

## **IRE Board Meeting Minutes**

**Dec. 5, 2009 – 2:30 p.m. CDT at the Marriott St. Louis Airport**

**Board members in attendance:** Alison Young, Duff Wilson, David Cay Johnston, Manny Garcia, Cheryl Phillips, Robert Cribb, Leonard Downie Jr., Stephen Miller, Lise Olsen, Mc Nelly Torres, Lawan Williams, Phil Williams.  
Absent: Lea Thompson.

**Staff Present:** Mark Horvit, Jennifer Erickson, John Green, Amy Johnston, Stephanie Sinn; IRE attorney David B. Smallman, Esq.

1. **Call to Order**(Young): Young called the meeting to order at 2:42 p.m.
2. **Meeting overview** (Young): Alison thanked the board members for traveling to St. Louis for an in-person meeting. She said the goal for the day is to talk about the challenges that IRE is facing and how the organization can meet them. She also said the group would talk about recent successes, such as the Challenge Fund for Journalism V, the October membership drive, the Campus Coverage program and IRE moving into distance learning.

She asked board members to focus their discussion on policy, the direction of the organization and plans for the future.

3. **Minutes approval:** The board members reviewed draft minutes from the June 11, June 13, June 29, July 24, Sept. 10 and Sept. 17 meetings or calls. Young pointed out two corrections, which were noted. Wilson moved to accept the minutes with Young's corrections; Miller seconded the motion. All were in favor and the motion passed.
4. **Executive director's report** (Horvit): Horvit said that he is sharing monthly budget updates with staff and board members. He said that he and staff had a productive retreat this summer wherein many ideas were shared. He said that all staff members contributed to the reports that were distributed in the board packets today.

Attendance for the August CAR Boot Camps was good and brought in substantial revenue; staff decided to cancel the Miami camp at FIU, scheduled for December, because of low registrations. Two CAR Boot Camps are scheduled for January 2010 in Columbia (mapping and regular). IRE staff conducted such training in Minnesota and New York over the past year. He plans to move the Statistics camp from spring to fall; former board member Steve Doig has discussed the possibility of offering this as an online course.

Horvit said that IRE would conduct several ethnic media seminars in 2010; McCormick funds them and New America Media and Brant Houston of the University of Illinois collaborate on the program. He said that McCormick has decided not to renew the grant following completion of the workshops.

Horvit reported that the Ford Foundation recently approved a \$75,000 grant in support of two ethnic media workshops in NYC, and four regional bilingual workshops, over two years; the first bilingual seminar will take place in San Diego. He and staff submitted a new grant request to the Ethics and Excellence in Journalism Foundation for the Watchdog program.

IRE will begin offering webinars via Adobe Connect, discounted through the University of Missouri. The first will be in December on the topic of Google Wave and will be free. IRE members Sarah Cohen and Jennifer LaFleur will lead one on the stimulus package in January (\$5 charge for members/\$10 non-members/free for anyone who's taken a recent Watchdog seminar).

IRE staff will offer training on the 2010 Census in the coming months; Paul Overberg and Steve Doig have

offered to lead seminars. As part of this program we will offer a half-day of Census training at the CAR Conference in Phoenix.

Horvit said the October membership drive was successful. Many members gave donations as they renewed, and staff created new materials for recruitment.

Horvit said that conference fundraising is underway and going well. For the 2010 CAR Conference, ASU has agreed to provide all of the seminar space and other items as in-kind donations; *The Arizona Republic* has come on as a sponsor. For the 2010 IRE Conference, the *Las Vegas Sun/Greenspun* Corporation will be our hosts, and Sunbelt Communications/Jim Rogers are sponsors. Sponsorships for both conferences total \$57,500 currently; our goal is \$140,000, and we are on track.

Horvit said that IRE hired Roger Moore as a marketing consultant in 2006; Moore's report may be used as a model for putting together an updated marketing plan. Horvit said that MU journalism professor Margaret Duffy oversees a program wherein seniors and grad students work with professionals and put together marketing plans – they charge \$600 per semester. He asked board members to send him feedback so he may decide how to proceed. Olsen said that IRE needs someone working on this all year, rather than staff working on it piecemeal.

