

Board of Directors Meeting
June 22, 2017

In attendance: Cheryl W. Thompson, Jill Riepenhoff, Lee Zurik, Phil Williams (via Skype), Matt Goldberg, Sarah Cohen, Andrew Donohue, T. Christian Miller, Ellen Gabler, Nicole Vap, Steven Rich, Josh Meyer, Ziva Branstetter

Staff in attendance: Doug Haddix, Heather Feldmann Henry, Stephanie Sinn

Previous Minutes

Motion to approve minutes from January 24, 2017 board call made by Cohen, seconded by Branstetter. Unanimously approved.

Motion to approve minutes from April 24, 2017 board call made by Goldberg, seconded by Vap. Unanimously approved.

Executive Director's Report

Staff updates

Haddix spent his first month as IRE's executive director in the IRE offices in Columbia, Mo. Thereafter, he has visited one week each month. Haddix has been checking in with the staff, and this arrangement seems to be a good amount of time. The dean of the Missouri School of Journalism and Haddix have met several times when Haddix has been in town. Haddix believes they are developing a good working relationship.

On June 19, Megan Luther gave notice that she will be joining Raycom, leaving IRE in late July. Laura Dieringer's last day was June 23.

Grants

Haddix worked directly on the renewal and acquisition of new grants. Cody Winchester, Megan Luther and Denise Malan met with the Ethics & Excellence in Journalism Foundation. They are pleased with the Watchdog Workshops and how they are evolving, per meeting.

Cohen asked if there is a target for partnerships. Haddix responded that a Director of Partnerships position is being considered, and this matter would fall under this position's set of responsibilities.

Training:

Haddix said there have been some challenges with staffing due to turnover, but otherwise it's going well. He has stepped in as needed.

CAR Conference:

Went smoothly.

IRE Conference:

There were 1,613 attendees registered as of the morning of the meeting. As of the meeting, revenue stood at \$300,000. Last year's revenue was \$315,000. Donohue asked how attendance compared to last year. Last year's numbers were in the 1,800 range.

Membership:

There has been a small drop in memberships over last year, but Haddix attributes the slide to a rebound from the jump in memberships last year that came with strong attendance at the New Orleans conference. Donohue asked about the conference attendance numbers in Philadelphia. Sinn said that conference was also in the 1,800 range.

Training:

With the knowledge that IRE is not going to have a conference in the northeast in the next few years, the staff has started thinking about doing something else in that region.

Cohen asked how the board and IRE are engaging with the Ida B. Wells Society. She wants to make sure we have a close relationship with them. Haddix said that part of the Knight grant for IRE has gone to scholarships for Ida B. Wells students/members to attend the IRE conference and NICAR.

The board considers it a priority to look for ways to partner with all types of organizations representing diverse groups.

Total Newsroom Training (TNT):

Haddix asked for help with spreading the word about TNT. This program offers two days of intensive training at no cost to small/mid-size newsrooms. It is wholly funded by a grant and was recently renewed for its fifth year. The program received about 50 applicants last year, and IRE awarded training to 10.

Python Bootcamp:

Haddix said that Cody Winchester is talking with people in a few different cities about a Python bootcamp. There is a lot of demand, and this could be a strong revenue generator.

Conference Planning:

There was some discussion about the location of future conferences. Over the next few years, conference locations are as follows (per Sinn):

2018 CAR Conference - Chicago, IL
2018 IRE Conference - Orlando, FL
2019 CAR Conference - Newport Beach, CA
2019 IRE Conference - Houston, TX

Cohen asked if can we look into having some future conferences in more northern cities. She has heard some interest in Detroit. Gabler asked if Sinn/IRE has looked at Minneapolis. Sinn said they had considered it for CAR but wasn't sure if there was a large enough venue. She said that space is a big hurdle when planning: We take 60,000 feet of meeting space.

Zurik asked if the board can we get a list of places where we fit. Sinn said she could compile this for the board retreat in September.

