

IRE Board Meeting

June 10, 2010

IRE Conference in Las Vegas

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

Staff Present: Mark Horvit, Jennifer Erickson, IRE attorney David B. Smallman, Esq.

1. **Call to order (Young):** Young called the meeting to order at 4:11 p.m.
2. **Recognition of former and retiring board members; each received an IRE plaque:**
 - **David Dietz:** Phillips said that Dietz has served on the board and committees since 1996. Now that he's stepping off the audit committee, the board wanted to thank him for his years of service on development and fundraising committees and bringing IRE up-to-date on finances. Dietz said his first encounter with IRE was in 1993 in New York. He said he has been privileged to be part of this organization ever since – "IRE rocks!"
 - **Mark Katches:** Horvit said that Katches matched a record number of mentors and mentees in the program this year and that IRE has been lucky to have a strong leader. His work also helped in an approach to the Scripps Howard Foundation, the current sponsor of the mentorship program. Katches said that the program works because of the wonderful mentors who volunteer, including many board members, and the IRE staff.
 - **Stephen C. Miller:** Young said that the board is losing an important voice in Miller, who spent 12 years on the board. She said Miller's commitment to IRE is clear and that he's been the voice of the history of the board by providing important context for decision making. Miller said that he's had great joy in serving, as IRE has made a profound difference in the world.
3. **Approval of minutes:** Downie made a motion to approve the minutes from the December 5, 2009, and May 18, 2010, board meetings. All were in agreement and the motion carried.
4. **Executive Director's report:** Horvit gave an update on the Las Vegas conference: registration currently stands at 777, with more onsite registrations expected today and tomorrow. We exceeded our fundraising goal of \$140,000 and raised \$158,000, including an in-kind donation via Arizona State University for the CAR Conference.

Horvit said there are many workshops and training sessions underway. In January, IRE started offering on-line training, and he and staff are pleased with the progress. IRE staff is also working to eventually provide distance learning for in-newsroom training for newsrooms that cannot afford to travel.

Planning is underway for the pilot Community Partnership Program under a McCormick Foundation grant. IRE will bring the program to Chicago, plus one other city; it involves intensive training in person, then distance work, followed by a return to the newsroom.

The 2011 CAR Conference will take place at the Marriott in downtown Raleigh; Duke University will be our host. Orlando IRE in 2011 is complete and the contract has been signed.

Horvit said the board authorized him to move forward with Boston for the 2012 IRE Conference and San Antonio in 2013. Horvit discussed Boston options, including a \$195 room rate in the Waterfront District and a downtown option at \$225 per night. He said Philadelphia is still in play as well. Discussion ensued. Horvit asked if the board agreed that he could move ahead with the Waterfront District option, continuing to negotiate the contract, and search Philadelphia to find competitive contracts. There were no objections from the board members.

Horvit said that IRE has many other foundation grants in play: IRE received a \$17,500 grant from the Gannett Foundation for Census training; IRE is in year two of a \$75,000 Ford grant; year two of the Campus Coverage program, funded by Lumina, will take place in January at ASU. IRE also received grants in support of organizational improvements: \$25,000 from the Challenge Fund for Journalism for office database improvements and \$25,000 from the Philip L. Graham Fund for Web site improvements and laptops. IRE is working with Hot Type, run by IRE members Matt Waite and Chase Davis, for the Web project.

Other training news: IRE will conduct on-the-road CAR boot camps in San Diego and possibly NYC. TCU

is starting a new community journalism institute, and Horvit said he'll visit the program in the fall to conduct a one-day workshop; there is potential for conducting future Web training in Texas, which may be a model for other states.

Horvit introduced Coulter Jones, a new hire at IRE who is working on the Web site. Starting in August he'll work full time – 20 hours in the data library and 20 hours on the Web. The board members welcomed him to IRE.

Garcia said that IRE should prioritize fixing data searches on the IRE Web site to reflect one-stop shopping. Young suggested that the board help staff raise the funding to make this happen. Horvit said IRE could need around \$100,000 to complete such a project if it includes scanning all stories in the library and allowing for full text searches.

Horvit said that IRE published its second e-book, *New Muckrakers* by Len Downie Jr. Horvit thanked Downey for his generosity – all proceeds will go to IRE. More e-books are in the works.

Horvit shared the results of a marketing project that MU strategic communications students completed for IRE last semester. Highlights from their report, a survey of more than 250 working journalists, student journalists at MU and focus groups, included: more than half of respondents thought they didn't qualify for IRE membership, i.e., the organization doesn't apply to me; the top priority cited by professionals was obtaining resources, and for students, networking; many found the IRE Web site to be too text heavy; suggested campaign slogan: I Am IRE, saving journalism since 1975.