5. **Executive session:** P. Williams made a motion to head into executive session to discuss legal issues; Downie seconded the motion. All were in agreement and the executive session commenced.

The meeting was called back to order at 4:34 p.m. by Young.

6. **Conference Committee** (Torres/L. Williams):

- a. **Update on keynote speaker for IRE Conference:** Torres reviewed the list of potential keynote speakers. She asked board members to send other ideas to Horvit and her. Torres said she will send out a memo on how the committee promoted the Miami conference, for reference as we start 2010 promotion.
- b. **Discussion and vote on future conference locations:** Horvit said IRE is committed to Orlando for the 2011 IRE Conference. Financially it's a great deal, thanks to Stephanie Sinn's negotiations, with low risk, low food-and-beverage minimums and no attrition.

CAR 2011: Horvit said that Duke University has offered seminar space, via Sarah Cohen, over spring break. Horvit asked if the board agreed that he and staff should pursue this. The consensus of the board was to move forward on Duke for CAR 2011.

IRE 2012 and 2013: Horvit said that San Antonio and Boston are strong possibilities; the Boston dates fall over Father's Day, each year. Horvit asked the board to consider if Father's Day rules out Boston as a location. Also, there would be a \$195 rate in Boston. San Antonio rate would be \$169 on the river walk.

***Olsen made a motion to move ahead with Boston in 2012.*** Phillips seconded the motion. Discussion ensued. Downie said that, since the dates would fall on Father's Day, IRE should plan to load up the early part of the schedule and have a reception for younger folks on the

Sat. night of the conference. Phillips called for a vote. All were in favor of authorizing staff to pursue Boston in 2012.

*Olsen moved to authorize the staff to pursue a contract in San Antonio for 2013.* Wilson seconded the motion. Discussion ensued. Johnston recommended that IRE consider second-tier cities (Harrisburg, Pa., Toronto or Montreal) in future years. Johnston called the question. All were in favor and the motion passed. Horvit said he would come back to the executive committee for final approval.

7. **Contest Committee** (Phillips): Phillips said the committee is concentrating on how the IRE Contest should be structured and, possibly, updated. Phillips asked board members to send her comments and ideas on categories, such as on-line journalism, nonprofit models, and partnerships. Phillips said she would send out a cogent reminder email early the following week.

8. **Member Services Committee** (P. Williams): P. Williams said the committee is working on the recruitment of new members, including students and non-traditional members. The committee is considering a mini-membership drive in March targeting specific groups. He asked for feedback on potential 2-for-1 memberships with the journalism organization SABEW and perhaps the ethnic media organizations (NABJ, NAHJ). For a limited time, if any active members want to join IRE, they would get a discount.

Discussion ensued. Horvit said there's been some discussion on whether the offer of discounts would bother members who pay the regular \$60 fee. Membership has costs associated with it, and \$60 is already a low annual fee. Houston said that every dollar in IRE membership means \$5 in services. Phillips asked that IRE include NLGJA when offering such discounts. Johnston said the offer of discounts to attract new members is a common business practice. IRE has a need to increase diversity; the organization may take a hit financially, perhaps, but it is important. Cribb said IRE should look to international organizations as well.

Young applauded to Phillips and P. Williams for their hard work in heading their committees.

9. **Report on the Investigative News Network** (Brant Houston): Houston said that, back in July, about 20 nonprofit organizations got together as the Investigative News Network (INN). It's turning into a 501(c)(3) and will have staff. The goal will be to network and provide administrative support and inroads to collaborations and to help with story distribution. Houston discussed ways that IRE can work with INN. Houston is chair of the steering committee, and the Center for Public Integrity is the fiscal agent. The INN is defined as a group of nonprofit journalism organizations that conduct investigative reporting in the public interest.

