

Minutes
IRE Board of Directors
June 30, 2020
Video Meeting

With IRE Board President Chery W. Thompson presiding, the meeting of the IRE board of directors was called to order at 5:35 p.m. EDT on June 30, 2020.

In addition to Thompson, the following board members were present: Vice President Mark Rochester (joined at 5:38), Secretary Jennifer LaFleur, Treasurer Jodi Upton, At-Large Member Steven Rich, Bethany Barnes, Jodie Fleischer, Jennifer Forsyth, Cindy Galli, Marisa Kwiatkowski, Brian Rosenthal, Kat Stafford and Mark Walker.

Staff members in attendance: Executive Director Doug Haddix, Deputy Executive Director Denise Malan, Director of Events Stephanie Klimstra and Director of Partnerships Chris Vachon.

CONFERENCE REGISTRATION RATES

President Cheryl W. Thompson explained that a working group of board members, chaired by Cindy Galli, was put together to discuss the conference registration rate for the 2020 virtual conference. She asked Galli to report the group's suggestions to the board.

Galli said the group is cognizant of the financial difficulties of members and understands the need for a registration cut-off to incentivize members to not register at the last minute. The following was recommended:

\$175 early bird rate ending July 31

\$200 regular rate August 1-31

\$250 rate beginning September 1

There was discussion about a first time attendee discount as well as a day-of rate.

Galli shared that there was no consensus among the group.

The group asked about offering more scholarships to the conference.

In addition, members asked if the platform allows for newsrooms to participate in the conference and if so, could IRE offer newsroom rates.

Brian Rosenthal said that since there was no consensus within the working group, that it was not making these recommendations. He said compared to other journalism nonprofits, IRE's rate for a virtual conference is higher.

Jennifer Forsyth asked if a first time discount meant first time attending an IRE conference and if so, how would IRE verify that. Stephanie Klimstra answered that it would be a manual process for staff to verify.

Klimstra was asked for data related to when people typically register and she reported the following:

2018 IRE

Early bird: 892

Regular: 497

Onsite: 59

Student: 127

2019 IRE

Early bird: 685

Regular: 791

Onsite: 55

Student: 133

Klimstra also explained that the early bird rate is given to speakers regardless of when they actually register.

With over 400 speakers for an IRE conference, we do ask speakers to pay registration unless they are only attending their session and leaving. This allows us to keep registration as low as possible for all attendees. We do give speakers the early bird price for registration all the way up to the conference so they can pay the lowest rate possible. This is why speakers were not included in the breakdown of totals as they were offered the early bird registration throughout the registration process. In addition comp registrations for sponsors, exhibitors and recruiters, etc are not included in the totals provided.

Rosenthal requested data for the number of first time attendees for IRE conferences. Klimstra explained that IRE does not track that data nor does the membership database allow for that data to be captured.

Steven Rich mentioned that a previous board didn't want to exceed \$300, so the board set a rate of \$299.

Haddix confirmed that tiered rates do help getting members to register early.

Bethany Barnes reminded everyone that it's an important conversation for the group to have since the board wasn't informed of the tiered pricing for the virtual conference.

Jodi Fleischer asked for the approximate date ranges for the tiered pricing model for previous conferences. Klimstra provided that information (see below).

FYI - this was the plan for 2020 for the initial dates of the conference (June 18-21)

Must be an IRE member through July 1, 2020

Early-bird registration ends midnight April 20, 2020 (\$315)

Regular registration ends midnight June 15, 2020 (\$365)

On-site registration starts June 16, 2020 (\$415)

2019 IRE conference (June 13-16, 2019)

Must be an IRE member through July 1, 2019

Early-bird registration ends midnight April 15, 2019 (\$315)

Regular registration ends midnight June 10, 2019 (\$365)

On-site registration starts June 11, 2019 (\$415)

2018 IRE Conference (June 14-17, 2018)

Must be an IRE member through July 1, 2018

Early-bird registration ends May 14, 2018 (\$299)

Regular registration ends June 12, 2018 (\$329)

On-site starts June 13 at 7 a.m. (\$359)

Marisa Kwiatkowski asked if staff did a sensitivity survey related to the rates. Haddix asked her to clarify and ultimately answered no. She then asked if the gap from \$175 to \$200 was enough to spur members to register early and asked about the break even point for the conference budget. Haddix explained that the conference is not designed to break even, which Kwiatkowski agreed was true. For IRE and similar organizations,

conferences are significant revenue streams to keep the organizations funded throughout the year. Kwiatkowski also asked whether IRE could offer conference scholarships to more attendees, since the scholarships will not need to cover attendees' travel expenses. Klimstra said they have been having conversations with funders about this.

