

Minutes, IRE Board Meeting, June 14, 2012

Board members in attendance: (in person): Manny Garcia, David Cay Johnston, Sarah Cohen, Lea Thompson, Mc Nelly Torres, Rob Cribb, Len Downie Jr., Alison Young, Josh Meyer. Phil Williams; (via phone): Andrew Donohue, Matt Waite, Aron Pilhofer (for part of the meeting).

Staff: David Smallman, Mark Horvit, Allison Prang

Garcia calls meeting to order at about 4:15 p.m.

Garcia discusses the upcoming election and the board members who have expressed interest in joining the executive committee. They are: Johnston (president), Donohue (vice president), Cohen (treasurer), Thompson, Torres and Garcia. Others can choose to run and any newly elected board member could run.

Johnston makes motion to approve minutes from the May 3 Board call. Young seconds. Unanimous approval.

Horvit introduces Megan Luther, new IRE training director, and Elizabeth Lucas, the new data library director.

Executive Director's Report:

More than 1,130 attendees have registered for the conference, not including passes for sponsors. Horvit says he thinks we'll be approaching 1200 people, making this one of the biggest conferences ever. The conference fundraising goal was \$140,000 dollars; about \$160,000 has been raised for both conferences. The shift from local support to national support continues, although The Boston Globe and Boston University were both significant funders.

IRE has a little over 4,200 members as of early June. That's down a bit from last year, although revenue for membership remains strong. IRE increased membership by \$10 this fiscal year. Renewals are down a bit, student membership is up. Fewer grant programs include a one-year membership (which were funded at a reduced cost). We also switched to a new membership database several months ago, and that may account for some differences in the numbers.

Williams asked if there was much feedback from fee increase. Horvit said there was very little comment, and he noted that the cost of attending the conferences remained flat.

Horvit said the cost for customized in-newsroom training has been increased slightly, and IRE no longer offers discounts for multiple days. The highest rate is \$1,750 per day, which is still low. Meyer suggests that, if the group being trained is large, the rate could be higher. Horvit said staff is continuing to look into the rates.

Horvit notes that IRE is doing more training at the corporate level. In the past two years, IRE has been hired by Gannett, McClatchy and Hearst to do regional workshops, and this year has also done a series of webinars for Gannett. Horvit says Gannett's Kate Marymont was the first corporate executive to commit to training (and to providing memberships for Gannett employees and scholarships to attend the IRE Conference). Gannett's model has helped drive other corporate training. Cohen asks if the training designed for Gannett can be repurposed afterwards; Horvit says it can.

For second year in a row, Scripps has more than 70 journalists at this conference. ABC and CBS have large presence as well, and NBC has journalist from its owned stations. More than 40 members of the Investigative News Network are in attendance.

Another training trend is the increase in training specifically for broadcast. The Hearst training is broadcast specific, driven by Hearst's Brian Bracco, and is focused on quick-turn investigations and increasing daily watchdog journalism. IRE will be doing a CAR boot camp for NBC-owned station's investigative teams in the fall.

Horvit discusses the new website, which launched in November. He says IRE staff is doing a great job of generating content for the site, with Lauren Grandestaff helping lead efforts on social media. A grad student will be hired this fall to expand these efforts. A new position will be added to oversee the website, either part-time or full-time. That position could also help with the IRE Journal. In the first five months of the year the site had about 100,000 unique viewers. Meyer asks what is driving the traffic. Horvit says it's possible that the increase in content, better design and easier use are all contributing. The new site also is designed to better maximize search engine traffic, according to Waite, who helped build it. The number of job ads has increased significantly.

The Quick Hits newsletter now has well over 10,000 subscribers, and ads are being sold. Overall, however, ad sales generate very little revenue.

Williams expressed concern that job ads sometimes dominate the site's main blog. Other board members said this is good, as it can help draw traffic. Williams suggests that job ads be placed in a separate block on the site's main page, others support leaving them in the blog.

Cribb asked why IRE doesn't do more when big media stories break in areas pertinent to the organization's mission. Horvit said that, in part, it's a matter of having time to research and write posts. Cribb noted that a board member could do it and suggested that a small advocacy committee be created for this purpose. Young noted that a few years ago IRE looked at doing something like this, and having the time was an issue. There also was the question of what positions IRE should take. Downie and others noted that taking positions for IRE can be problematic, as the

correct position to take is not always clear. Young noted that training is IRE's main mission, and anything done shouldn't take time or resources from that.

Donohue said it's important to weigh what kind of value IRE could add if it becomes involved.

Horvit stressed that he would welcome more web content from board members, even if it's from another outlet that they wrote for.

Johnston asks that Cribb chair a committee to look at these issues. Johnston and Meyer volunteer to be part of that effort, which Cribb says will be called a Public Engagement Committee.

Horvit discusses training. The Ethics and Excellence in Journalism Foundation continues to support the Watchdog Workshop program. The McCormick Foundation is funding the Community Partnership Program, where we work with two newsrooms in each of several cities to provide training and ongoing support. The Rockefeller Brothers Foundation is sponsoring election workshops. The Campus Coverage Project grant from Lumina ends this year. We may continue the project if we can find another way to fund it, and Lumina is potentially interested in providing a smaller amount of funding and help.

