

**Minutes**  
**IRE Board of Directors**  
**Sept. 28, 2020**  
**Video Meeting**

IRE Board President Cheryl W. Thompson called the meeting to order at 10:01 a.m. EDT.

In addition to Thompson, the following board members were present: Bethany Barnes, Jodie Fleischer, Jennifer Forsyth, Cindy Galli, Marisa Kwiatkowski, Mark Rochester, Brian Rosenthal, Jodi Upton and Mark Walker.

Board members not present: Jennifer LaFleur, Steven Rich and Kat Stafford. Kwiatkowski took notes in LaFleur's absence.

Staff present: Executive Director Doug Haddix

President Cheryl W. Thompson opened a discussion about an Ask Me Anything that occurred during the IRE Conference.

The board discussed whether the event required the board to take any action. The board had not received a formal complaint under the Code of Conduct at the time of this meeting.

Walker said he does not believe IRE owes anyone an apology. He said if such an exchange had occurred over the regular course of business, a journalist would not seek an apology from the FBI, DOJ or another agency.

Bethany Barnes explained why she brought the discussion to the board and suggested the board consider making a statement affirming that tough questions will always be welcome at IRE. She said she felt the speaker was disrespectful to members in wanting them to apologize for essentially asking questions during an Ask Me Anything. She said she felt it was also disrespectful to the type of event he agreed to participate in. Barnes said she was not suggesting IRE apologize. She noted that at an in-person event, someone likely would have talked to the people who interacted with the speaker. She felt it would be good to reach out to them now. She also said she thought someone should speak with the speaker about how he handled the event.

Forsyth said she fully supported someone reaching out to members involved and offered to be the one to do so. Forsyth said she thought the speaker kind of came across as arrogant, but she didn't think he crossed the line into violating IRE's Code of Conduct.

Galli agreed that the speaker was patronizing and condescending. She said she felt the member held her own. But she said if the Code of Conduct applies to the speaker, it also applies to members. Galli said she was disappointed that the topic took so much oxygen that people weren't able to ask questions about how to do something as a journalist. At the end of the day, the speaker has a body of work to learn from and the exchange took away from that.

Mark Rochester said he doesn't believe the board should issue a statement. But he thought it was important to communicate to the speaker that his behavior did not meet the standards that we expect all IRE speakers to uphold — being professional, courteous and understanding.

Walker reiterated Galli's point that it was an educational conference. Just as they could find people who could complain about the exchange, he said they could find others who could complain that they didn't get to ask the speaker their educational question that they may never have another chance to ask.

Brian Rosenthal said the conversation about the AMA is going on in a lot of places, including in the journalists of color channel in Slack. He said people are wary of IRE on issues of diversity and inclusion, as we all know, and he thought this situation was related to that. He wondered if the board could issue a statement that doesn't apologize or condemn, but explains that: IRE is a place for these tough questions and while the exchange that went public was to be rude, patronizing and condescending, IRE has a Code of Conduct that says discourse should be civil and respectful, and we try to hold speakers to that; And in the future, we'll continue to hold speakers to that and maintain IRE is a place for tough questions and tough answers. Rosenthal said he thinks that could be helpful for members.

Thompson read a statement from Jennifer LaFleur, who said the speaker could have responded with much more courtesy to those asking questions. She said she did not believe the situation requires a statement from the board or staff.

Jodi Upton said she appreciated the points made during the meeting. She said the only thing she wanted to add was that she didn't believe anything needed to be sent to the speaker. She said she felt the response is that IRE doesn't invite him back. If he asks why, they could tell him.

Marisa Kwiatkowski briefly echoed what other board members said. She supported Kat Stafford's suggestion (via email) of reaching out to the people who had that interaction with the speaker and Upton's point that those involved could file a complaint if they felt there was a violation of the Code of Conduct. Kwiatkowski also agreed the speaker was patronizing during the AMA, but she expressed concern about issuing a statement and the precedent that may set for the future.

Jodie Fleischer said she largely agreed with what everyone has said. She said a statement would not make the bulk of the membership happy. Some would feel it did not go far enough. Others would feel the board shouldn't have issued it.

Walker made a motion to have either the board or executive director reach out to those involved and talk to them about their exchange.

Barnes seconded the motion. Forsyth amended the motion to also reach out to the man who interacted with the speaker. Kwiatkowski seconded the motion.

After discussion, Walker withdrew his motion and the board agreed that Forsyth would reach out to the three attendees.

Thompson reminded chairs that their committee reports were due. She asked for a motion to adjourn.

Upton made the motion. Walker seconded.

Vote: Unanimously approved

Meeting adjourned at 10:57 a.m. EDT.

*Note: The video of a second speaker was edited to remove offensive language and reposted. Doug Haddix spoke at length with that speaker.*