

IRE Finance Committee Meeting Minutes

November 4, 2025

Attendance

Committee Chair: Mark Greenblatt

Committee Members: Rick Gevers, Mary Hudetz, Myrta Pulliam, McNelly Torres, Lee Zurik

Staff: Diana Fuentes (Executive Director), Heather Feldmann-Henry (Financial Officer)

Board Guests: Alejandra Cancino, Jodie Fleischer, Josh Hinkle (Board President), Kate Howard (Board Vice President), Brian Rosenthal (Board Chairman), Andy Lehren (joined at 2:06 pm AZ time)

Call to Order

Chair Greenblatt convened the meeting at 2:00 p.m. Arizona time on Election Day, November 4, 2025, prioritizing Finance Committee members for speaking roles while welcoming guest participation.

I. Spending Policy Recommendation

Chair Greenblatt introduced a draft spending policy establishing guidelines for spending endowment and reserve money for the first time in IRE history.

Key Policy Provisions

The policy mirrors language from IRE's Knight Foundation agreement and establishes spending targets of 3.5% to 5% of endowment value. The policy's core protection requires first preserving the inflation-adjusted value of the endowment corpus before spending on other priorities—the organization must "pay ourselves first, and then we spend on other priorities." The policy includes a board override mechanism for emergencies and employs a three-year rolling average of market values to smooth volatility during market downturns.

Discussion

Lee Zurik asked about current endowment value. **Diana Fuentes** reported \$8,441,499.59 (IRE's share, excluding ICI funds), including \$680,000 in new proceeds with more pending.

Lee Zurik inquired about the 3.5% to 5% range. **Chair Greenblatt** explained the language was lifted from IRE's Knight Foundation agreement—language IRE already follows operationally. The 3.5% target is standard for nonprofits, and the policy's strength is requiring inflation-adjusted preservation first.

Brian Rosenthal asked about modeling future spending versus past years. **Chair Greenblatt** said he hadn't done exact modeling, only forecasts. Taking 3.5% of current value would yield more than IRE currently spends from endowment. He provided crucial context: while the gala netted over \$1 million, IRE can only access gains from endowed money after protecting the corpus. Based on ten-year returns averaging 5.5% annually, that deposit could eventually provide roughly \$58,000 in usable funds.

Heather Feldmann-Henry confirmed she'd run calculations and had no concerns. The policy has worked well for IRE's agreement with the Knight Foundation. She'd already spoken with auditors and plans to implement this year if the board approves.

Lee Zurik asked about last year's endowment spending. **Heather Feldmann-Henry** reported \$168,000 from general endowment (mostly fellowships), with an additional \$30,000 from other funds.

Josh Hinkle asked about implementation timing. **Chair Greenblatt** said he'd be comfortable with next budget cycle, though earlier implementation could help fundraising as many have asked how IRE protects endowment money.

Motion and Vote

McNelly Torres moved to recommend the board adopt the draft spending policy. **Lee Zurik** seconded.

Vote: All Finance Committee members voted in favor. Motion passed unanimously.

II. Investment Portfolio Update

Chair Greenblatt reported IRE's stocks were very recently discovered to be approximately 98% domestic and 2% international. The investment manager indicated intention to move to 10% international soon. Greenblatt asked for committee feedback. **Myrta Pulliam** said 10% is not enough and "needs to be more." **Lee Zurik** and **McNelly Torres** agreed. Greenblatt said he'd return to the investment manager with this guidance.

He noted that previously roughly a third of equities were concentrated in a handful of stocks. Due to committee work, IRE is now much more diversified, buying index funds and reducing individual holdings.

III. Gala Financial Update

Heather Feldmann Henry reported approximately \$120,000 remains uncollected, mostly from organizations. She's working with fundraiser Jill and foresees no problems. Currently \$266,000 from recent collections needs transferring to the endowment. Total expenses expected around \$415,000. **Feldmann Henry** confirmed net proceeds: \$1,140,000.