P. Williams asked if IRE could provide the umbrella for the group. Houston said IRE would be part of the network. Johnston asked whether lines of formality were needed in the relationship between IRE and INN. Horvit said it is important that IRE be part of the network. Many IRE members are involved in the organizations that are joining the network. Horvit said working with INN is another way IRE can provide services to its membership.

The meeting went into a brief recess. Young said that the budget discussion would be moved ahead of the revenue discussion.

10. **Budget** (Johnston): Johnston said that the board needs to focus on new sources of revenue for IRE. He said that he and Horvit distributed an endowment report among the meeting materials, and that there is

additional money available in the endowment that IRE can draw if needed. Additionally, IRE now has a Cash Flow Statement (CFS), and he and Horvit would continue to refine the fiscal reporting.

Young drew attention to the CFS and asked: where are we headed and what is the scenario?

Horvit said the membership drive picked up the budget in the membership category a bit; this shows that when we are proactive, we can make a difference. The Campus Coverage program will bring in revenue at the start of 2010. In addition, we did not factor the decision to raise conference fees into the current budget.

Olsen said that the important figure is \$36,000 – the amount IRE is down in revenue at the moment. Horvit said to look at previous years – this time of year, in 2008 and 2007, IRE was down \$87,000 and \$70,000, respectively.

Horvit said there are a few things in the works that will affect the bottom line. For example, the McCormick Foundation is considering a \$40,000 grant to IRE.

Wilson thanked Johnston and staff for their hard work. Young said that staff would continue to provide monthly reports to the board and that the executive committee meets the second Thursday of each month. She invited all members of the board to take part in that call. Houston said it might be time to think about looking at biennial budgets for IRE.

11. **Revenue issues:** Young said the budget areas where IRE is down the most are the Database Library and on-the-road training. Horvit said the board and staff should be looking at the big picture and what we should be doing differently.

. **Board fundraising/Advisory Board:** Young said that the board pulled together and met the recent Challenge Fund for Journalism grant in some very difficult times. She said that everyone must continue to raise funds for IRE. She said she is putting together a conference call the first week of January to do some very specific brainstorming on fundraising. Do we need a panel of outside advisors; people who are tapped into money? Who might those people be to make the asks?

Garcia said he spoke with Tom Fiedler of Boston University and Alberto Ibarguen from the Knight Foundation. They each said IRE's board is top-heavy with journalists and that it needs an advisory board of people who care about investigative journalism and can give you advice and, more importantly, money.

There was a consensus among the board members to move forward with pursuing an advisory board.

- a. **Advertising:** (P. Williams): Williams asked whether IRE should change its advertising policy to allow ads from non-journalism corporations. Horvit said the current policy is to accept ads from media-related companies, foundations, and media-related products of use to IRE members. Miller said that tech companies need new places to advertise; IRE can be one of those groups. Young said that, in print journalism, news is separate from advertising.

Discussion ensued. After various motions were made and withdrawn, the following motion was made by Johnston: ***IRE will accept ads at our discretion, and the executive director will consult with the executive committee on a case-by-case basis. One year from now, the executive director***

*will submit a detailed report for review by the board.* Downie seconded the new motion. All were in favor and the motion passed.

b. **Sponsorships** (Garcia): Garcia asked whether IRE should accept donations or sponsorships from non-journalism corporations. Horvit said that, to date, IRE accepts sponsorships from media organizations and media corporations only. Garcia pointed out that you'll see Toyota, GM, etc. at other journalism conferences that allows them to bring in more revenue.

Young said there is a concern that there would be an impression that sponsors affect training decisions. Should we allow non-journalism sponsorships of the conference as a whole? specific panels?

Discussion ensued.

*P. Williams moved that IRE pursue non-journalism companies as conference vendors/exhibitors and study further what IRE's sponsorship guidelines should be.* Phillips seconded. All were in favor and the motion passed.

c. **Data Library sales:** Horvit said the current model within the Database Library must be revisited for the long term, as more data is becoming more easily available. IRE will be able to continue to sell some data sets, but the current model may not be a model for sustainability.