Data Services:

Haddix said that this is in a rebuilding stage and that IRE will be working on a plan over the next couple of months for how to grow the revenue side. Haddix said the numbers look pretty good, even though there was a vacancy (Director of Data Services) for about 4 months.

Editorial:

Sarah Hutchins is now the editorial director. She is responsible for any news we are producing, for the institutional voice, the way people are encountering us. The Trump issue of the IRE Journal was released as a PDF to the general public and has generated a really good reaction.

Vap asked about redesigning the website. Haddix reported that IRE has started this process. Sinn added that a company is already transferring data from the main IRE site over to a Wordpress site, which will be responsive. Haddix said there may be a second stage later in terms of design, but right now it's about getting the site to be on one platform and fully integrated.

Haddix said the podcast is growing significantly, and that it got a boost in traffic from the David Farenthold episode.

Research Desk:

Reuters has renewed their contract with the Research Desk. Haddix suggested that the Research Desk is another potential revenue stream for IRE, as news researchers have gone by the wayside in newsrooms and there is a large demand for people who can do backgrounding of

different individuals and companies, pulling court cases, filling out a spreadsheet, etc. A director of partnerships will be very helpful with moving those efforts forward.

Endowment and Budget:

Donohue reported that the three endowments are on track to earn what they have earned in previous years, but since the books are in good shape, there isn't necessarily a reason to withdraw it. Earnings could be reinvested back into the endowments.

Haddix reported that IRE has reinvested a \$100,000 surplus back into the endowment from last year along with other donations that were specified to go into the endowment.

Miller asked if there is a target for funding the endowments. Haddix responded that it is part of the budget.

Haddix reported that for the Arizona Project movie project, IRE got a \$35,000 option, \$21,000 of which went to legal fees related to overseeing the project. Cohen asked if there is another payment coming in relation to the film. Haddix responded yes, that if filming begins, a large payment would come to IRE. Cohen commented that this would give the organization a reason to do an endowment drive and that it's worth revisiting if the payment comes through.

Haddix said that IRE has reinvested \$15,000 in the David Donald Fund so it is fully endowed and IRE can start funding scholarships next year for the CAR Conference in Chicago.

Haddix noted that any individual fellowship funds that are created, for example, in the name of a particular journalist must be funded to at least \$20,000 before money can be taken from them and applied to scholarships. Cohen suggested that IRE should have a more established policy on rolling out scholarships in the name of individual people, and suggested that IRE might combine these scholarships into a single fund. Gabler suggested that it might be worth putting the policy in writing so that people understand why there aren't more scholarships.

Haddix said that we can be creative with marketing both to our members as well as funders and donors, including donors who want to give less than \$20,000. (Haddix referenced a couple who, through IRE, covered the cost of a journalist to attend a bootcamp, which came to about \$2,170.)

Haddix noted that using the endowment earnings is built into the budget, but if IRE does well and does not need it, the earnings will be returned to the endowment.

Motion to accept the budget made by Vap; Thompson seconded. Adopted unanimously.

Goldberg asked the board to spend some time thinking about what it can do to raise money for IRE. He said that both he and Zurik were able to find some new money this year for the

conference. He said that we can all do a better job and that we should ask for more, since people seem willing to give.

Zurik said to think about which organizations have never given us money but might want to get involved with IRE. Zurik encouraged the board members to get creative. You might not be the perfect person to make the pitch, but someone on the board may be a good fit, so bring up the idea.

Conference Committee:

Vap commended Thompson, Sinn, Luther and the rest of the IRE staff for fantastic coordination and planning of the conference.

Thompson asked that the board start recruiting a keynote speaker earlier in order to lock down more exclusive speakers whose schedules are often booked out. Cohen said this is something that happens every year and suggested that the board implement a system wherein members bring to the conference a list of people they want to see as keynote the following year.

Branstetter suggested that board members don't need to tell candidates they've been recruited for the keynote, and that if the board can get more than one high-profile speaker, they could be featured as a showcase panel.

