.

Downie said the budget looked impressive.

Meyer asked if Horvit was being pulled in to many directions and what was being done to deal with the demands on the executive director's position.

Horvit said that they would be discussing it more at the June meeting. He also noted that he would be putting together an organizational chart for the June meeting. He noted that Jaimi Dowdell and Stephanie Sinn were now in management positions that improved workflow in the office and reduced the number of issues coming directly to the executive director. The expansion of the DocumentCloud team also has reduced Horvit's day-to-day involvement.

An overview of the DocumentCloud budget followed.

Cohen asked Horvit how comfortable he is with the overall financial picture. He replied that he is very comfortable with current situation and plan for the coming year. She asked whether there might be funds available to hire contractors to work on specific projects to reduce workload on the staff.

### **Other Items**

- Horvit said that at the NICAR conference he spoke with several board members about IRE forming an arrangement with the National Freedom of Information Coalition (NFOIC). Combining some resources could be beneficial to NFOIC, which has seen a significant reduction in its budget. It would also provide IRE with another tangible way to play a role in issues related to access to government information. One key piece is a fund that NFOIC administers that provides some support to legal challenges to rejections of open records requests. It was created by NFOIC and the Knight Foundation, with funding from Knight.

Horvit reminded the board that he joined NFOIC's board as a liaison from IRE and the Missouri School of Journalism. Discussions of this possible new relationship have run the gamut from some kind of merger to more of a partnership, which is where things now stand.

Meyer noted that they seem like a good organization. Johnston said that he thought it goes toward our mission and that we should proceed with the conversation. Miller said he was enthusiastically in support of it.

Vap noted that she is on the local Colorado board and they are hosting NFOIC's national conference later this year in Denver and it might be a good time to get some feedback. Horvit replied that this is something that would be on a more accelerated time frame. He said he would talk with Cohen about how to proceed.

- Horvit told the board that he has been discussing a possible joint project with the Asian American Journalists Association (AAJA). It would be a multi-year grant that would involve IRE training and consulting as part of a bigger project.

- Cohen asked if Horvit could walk through the timetable and changes with the elections.

Horvit described the timetable:

April 13 – Period to declare candidacy begins

May 11 – Deadline for candidates to appear on the initial ballot

May 18 – Voting period begins: candidates statements posted online

June 4 – Deadline to be added to the ballot

June 6 – Voting closes at 6:30 p.m. eastern time.

A few changes from last year:

- All of the information about the candidate will be online, we will not duplicate that on the ballot.

- Candidates' speeches will be Friday evening immediately following the Friday afternoon showcase and in the same room. In the past these have been done on Saturday evening. The goal is to hold this earlier and potentially with more people in attendance.
- We will still have the membership meeting Saturday evening, where the membership can ask questions. We will then announce the winners.
- Contest judges are included on the ballot for the first time this year. If no candidates run, those two seats will be appointed, as has been the case in past years if no one ran for a contest judge seat.

Cohen said she is working on a letter to send to candidates that offers details and suggestions about running for office. Cohen also said she has a letter to send out to the membership encouraging those coming to the conference to wait to vote until they hear from the candidates.

Riepenhoff suggested that it might help to have a specific description about what the contest judges do. Miller noted that IRE needs to be up front about the fact that if no one runs we will appoint people.

Meyer asked if the board should discuss some issues from the vote on several items in the Articles of Incorporation that was held at the CAR Conference. He said some students told him there was tension during that meeting. Cohen and Horvit said there was some objection to holding a voice vote instead of a closed ballot, and Cohen said a student asked about whether students would be allowed to run for the board in the future – now that they could vote – and she said they would not be at this time. Cohen also noted that the items that were up for vote has been shared with the membership in advance and feedback and input had been sought; no questions were asked and no feedback submitted prior to the vote.

Meyer asked if the vote was close or if it was unanimous. Horvit replied that it was unanimous on each item.

Goldberg motioned to adjourn at 11:15 a.m. Meyer seconded. The vote was unanimous to adjourn.