Kat Stafford asked what percent of IRE fellowships are for journalists of color.

The breakdown of fellowships and scholarships can be found [here](#).

Rosenthal said the board has not approved the rates yet and the budget includes the flat rate of \$200. If the board wants to make any changes, a vote needs to be taken. He asked what the revenue target is for the conference and added that the cost also includes membership fees, which increase the price further.

Haddix answered by saying that the membership revenue was already taken into account in the budget. He went on to talk about how the budget is prepared and the conference budget is part of the larger organizational budget.

Rosenthal asked how much is available for conference fellowships.

IRE staff has put together a breakdown of available fellowship funds, which is attached to these minutes.

Fleischer asked about the security features of Pathable and whether IRE can prevent people from sharing links and what would stop someone from showing conference sessions to a whole room. In addition, as a result of this, she asked if IRE should have organizational pricing.

Denise Malan said the virtual conference platform, Pathable, is a secure system that requires a login. A link is not shared with the attendees. The login information could be shared. There is no technology to stop someone from putting it on a large screen to share with others or to screen record a session

Klimstra said organizational pricing has been discussed previously. IRE has not done it because IRE wants everyone to be a member.

Thompson asked if staff would have any problems with a tiered registration rate. Haddix answered no.

Galli asked if the board votes for the tiered rate, whether the board can discuss add-ons later. Haddix answered yes.

Barnes asked if a first-timer discount was added later, would IRE need to issue refunds. Klimstra answered yes.

Rosenthal said he doesn't understand the rush and felt the group was making another rushed decision. He noted other groups have announced prices much closer to their conferences.

Klimstra indicated that IRE cannot process refunds for those who registered for the in-person conference until the rate is determined.

Rosenthal said he thought the rates were too high and he would vote yes if there was a first-timer rate included. He would vote no if no first-timer rate was included.

Fleischer asked if the group could come back later to talk more about scholarships. Haddix answered yes.

LaFleur said she understands the need to get this answered, but doesn't want to feel that the group is rushed. She asked whether the working group members felt they could reach a consensus if they had another meeting.

Mark Walker said the board should make a decision all at once so a challenging refund situation is not created. He said if the group is going to meet again, a strict timeline should be set, whether or not there is consensus in order to provide an answer to staff.

Rich said either the group comes to a full decision today or we give more time for discussion. Keep in mind the board is not creating fees for every virtual conference, just the first one, so there are opportunities for adjustments if there are future virtual conferences.

Motion and second by Cindy Galli and Jodi Upton, respectively, the board approved the following virtual conference 2020 registration rates, by a vote of 7 to 6, as well as a promise to look at scholarships and dedicate some to hardships and journalists of color:

\$175 early bird rate ending July 31

\$200 regular rate August 1-31
\$250 rate beginning September 1

The voice vote was as follows:

Barnes: No
Galli: Yes
Fleischer: Yes
Forsyth: Yes
Kwiatkowski: Yes
LaFleur: No
Rich: No
Rochester: Yes
Rosenthal: No
Stafford: No
Thompson: Yes
Upton: Yes
Walker: No

CENSUS/AUDIT OF JOURNALISTS OF COLOR

Stafford said board members likely had seen Twitter chatter about a census/audit of journalists of color and she strongly supports IRE doing this and that the Ida B Wells Society is interested in partnering on the project.

LaFleur said the methodology should be carefully considered because some investigative reporters do not have the specific title of “investigative reporter.” She noted that Reveal and ProPublica are investigative newsrooms, but reporters have titles of reporter or senior reporter.

Rich said IRE can train all the journalists of color possible, but if newsrooms don’t hire them, IRE has failed. This is in line with IRE’s mission.

Barnes suggested using archives of Local Matters newsletter to help identify reporters at smaller newsrooms that do not have defined I-teams.

Kwiatkowski asked if it should be a board/committee function rather than a staff responsibility.

Upton suggested a working group to tackle the definition issues, etc.