Horvit says DocumentCloud has been growing quickly, with more than 4 million pages uploaded, and at this point all services remain free. IRE has two grants, one from the Knight Foundation through a Knight News Challenge award, to create a method for an audience to post comments, and one from the Open Society Foundation to make the service available in additional languages. At this point there is about 18 months of grant funding remaining. Another effort is to create the framework to charge for some services.

Budget and Endowment Report

Johnston says the budget looks good as the fiscal year draws to a close. IRE will have a much larger cash balance than usual. He says there are no problems in the short run. It will be important to begin generating income from DocumentCloud, and the organization cannot count on drawing as large a crowd to the next few conferences, which has helped generate income.

Young moved to adopt the proposed 2012-13 budget, which was discussed during a previous Board meeting. Williams seconds. The budget passes unanimously.

Johnston said the endowment is performing as expected. IRE's investment advisers are holding more cash in the endowment than usual, as it's harder to find appropriate investments at the moment. Horvit notes that funds were taken from the endowment this year to build up the reserve fund.

Downie asked if any changes in the endowment are anticipated. Johnston said the only change, which was approved by the Endowment Committee, was shifting a small percentage of additional funds into dividend-bearing stocks. Johnston said board members will be asked to seek five-year pledges from people with whom they're connected, to help build the endowment.

The conference has brought in more revenue than anticipated. Horvit said IRE staff has done a fantastic job of handling the larger crowd and preparing for the conference, and said that the work of the staff has been responsible for many of the organization's successes this year.

Torres thanks the staff for their work.

Technology Director

(Pilhofer joins the meeting via phone).

The board discussed the possibility of creating a new position of Technology Director. Horvit notes that such a position is not in the budget, but could oversee a wide range of initiatives, including DocumentCloud. Horvit noted other recent projects such as Census.Ire.org and PANDA, for which IRE serves as the fiscal sponsor.

Pilhofer says IRE needs someone who sees how projects like DocumentCloud fit into the larger picture. He notes that NICAR has drawn a larger tech-focused crowd. Young and Meyer also like the idea.

Horvit says some DocumentCloud funding could go toward such a position, and that he is looking to bring in funding to significantly rebuild the data library, and someone in this position could oversee that effort. Horvit noted that Pilhofer has volunteered to help with DocumentCloud even after leaving the board, but there is no one on staff fulltime who can help Ted Han with the technology.

Discussion ensued of where such a position would fall within the organization's priorities. Such a position could help put IRE on the cutting edge of technological advancements in investigative reporting, and could help with training in this area. Garcia asked Horvit to create a jobs priority list. Downie said Horvit should create such priority list and bring it to the executive committee.

Johnston made a motion that a committee of Cohen, Waite and Pilhofer work with Horvit to determine where this position stands in the list of priorities. Because a potential job candidate already exists, the process must be expedited. Meyer seconded. The board votes unanimously in favor of creating this small committee.

IRE Elections

Horvit notes that the Board talked last year at its retreat about revamping the process for the election of Board members, but no action was taken. Young said that among the issues discussed was whether to allow online voting. Horvit noted that the absentee balloting period was extended this year, in an effort to address some of the complaints from last year.

Torres asked whether a committee should be created to discuss this and report back at the fall retreat. Downie and Young agreed, and Torres volunteered to serve on the committee.

Johnston makes a motion to create a committee of Torres, Garcia and Cohen to look at alternative ways IRE can conduct its election. Downie says the committee come back with a full recommendation, and look at potential downsides, including what online voting would do to attendance at the membership meeting.

Young notes that another item discussed last year was whether one or two slots on the board should be filled by nominating committee (instead of members).

Johnston modifies his motion to ask the committee to also consider different governance arrangements, in addition to alternative ways to conduct elections. Garcia seconds. The board votes unanimous approval.

BREAK

Board Attendance Policy

Young says that IRE once had three in-person board meetings each year. Because of the costs involved, this year we held two in-person meetings and two pre-scheduled conference calls. She notes that the bylaws require board members to attend two-thirds of all meetings. She proposes new wording for the bylaws that requires attendance at two-thirds of all pre-scheduled meetings, whether in person or by phone or other means.

Johnston proposes that the executive director be asked to report about who has not met those standards each year before the annual conference. Discussion ensues, and the consensus is that, in the event some member hasn't met the standard, the executive director will notify the executive committee prior to the deadline for running for the board each year.

Downie makes a motion that Young's recommended language be added to the bylaws. Meyer seconds. The board votes unanimously in favor. (Johnston's proposal is not part of the official bylaws, but is policy that will be followed.

2013 IRE Conference

Torres discussed efforts already underway to plan for the IRE Conference in San Antonio in 2013. A planning meeting is being held during this conference.

Horvit said Stephanie Sinn will be working on finding locations for the CAR 2014 Conference and IRE 2016. Thompson said Sinn has done a great job building IRE's relations with Marriott and overall conference planning.

Sinn said CAR 2014 will be on the east coast if possible.