Horvit said IRE currently operates under strict rules to sell to IRE members only, as a member service. He would like to explore two different new models:

- Seek funding from foundations that are interested in transparency, and make the data free and open to anyone.
- Sell data to more groups, industries, etc. beyond our membership. And continue to sell to our members more cheaply.

Discussion ensued.

*Johnston made a motion to allow the executive director to explore issues related to making the data free and open to anyone and to selling data to groups and industries beyond the IRE membership, and report back to the board.* Phil seconded. All were in favor and the motion passed.

d. **Other new revenue possibilities** (Thompson, Olsen, board): Olsen said she is working to identify people within the core membership who may develop widgets and other elements for the next-generation IRE Resource Center. She'd like to unveil some at the 2010 IRE conference. The question to answer is: who in our group can create these items?

Olsen said she will also put some proposals together on building partnerships that would allow IRE to move more quickly into distance learning.

Olsen said there should be an e-mail marketing emphasis at IRE. She said the board could help promote the IRE Contest and holiday gifts, for instance, via e-mail marketing. Designate a point person or a student. Come up with list of targets and planned email marketing. Young said that IRE needs to look at cyclical types of marketing.

Phillips said she spoke to a family-owned newspaper group about IRE's many training offerings. She then followed up with the individual newspapers and secured training gigs that resulted in real revenue for IRE. She reminded the board members that they should get the word out about IRE training. Also, if you speak to your newsroom or other newsrooms, keep in mind that you may offer limited, complimentary log-ins to the IRE Web site, so that attendees may get a taste of what IRE has to offer.

## 12. Other new business

- . **Board-term limits:** Olsen suggested that the IRE board move to three-year terms (currently they are two-year terms). She also said IRE should have in place overarching, financial and programmatic vision goals over 3 years. Then IRE could structure committees to support the overarching, long-term 3-year goals and better focus our efforts.

Young cautioned that a lengthening of terms may rule out potential board members because they cannot commit to longer terms. Smallman noted that Article 6 of IRE's Articles of Incorporation deals with board terms.

P. Williams noted that, each year, IRE board members who are newly elected at the June meeting elect officers without a chance to learn about the process and candidates. He asked whether this should change. Young said she would put this on an executive committee agenda for future discussion.

- a. **Ujima Project (Miller):** Miller said he wanted to talk about his role in the Ujima project in case there is a perceived conflict of interest with his IRE board duties. He gave an overview of the project, whose Web site offers African journalists, non-governmental organizations and others seeking factual data access to information that is not readily available in many African countries. The project takes databases from several sources – U.S. government agencies and the European Union, for example – and provides it in an easily searchable manner.

Ujima has sponsors and will continue to pursue sponsors. Miller has been working with the project. If his role with the organization becomes a conflict of interest, Miller said he will resign from IRE.

Smallman said that, according to board policy, the board must analyze the potential conflict and vote on whether they perceive a conflict of interest. Horvit said he is not prepared to make a recommendation at this time. The board agreed to have further discussion on the issue.

- b. **Steve Weinberg proposals (Horvit):** Horvit said that former IRE executive director Steve Weinberg approached him about possible IRE projects.

i. Indexing and digitizing Weinberg's collection of articles on investigative reporting: Johnston said that a better historical record of investigative reporting would be very important; perhaps IRE could be the agent for a grant that Weinberg would write. Downie suggested that the Missouri School of Journalism act as the custodian of the grant for a joint archive; they have development staff.

ii. Seeking funding to do additional research into the murder of Don Bolles: The board did not express interest in pursuing this.

c. Olsen said she assisted on an Electronic Book on computer-assisted reporting in English, Portuguese and Spanish that was funded by the Knight Center of Journalism in the Americas. It would be available on their Web site for anyone, including IRE members. She brought it before the board in case there was a conflict of interest. No board member spoke up to say that he or she perceived a conflict of interest.

13. **Adjourn:** Olsen made a motion to adjourn; Downie seconded the motion. The meeting was adjourned at 7:39 p.m.