

Board minutes - September 24, 2011 – St Louis meeting

Attendees: Manny Garcia, Andrew Donohue, Sarah Cohen, David Cay Johnston, Lea Thompson, Alison Young, Rob Cribb, Len Downie Jr., Josh Meyer, Aron Pilhofer, Mc Nelly Torres, Matt Waite, Phil Williams, Mark Horvit (executive director), Alan Lynes (development officer/minutes), Stephanie Sinn (conference coordinator), Amy Johnston (executive assistant), Ted Han (DocumentCloud lead developer)

The meeting was called to order by Garcia at TIME.

Executive Director's report

Horvit gave a status update on DocumentCloud. (FIND MY NOTES)

Board members discussed various aspects of the project. Garcia asked how users are vetted to avoid having phony documents posted. Horvit said membership is limited to news organizations. Thompson asked if there is a process in place to remove people from the service if necessary.

Pilhofer discussed some possible options for generating revenue through Documentcloud, and the board discussed whether consideration should be given to having a Documentcloud staff member who could obtain data sets that will be of high interest to journalists – such as the release of Sarah Palin's emails, which multiple organizations obtained and uploaded to the service. Thompson noted that some organizations, like the AP, offer similar services. Such a service could be similar to the pools used by broadcasters, she said. Downie and Meyer talked about whether getting a grant to offer such a service would make sense.

Pilhofer talked about the non-journalism organizations using the service, saying that the service's creators wanted serious organizations like human rights organizations.

Thompson – there are already pools of docs in place (AP)

Horvit discussed examples of collaborative work IRE has done in the past year, including the Census.IRE.org site. On the site, created by journalists from several news organizations through a grant from the Reynolds Journalism Institute based at Mizzou, census data comparisons can be done along with geographic comparisons side by side. The site has had more than 1,000 unique users, Horvit said. There was a discussion of giving a service award to those involved at the CAR Conference.

Horvit updated the board on the effort IRE joined in with the Association of Healthcare Journalists and others protesting the withdrawal of doctor discipline data. IRE posted the data after the federal government pulled it.

Horvit noted that the Data Library has been working on large project with the Sunlight Foundation.

Horvit said that Lumina Foundation funding for Campus Coverage is running out this year. IRE needs to look at ways to continue the project, possibly partially- grant funded and partially self-sustaining Cohen asked whether students could afford to come if they had to pay expenses.

Thompson asked whether IRE could put together CAR trainings to be held on campuses for students.

Horvit said the Boston Globe will be the host for the IRE conference in June.

Horvit updated the board on efforts to transition the IRE contest to an electronic submissions model. For several reasons that won't happen with this year's contest but the plan is to do so the following year.

Horvit said the final workshop of the bilingual border series sponsored by the Ford Foundation will be held in Mexico City in either February or March

Horvit said that Jay Hamilton at Duke University has a research project that involves using the IRE contest forms. He offered to pay the cost of digitizing all the forms – around 15,000 – and donate the cost of that work to IRE. The collection will be available to all members. The cost of this work could be around \$10,000.

A recent fire at the Missouri Historical Society resulted in some water damage to a few files in the Arizona Project. Those working at the society worked quickly and minimized the damage

Endowment Report

Johnston said our investment policies have been consistent and conservative. IRE needs to protect the capital and that it is worth reviewing our policies to see if any adjustments need to be made.

Johnston said the Endowment Committee approved taking \$50,000 in proceeds from the endowment and transferring those to the reserve fund, bringing that fund to about \$180,000.

Thompson praised the JJP Capital, which manages the account.

Young asked about outstanding pledges and whether they are collectible. Horvit said efforts to bring those funds in are ongoing.

Contest

The board discussed contest categories and several issues, including defining what “supplemental material” means. Staff will work on clarifying that and other points with Contest Committee members.

Downie noted that judges have the ability to move entries from one category to another. Young said that also should be an option during the screening process.

Cribb and Thompson discussed the need to have some instructional material for the new contest rules on the website. Board members agreed to review the FAQ drafted by Resource Center Director Lauren Grandestaff and provide feedback.