P. Williams suggested using reporter.org rather than ire.org for the main Web domain. Discussion ensued. Young recommended that they table the marketing discussion until the next meeting.

Horvit said that IRE membership went above 4,000 for the first time in many months. He credited October's membership drive and P. Williams' and staff's hard work. In addition, the Gannett Corp. recently paid for 280 memberships for three reporters at every newspaper in the chain and 30 scholarships to the 2010 IRE Conference.

Horvit reported that the IRE Data Library has many needs: obtaining new data, improving current data sets, removing data that members rarely request. Horvit plans to come up with a series of overarching goals for the Data Library in the coming year.

Horvit said that a few new vendors came on board for the 2010 Vegas conference, and he and staff will work to continue this trend. As for Journal advertising, IRE staff did not reach out to non-journalism organizations to advertise. Horvit proposed finding a firm that does this type of work and takes a cut; IRE wouldn't make as much revenue per ad, but it would allow us to increase the number of ads.

5. **Executive session:** Phillips made a motion to head into executive session to discuss a legal matter. Johnston seconded her motion. All were in agreement and the motion passed.

Phillips moved to leave the executive session. Miller seconded her motion. The motion passed unanimously and the executive session ended.

6. **Budget discussion and adoption:** Horvit reviewed details within the budget. He said that, overall, he and staff budgeted conservatively in most areas. Board members suggested adding new budget lines to give detail on Webinars, eBooks, and on-line versions of CAR Boot Camps.

Young pointed out that this was the first time IRE has not had to dip into reserve funds in her time on the board. She said that Horvit and staff have worked extremely hard over the past year to make sure this came to pass. She said she can't thank or praise them enough.

Young said the coming year would be dedicated to developing new revenue streams and moving forward as an organization. Johnston said that he finds that IRE's finances are stable; not healthy yet, but stable. P. Williams thanked Johnston for bringing confidence to the board in budgetary oversight.

Discussion continued. Johnston said one of IRE's priorities should be reaching college students and branding itself. Olsen recommended that IRE prepare a capital improvement budget separate from the general organizational budget – a "wish list" to present to potential funders.

P. Williams moved to adopt the budget as presented. Young seconded the motion. All were in agreement and the 2011 IRE budget passed unanimously.

7. **Contest committee report (Phillips):** Phillips said she plans to highlight a few issues and gain feedback. This summer, she will arrange for a dedicated conference call so that the Board may act on the recommendations of the committee.

Phillips said the committee is considering whether the IRE Contest should transition into an on-line-only judging system, whether to tighten up wording for what constitutes a student entry and how to handle combination/convergence entries, such as collaborations between online and print media organizations.

Phillips turned the report over to Thompson, who served as a judge this past year. Thompson said the collaborative entries fell into three categories: various media owned by the same parent company, various media not owned by the same company, and various news organizations pairing with nonprofit journalism centers.

Phillips asked whether IRE should start from scratch and revamp the awards categories to reflect collaborations. Thompson suggested that the board have a dedicated call on this topic to discuss whether or not to reconfigure the categories and to come up with a resource measurement.

Johnston made a motion that the Awards Committee take a "white page" approach to the issue of convergence and collaboration and report back within 60 days. Garcia seconded the motion. All were in favor, and the motion passed.

Horvit said that Gannett invited IRE to be part of a new program, wherein the foundation distributes awards of \$5,000 for online or technical innovation in watchdog journalism. IRE agreed and asked the contest committee to keep an eye out for investigations that would qualify among the 2009 entries. The committee decided to give the award to an investigation from Sarasota: Flipping Fraud – Sarasota (Fla.) Herald-Tribune; Michael Braga, Chris Davis, Matthew Doig. They also won a certificate from IRE.

8. **Committee structure discussion (Young):** Young distributed a handout with a proposed 2010-11 IRE committee structure, including seven standing committees (Executive, Member Services, Revenue, Contest, Conference, Audit and Endowment). P. Williams moved to accept the structure as presented; Johnston seconded the motion. All were in favor, and the motion passed.
9. **Committee/task force updates**

- a. **International Task Force (Olsen):** Olsen said that two different subcommittees, conference and bi-lingual, have been conducting phone meetings for the past two years. Olsen shared the following recommendations:

- i. Network more with international journalists and journalism groups.
- ii. Market the IRE contest and IRE membership to international groups.
- iii. Develop a new task force to move forward on on-line and distance training that would serve international members and U.S. members who can't afford to travel; partner with organizations that already do such work and develop agreements with them to develop training content (ICFJ, for example); consider ways in the current budget to provide seed money for people to develop courses. Olsen said that the task force members also recommend that the board abolish the International Task Force and incorporate its recommendations into the standing committees, encouraging each standing committee to reach out to international journalists.