Fleischer shared that she had an idea last year for a member survey. There are many issues to talk about, for example, should investigative photographers be included in the audit. As well as looking at local versus national newsrooms. She said maybe this would fit well with the new diversity task force.

Haddix shared that a professor reached out to him and offered expertise and possible funding.

Upton said Damon Kiesow and she had the same funding source -- the Knight Foundation - and both may be able to help defray some costs.

Fleischer asked how the information would be presented. Possibly through a public database.

Stafford said she will report back when she's answered some of these questions and has connected with the Ida B Wells Society.

Motion and second by Mark Walker and Cindy Galli, respectively, the board unanimously approved adjourning at 7:02 p.m.



Fellowships & Scholarships for virtual IRE20 conference

July 8, 2020

We will be able to award a much higher number than usual of the [IRE fellowships and scholarships](#) to the IRE20 national conference. A virtual conference eliminates the need for travel and lodging, freeing up funds that can cover the cost of registration and IRE membership/renewal for recipients.

As mentioned during the last Board of Directors meeting, IRE staff has been working in recent weeks to assess existing fellowships and scholarships in the wake of a virtual conference. We've reviewed our restricted, endowed funds and other accounts that typically cover registration, membership, and some travel and lodging expenses for recipients.

For some of these fellowships/scholarships, we have ample numbers of applicants who met the June deadline (in anticipation of an August conference). Rankings from respective selection committees are due this Friday. For others, we will need to re-open the process, promote them widely and process new applications.

In addition, we're engaged in ongoing discussions with the Knight Foundation to repurpose unused conference grant funds to provide additional registrations for journalists/students of color. Depending on the outcome, we may be able to fund an additional 100 registrations and memberships for JOCs for the virtual IRE20 conference. We may not know specifics for a few more weeks.

The table below summarizes the fellowship/scholarship funds, how their use is restricted, the number of fellowships/scholarships that we expected to award for an in-person conference, and the number that we now can award for registration and membership. Any unused funds will be rolled over to the 2021 IRE national conference.



| Fund | Restricted use | Fellowships for in-person IRE20 conference | Fellowships for virtual IRE20 conference |
|--------------|--|---|---|
| Graham | JOC professional | 3 | 28 |
| Student Fund | JOC student | 2 | 26 |
| Leonard | Early career/student/female | 2 | 20 |
| Stancill | Small newspaper | 2 | 17 |
| Dietz | Early career/financial reporting | 1 | 6 |
| Bennett | Student (OK, LA, MS, AL) | 2 | 10 |
| Napoli | Early career/broadcast | 2 | 17 |
| Marx | Early career (preference to IL) | 1 | 7 |
| Sager | Any professional journalist (not for students) | 2 | 15 |
| Houston * | International attendees | depends on travel costs | 20 |
| Torchlight * | International attendees | depends on travel costs | 9 |
| | | | |
| | MAXIMUM FELLOWSHIPS POSSIBLE | 17 | 175 |
| | | | |

* Houston & Torchlight fellowships typically fund international speakers. If funders agree, the numbers reflect registrations & memberships for international journalists.

It is important to note that IRE fellowships/scholarships are not the only funding available to those looking for support to participate in an IRE conference. Many other groups and organizations offer financial assistance. There may be other groups not listed who support journalists getting to IRE conferences. A quick summary is below:

Dow Jones News Fund (DJNF)

Covers registration for sophomores, juniors and seniors studying journalism or working for student media at community colleges and four-year universities. Number of recipients for IRE20 is being reconfigured by DJNF due to new virtual conference.



ProPublica

Diversity committee is considering supporting journalists of color to attend IRE20. Recently their representative reached out for more information from IRE. They have not made their final decision yet.

Lenfest Institute

Already awarded three scholarships for journalists of color who are either located in the Philadelphia-area (journalists or journalism students).

OpenNews

Awards travel money to journalists for the IRE conference each year. IRE staff reached out to ask about the number distributed for IRE20, but no response yet.

Report for America

This organization sends all of its newly selected reporters to the IRE conference each year since the inception of Report for America. Staff is verifying they are doing this for IRE20.

Mike Levine Fellowship

Supporting an early-career journalist working in daily or weekly print news organizations or digital-only news outlets.

Scripps Howard Foundation

Each year, the foundation sends its four fellows to the conference.