Brian Rosenthal emphasized success beyond the \$1 million—IRE exposed itself to many unfamiliar with the organization, creating potential for new relationships. Follow-up will be as important as the event itself.

Rick Gevers asked about future galas. **Brian Rosenthal** said no decisions have been made, but there's interest in another event, though perhaps not next year. **Chair Greenblatt** shared feedback from organizer Inez: waiting too long risks losing momentum. **Josh Hinkle** noted this would be discussed at the November 14th board meeting.

IV. November Budget Revision Proposal

Historical Context

Chair Greenblatt provided background: Last fiscal year, staff received a 3% raise pool with the Executive Director determining individual allocations. In February 2025, Rashika's \$39,000 part-time position (no benefits) was converted to full-time at approximately \$84,000 with

benefits. Even though Rashika is leaving, Diana intends to keep that newly created position. The forward-looking future-years obligations created from recent increases approved by the Board since February at staff's request, including Rashika's former job, spending approved by the Board in June, *and* the new proposal come out to roughly \$110,000 additional new permanent obligations for future IRE budgets created by this fiscal year's budget (and the proposed revision). The current revision represents a smaller additional amount but must be understood in this context.

Staff Proposal

Diana Fuentes explained this is a true characterization of our finances, but said these increases relate to IRE's mission of providing training. Unlike struggling organizations, IRE's conference attendance continues growing. In 2024-2025, IRE was down a trainer for five months yet produced nearly as many events. The current proposal requests \$24,000 for a raise pool—less than 1% of IRE's budget. When Fuentes started in April 2021, the endowment stood at \$5.06 million; it's now \$8.4 million (after recent gala proceeds were deposited).

Chair Greenblatt clarified the proposal also includes \$6,000 in one-time bonuses.

Committee Discussion

Lee Zurik advocated for a more conservative approach given industry trajectory, noting:

- Sponsorship revenue hasn't hit targets in several years
- Membership has dropped from recent years
- Major corporate supporters aren't giving 3% raises back-to-back years
- Should consider bonuses rather than across-the-board raises

"I don't want to see us getting into a situation where we have to lay people off or cut people back."

McNelly Torres acknowledged the difficulty, emphasizing she cares about equity but also recognizes industry conditions: "It is really bad, it is gonna get bad." She recalled when a former executive director had to let people go during the financial crisis.

Rick Gevers noted IRE has three full-time openings and asked whether it makes sense to delay the salary pool until seeing what new hires cost.

Diana Fuentes responded that given the small size—about half a percent of the typical budget—she and Heather believe they can find this money in future years.

Board Guest Discussion

Brian Rosenthal stated IRE faces an unprecedented situation with four unfilled positions. It makes sense to consider raises, but not right now—IRE needs to see how positions shake out, especially the development director where higher pay may be needed. His second concern: the budget revision benefits from a \$97,000 carryover from last year. Next year, without that carryover, IRE starts "\$97,000 in the hole."

Diana Fuentes responded that every budget year differs, with IRE's mix of revenue streams providing balance. **Heather Feldmann-Henry** added that IRE also reduced the amount taken from endowment for administrative purposes by \$30,000.

Chair Greenblatt asked about mid-year timing. **Diana Fuentes** explained she wanted this earlier but the committee asked her to delay it. **Brian Rosenthal** confirmed this recollection. **Kate Howard** noted the proposal came after the normal annual budget process, and asked whether the committee had ever discussed guardrails around when to consider proposals from staff for raises so it's a more predictable process. **Chair Greenblatt** committed to examining this in future meetings.

Alejandra Cancino asked about budget impact from the fundraising vacancy—what impact does Diana think there will be until a new person is hired?

Diana Fuentes said it's in flux as she's looking at hiring an interim consultant. She doesn't know costs yet as consultants vary, but hopes it won't cost as much as the prior person's salary immediately.