Downie asked that the task force put its recommendations in writing, with the goal of moving toward action plans. Downie said that he would like more shared information throughout the year from all task forces and standing committees.

- b. **New Revenue Task Force (Thompson):** Thompson said that 126 people gave advice for new revenue sources for IRE; she also met with each member of the staff. Their findings were as follows:
 - i. The IRE Web system needs major improvements, and we don't have enough funding to completely overhaul the system.
 - ii. IRE needs a better marketing plan.
 - iii. Advertising needs to be amped up in the IRE Journal and on the Web site.
 - iv. The core training that IRE has conducted for years is being eroded by other journalism organizations.
 - v. The IRE Journal should be an online only publication.

- vi. There is a feeling among members that the board talks too much and doesn't do enough.
- vii. IRE should provide more services geared toward freelancers.
- viii. All the above speak to the core of what our new revenue might be, including Webinars, distance learning, etc.

Discussion ensued. Young asked Thompson to email her report to the board. After receiving feedback, the task force could return to the board with specific proposals. Follow through and action items would become the responsibility of the new IRE Revenue Committee.

- c. **Membership:** P. Williams said the task force was challenged to expand the scope of membership and broaden outreach. How can IRE remain relevant in the changing landscape? P. Williams said that the task force also prioritized an increase in diversity among membership. He said the board had discussed, for instance, offering discounts to ethnic media organizations, such as NABJ, NAHJ, etc.

Downie said that IRE must address the issue of relevancy first and then approach ethnic media journalists with a clear description of how IRE can help their investigations and careers. Johnston said it should be the same case for reaching students.

Cribb recommended that IRE establish a system of caucuses, wherein IRE sets up listservs for various groups (academics, students, ethnic media, freelancers, etc.); the caucuses work independently all year and set up their own panel tracks for the conferences. He said the system builds affinity and highlights journalism that may not have been highlighted in the past.

L. Williams said she would not like to see minority tracks separate from other tracks at the main conference. Rather, if your goal is to have a more diverse group of speakers, ask the ethnic media or minority caucus to discuss who is doing good work out there. Share those names with the main conference committee. Cribb said he would put together recommendations and report back on the caucus structure within 90 days.

- 10. **Future board meetings (Young):** Young said the board last year decided to move from three to two in-person meetings. While this helped reduce costs for board members, it resulted in a loss of in-person discussions. She proposed the following:
 - a. Meet in June at the IRE Conference on the Wednesday ahead of the conference, or on Sunday, or starting at 3 p.m. on Thursday, catering in a meal paid for by the board.
 - b. Have a two-hour telephone board meeting in July on a Tuesday or Thursday at around noon eastern.
 - c. Have another such call in October.
 - d. Meet in-person in January at the St. Louis Airport Marriott or on Sunday, Feb. 22, before noon at the CAR Conference in Raleigh-Durham.

DCJ moved to accept Young's proposal, stipulating that the second in-person meeting should take place in February at the CAR Conference, and reevaluate in June 2011. Miller seconded the motion. Discussion ensued. Johnston called the question. Eight voted aye; one opposed; four abstained. The motion passed.

Johnston moved that the board add a third in-person meeting to the approved schedule: a two-day meeting in St. Louis in fall wherein board members would arrive on a Friday night to discuss the remodeling of IRE. If needed, board members could teleconference in to the February meeting at the CAR Conference. P. Williams seconded Johnston's motion. Twelve of the board members voted in favor; one abstained. The motion passed.

- 11. **Other new business:** Johnston said he was approached by a person who heads a committee at the Sierra Club who asked whether IRE would take the lead in a statement decrying the banning of journalists from covering the BP oil spill in the Gulf. Board members said they would consider making a statement on their own, perhaps in conjunction with other journalism organizations. Horvit said he would talk to other executive directors and report back to the board.

Young said people had expressed concern over the procedure for electing the board's executive committee positions and asked for more transparency. With that in mind, she said she would share the

roster as it now stands: Young is running for president; Garcia for vice president; Johnston for treasurer; P. Williams and Olsen for secretary; Thompson and Torres for member-at-large. Young said she would also share this information with the people who are running for the board.

Young said that this is the last board meeting for L. Williams and Wilson and thanked them for their service. The board also congratulated Wilson on his recent marriage, and presented him with a gift and card.

Young said that Thompson decided not to run for president of the board. Thompson said she would like to stay on the executive committee, but she feels that the president should be attached to a well known media organization.

12. **Adjournment:** Johnston moved to adjourn; P. Williams seconded the motion. The meeting adjourned at 9:30 p.m.