Vap recognized Goldberg for bringing in a lot of money for the conference via sponsorships.

Zurik suggested going back to the conference sponsors with a message that tells them what they got for sponsoring IRE. Haddix said that this will probably happen in August, and that some of the sponsorships require follow-up forms detailing how their money was used. Riepenhoff suggested a handwritten note.

Miller asked about a giving sheet. Haddix said yes, we have one, and have increased some giving levels, but that we might raise them a little more. As we start planning for CAR, Haddix will tell the board what is still available.

Branstetter asked about in-kind opportunities for smaller line items, like printing, for people who can't give a lot of money.

Contest Committee:

Riepenhoff said there are four board members on the contest committee — this was incredibly helpful. Donohue volunteered to be on the committee for the 2017 contest. Thompson has already volunteered, too.

As a remedy to some issues the contest committee encountered this year, Riepenhoff suggested selecting "super screeners" for each category. These people would be required to

look at every entry and act as a quality control monitor. These super screeners would head their screening subcommittee and would be responsible for seeing that the subcommittee met contest deadlines. Under this structure, the contest committee would have two conference calls — one with the super screeners and one with all screeners. Mark Horvit has volunteered as a super-screener for the large print category.

Riepenhoff announced that they made the decision not to award medals in order to respect the special status carried by the medals. She was also glad that we were able elevate the finalists this year with conference name tag ribbons. The finalists will be announced in the awards luncheon video, along with the winners.

Cohen said the criteria for being a finalist should be that you can imagine the entry winning. If you can't, then it's not a finalist.

Riepenhoff suggested the need to rewrite the questionnaire, possibly an issue that should be addressed at the retreat. She also mentioned the need to require people to upload video/audio without ads, and said that innovation should be one category and one award.

Cohen mentioned that the board might want to find a way to recognize single-issue sites, and said that the categories don't really address that.

Goldberg asked the conference committee to come up with a list of suggested changes that the board can make decisions on.

Goldberg also mentioned that it might be time to retire the paper certificate and make it something that you can display.

Zurik mentioned that results/impact section should help an entry, but that it shouldn't hurt someone's chances if there was no change, since this is not under a reporter or news organization's control.

Member Services Committee:

Gabler asked if IRE should make student sponsorships an annual fundraising event that happens at a certain time each year. The board enthusiastically responded in the affirmative. Zurik suggested asking every year in September.

Gabler asked if IRE can have people sponsor students to go to IRE/NICAR rather than a membership. Thompson asked if we can get universities to send students. Gabler has found it's easier to do that with NICAR because classes are in session and it falls around the time of spring break for some schools.

Cohen suggested coordinating with the student press association meeting, which also happens in the summer, and expressed concern that we might cannibalize other donation sources.

The board likes \$25 student sponsorships once a year, and tabled the conference sponsorship question for another time.

Public Engagement Committee:

This year, IRE awarded its first Don Bolles Medal to the late Miroslava Breach Velducea, a Mexican journalist who was assassinated for doing her job. Branstetter mentioned that the messaging around the award was important, and that they would be emphasizing that Velducea represents the many journalists who have been targeted or threatened for their work.

Branstetter also expressed the desire to have a more formal mechanism to solicit input from all members to make the Don Bolles Medal a more inclusive project. She suggested asking for nominations starting in December and making the deadline mid-January. The public engagement committee can then consider the recommendations to decide: 1) If they want to award the medal and 2) to whom. She also said that someone representing the person being awarded should be invited and that there should be a ceremony.

Some board members expressed concern that asking for nominations suggests that IRE will award the medal every year. Branstetter and Goldberg agreed that this would be part of the messaging and that special care would be taken on this point. The committee will come up with language around the award.

Haddix suggested a Google form that might work throughout the year.

Williams suggested setting up a webpage with an email address at the bottom, or a form for nominations. Branstetter stressed the need to formalize a nomination process by the fall retreat.

The group then entered a brief executive session to discuss personnel and then adjourned the regular meeting at 5 p.m.