Alejandra Cancino clarified her concern. The timing is concerning. She acknowledged Diana had asked for raises earlier and the committee asked her to delay, but it is a difficult time to think about this question in particular, because there isn't someone in that capacity right now, and "it does kind of weigh heavily what [Lee] said about the current state of the industry."

She emphasized this isn't about not appreciating staff—the timing of it just because everything is in flux not only within IRE, but outside of IRE.

Diana Fuentes said she's looking at hiring an interim consultant. She offered examples of why she believes foundations are giving more due to current conditions:

- Ford Foundation: \$100,000 for operating
- MacArthur Foundation: \$20,000 for Indigenous Students Workshop fellowships due to attacks on journalists
- Jonathan Logan Foundation: Invited IRE to apply for \$100,000 annually for three years (up from \$75,000 for two)

Brian Rosenthal said he's optimistic about fundraising opportunities with a strong new development director but concerned "we're getting a little ahead of ourselves. I don't think we have the money right now." Fundraising and membership have declined. "The wisest course of action right now, given everything that's up in the air, is to hold off on the across the board raises, settle in to new people and revisit the issue in a few months. And I'll be the first to say, especially if new money comes in. Let's do the raises and let's make them retroactive to now."

Chair Greenblatt noted he agrees with both Brian and Lee and Jodie—Lee and Jodie work at corporate levels of major media firms and see what's happening inside two companies, data IRE should heed. He also sees tremendous opportunity with the right development director.

Jodie Fleischer provided detailed industry analysis. Her company and Lee's consistently send people to conferences, but currently all travel is frozen throughout her company. Raises are flat unless contractually negotiated. "It's not predicted to get better. This isn't a phase. This is the

future." Conference attendance may decline as companies cut travel and staff. TV consolidation will eliminate "entire newsrooms worth of staff." She wholeheartedly agrees IRE should hold at least until filling the development director position.

Chair Greenblatt noted IRE is sitting on nearly \$100,000 in carryover money. If the committee is moving toward not recommending this proposal, they could invite staff to propose using carryover money for one-time bonuses instead of permanent raises.

Lee Zurik supported bonuses citing negative financial winds: "I don't think the winds may or may not come...I think they're here."

Josh Hinkle asked about if the Board did approve the raises today, where would Diana find increased money if she needed to increase the salary of the new director of development.

Diana Fuentes said the hope is the person would raise enough money to cover their salary, but positive recent market returns in the last year (8.8%) could suggest IRE relay on endowment earnings.

Josh Hinkle expressed concerns about retention and capacity. If IRE loses 1 or 2 more talented staff, "I really think that's going to be detrimental for the organization."

Lee Zurik responded that no one is saying don't hire the open positions. He stated it is on IRE's staff leadership to lift staff up and get through tough times, and encouraged more efforts, adding, "The board and this committee's top responsibility is fiscal responsibility."

Mary Hudetz asked why bonuses weren't being considered. **Diana Fuentes** explained: "It's an investment in your people. I think it speaks volumes when you can do a raise versus a bonus."

Rick Gevers noted fundraising "is not a college football coaching job. It's a 2 to 5 year relationship building." **Diana Fuentes** agreed.

Motion and Vote

Chair Greenblatt moved to recommend the board not approve the proposed budget but invite a different budget that rewards staff this year with a reasonable bonus amount to be determined by staff, "so that we are intentionally sending the message that we care, and responding to the fiscal guidance that we've heard."

Myrta Pulliam seconded, adding the explanation to Diana should be: "We care. We'd rather give you a raise...And we're in tough times and we're going to raise a bunch of money (in the future) so you will get permanent raises."

Roll Call Vote:

- Lee Zurik: For
- Rick Gevers: For
- Mary Hudetz: Opposed
- Myrta Pulliam: For
- McNelly Torres: For
- Mark Greenblatt: For

Result: Motion passed 5-1.

Adjournment

Meeting adjourned at 3:00 p.m. Arizona time / 5:00 p.m. Eastern time