Young also praised Sinn's work and asked whether IRE receives compensation for all the work done to help organizations hold events during the conference. Horvit said staff will look into charging for this service in the future. Sinn says there are seven or eight separate events going on in conjunction with the conference.

Williams encourages the Board to take sweeps into consideration when scheduling the CAR Conference. Horvit says this has come up and he knows some broadcast members are not happy with the current schedule, which has been to hold the conference in late February. This was done to avoid running up against the South by Southwest Conference. Horvit reminded the board that he previously did some research and found that very few broadcast members attended CAR when it was in March vs February. Thompson says she thinks more broadcasters are now interested in the CAR Conference. Some discussion ensues of whether the conference should be moved to March or to the fall, or should remain in late February.

Young asked that this discussion be continued at the fall retreat. Board members concur, and also tell Horvit that it is OK to schedule 2014 in late February or early March, and consider the fall for future conferences.

BREAK

IRE Contest

Thompson discussed the changes made to the IRE Contest. One category that did not draw many entries was breaking news, and many of the entries submitted did not really qualify. A lengthy discussion of the award and its merits was held, with the agreement that it be sent back to the Contest Committee for further consideration. Among the issues raised were whether it should be broadened to encompass all shorter-term investigative reporting instead of being tied to an event; whether, if it is tied to an event, the period of time between the event and publication should change; whether it should be dropped; the value of IRE offering a shorter-term investigative award and the message that sends to members; whether the name should be changed; whether it should be changed to a "beat reporting award" or "body of work award";

Thompson discussed the student award, and the potential need to issue two in a given year, one for work done solely by students, one done in conjunction with a professional organization.

She noted there were no magazine entries that made it to the finalist level, and that IRE has 97 members who identify themselves as working for magazines. Under the new rules, there is no magazine award; it's included in other categories.

Thompson said the Contest Committee considered three additional awards: editorials, courage and service to the First Amendment, and noted that a special award was given this year that fits these criteria. The committee recommends that the awards structure not be changed, but that judges remain on the lookout for such stories that can be similarly singled out.

There was discussion of whether IRE should try to raise money to give out cash with the awards, as many others do. Cohen noted that the Gannett award carries a monetary reward, and we only get 15-20 entries.

Horvit said staff is working to switch to an online contest, with Lauren Grandestaff heading the effort. He recommends that IRE work with Delta Systems, the company that build IRE's new membership and donor database system. One advantage is that the awards system would integrate with that, and the price is competitive or lower than other options reviewed. It would cost \$10,000-\$12,000.

Thompson asked if all video would be able to be uploaded; staff said they would check to confirm how that would be handled. Thompson questioned whether it's worth the money if all video can't be uploaded.

Downie and Johnston stressed that any new system needs to be easy for screeners, judges and entrants to use.

Torres favors the move and said IRE should move quickly.

Young made a motion to authorize Horvit to proceed if the system can upload video. If not, he must bring the issue back to the board to explain how the system would work before proceeding. Thompson seconds, and the motion is approved unanimously.

Cribb discussed creating a "moral courage" award that is not part of the IRE Awards, continuing a discussion begun at the last board retreat. Nominations could be accepted from anyone, and the winner doesn't have to be a journalist. Meyer noted that Medill already gives a moral courage award.

Discussion ensued, including whether money should be raised for such an award and whether the winner should be restricted to a journalist or not; whether this

veers to close to advocacy and strays from IRE's mission; whether the Board should choose the winner as opposed to a separate committee.

Cribb also brought up another previously discussed award, one that would put a spotlight on government agencies that ignore transparency and openness. A similar award has been very successful in Canada. Horvit notes that SPJ just added a similar award a year or two ago. Downie says that if IRE adds this, it must have a unique identity and purpose.

Young moved that such an award be created, and that the Contest Committee work on the details, then bring them back to the board for further consideration. Thompson seconded and the board approved it unanimously. Young said that ideally the committee would report back at the fall Board retreat.

IRE Legal Representation

David Smallman announces that after many years of service, he will be stepping down as IRE's fulltime pro-bono attorney. The Board gives him a standing ovation for his many years of service.

Smallman suggests creating a legal advisory committee, so that no single lawyer is asked to do everything. He offers to help recommend names for the committee. Thompson thanks Smallman for his enormous contribution to the organization, and makes a motion that the board set up a special committee to formulate a plan for future legal representation. Young seconds and the board approves it unanimously.

CAR Project Fund

Horvit says that Google will be providing \$50,000 to create a fund that IRE can use to award small grants to journalists working on data-related projects. IRE will create a committee to set up the parameters for the program and to judge entries. The fund will be announced this summer and begin in the fall.

There is also the possibility to work with Palantir, a company that has advanced social network analysis software that many government agencies and businesses use to find connections between people and networks. Many intelligence agencies use it.

The board supports the Google fund but has many questions and reservations about working with Palantir.

Other Business

The first board conference call is set for Aug. 23 at 12:30 p.m. eastern/11:30 a.m. central. Other board calls will be Feb. 21 and May 2. Dates for the board retreat will be determined via email conversation.

Young makes a motion to go into executive session for a personnel matter Garcia seconds, and the vote is unanimous.