Lunch break

Website update

Horvit gave a demonstration of the new website, which is set to launch later this fall. Cohen noted the need to brand DocumentCloud on the new site.

Horvit said that each staff member will have the ability, and the responsibility, for updating their own portion of the site, which should allow for faster posting of new content.

Young discussed the need to do adequate publicity in advance of the launch.

Brainstorming session

Garcia asked board members to think about what separates IRE from other organizations, and where the organization should look for continued growth and new revenue streams. Garcia asked board members to focus on things that are doable, measurable. Cribb suggested instituting a whistleblower award, or moral courage award. He suggested that it might be named for Don Bolles. Cribb said IRE might want to start it at the IRE Conference and build it into a gala with major speakers and sponsors. Cribb also discussed offering an award for the government agency or official who did the most to block access to documents, meetings, etc. There was discussion of whether this could be launched for the June IRE Conference. Board members supported the idea. Cohen discussed ongoing efforts to hold happy hours and informal meetings around the country, to keep IRE in people's minds throughout the year, not just at conference time. Board members discussed whether we should try holding IRE chats on Twitter. Downie suggested creating a "members helping members" portion of the website. Pilhofer suggested asking members what they want to learn, and what they'd be willing to teach.

Advisory Committee

Pilhofer said the board should look at whether IRE needs an advisory committee that would serve as an adjunct to the Board.

Downie said that having such a body focus solely on fundraising is not a good model, but that it would be better if created as a business advisory council.

Downie said IRE needs to put more emphasis on earned income. He said that if an advisory committee were created, we need to come up with a list of subject areas we need expertise in, then come up with names for fit these areas

Board election process

Pilhofer said IRE needs to reconsider the process used to elect board members, for numerous reasons.

Johnston said one option is presenting a slate of candidates and also having open nominations.

Young said other items to consider is whether IRE should have any non-member board members, and whether electronic voting should be allowed.

Board members discussed a variety of election-related issues, including absentee voting.

Pilhofer moved to create a task force to look into this, seconded by Young. It passed unanimously. Horvit emphasized that any change in the election process would need to be presented to membership for a vote at the June IRE Conference.

The meeting adjourned for the day at 5:30 p.m.

Sunday, September 25, 2011

Garcia calls the meeting to order at 9 a.m.

Board members discuss the need to emphasize IRE's scholarships, fellowships and other offerings. Young proposes a "brag page" for the new website, calling attention to IRE's recent accomplishments.

Board members discuss whether it's time to restart an endowment drive. No action is taken to do so at this time, but Johnston asks members to provide names of those they believe would be strong potential donors.

Conference report

Sinn discussed potential upcoming locations for conferences. For the 2013 CAR Conference, Louisville, Ky., was presented as an option. Williamsburg, Va., was also discussed.

IRE Conferences for the next two years are already planned: Boston in 2012; San Antonio in 2013.

There was a recommendation to go to San Francisco in 2014 and Philadelphia in 2015. The Board discussed the tradition of going to Arizona every 10 years to commemorate the Arizona Project, which would mean a Phoenix conference in 2017.

Johnston moved to approve those three locations and dates. Garcia second; the motion passed unanimously.

No decision was made for the 2016 conference. One option discussed was Toronto, but no decision was made.

Young made a motion to approve CAR in Louisville in 2013. Williams seconded; the motion passed unanimously

Board members then discussed the keynote speaker for the 2012 Boston conference. Jill Abramson, new executive editor of The New York Times, was the consensus choice. Johnston made a motion to ask Abramson; Williams seconded. Discussion followed, and the motion was amended so that, if in two weeks Abramson had not responded, another speaker would be approached. The amendment passed, with Thompson and Young abstaining. The motion to invite Abramson passed.

Williams stressed the need to look at diversity when selecting future keynote speakers. Cohen said that is also true for the overall speaker list for the conference.

Johnston moved to adjourn the meeting at 10:50 a.m. Williams seconded; the motion passed unanimously.