

**Note:** On April 21, 2026, Secretary Ana Ley made a motion via email to approve these minutes. It was seconded by Board Member Caresse Jackman and received 10-0 approval on April 23.

# IRE Board of Directors

Board Meeting Agenda via Zoom

April 10, 2026 @ 9:00 a.m. CT

**Board members in attendance:** President Josh Hinkle, Vice President Kate Howard, Treasurer Mark Greenblatt, Secretary Ana Ley, At-Large Member Alejandra Cancino, Chair of the Board Brian Rosenthal, Mary Hudetz, Paroma Soni, Cindy Galli, Jodie Fleischer, Caresse Jackman, Andy Lehren.

Hudetz joined at 9:13 a.m. and left at 10:37 a.m.

**Staff members in attendance:** Lauren Grandestaff, Cody Winchester, Chris Vachon, Heather Feldmann Henry, Francisco Vara-Orta and Amy Eaton.

President Josh Hinkle called the meeting to order at 9:02 a.m. CT. Secretary Ana Ley called roll.

## Action Items

### IRE Board Core Values<sup>1</sup>

The Board voted to approve its vision, mission and core values. Creating this language was one of the final Board initiatives in which our late executive director, Diana Fuentes, collaborated before she died March 20. The Board dedicated the initiative in her honor. The values would be posted online in the About Us or Board of Directors section of [ire.org](http://ire.org) and be added to the top of the Board's policies and procedures manual. Hinkle made a motion to approve the language and Howard seconded. The group approved unanimously by voice vote.

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<sup>1</sup> **IRE Vision, Mission and Core Values: Our Vision** – The IRE Board of Directors envisions a future where our journalism training and advocacy play an essential role in strengthening democracy by empowering a resilient, inclusive and forward-looking community of investigative journalists to uncover truths and serve the public good. **Our Mission** – IRE's mission is to foster excellence in investigative journalism, which is essential to a free society. We accomplish this by: Providing training, resources, and a community of support to investigative journalists. Promoting high professional standards. Protecting the rights of investigative journalists. Ensuring the future of IRE. **Our Core Values** – The Board's decisions are grounded in a fundamental belief that our work is critical to IRE's success. Our Board members serve out of loyalty to the mission and provide essential oversight and accountability to IRE's members and the broader public. In helping to carry out that mission, the Board embraces the following core values – *Collaboration:* We believe in prioritizing working well together, with IRE staff and with members; contributing to our collective goals; and being active, informed and respectful participants in the decisions we make and their impact. *Diversity:* We believe in having a broad range of voices, backgrounds, abilities and communities represented on the Board; actively ensuring everyone can speak and be heard; and fostering an open, inclusive dialogue. *Efficiency:* We believe in acting thoughtfully and effectively, making timely, streamlined and mission-focused decisions, and demonstrating respect for the work and roles of others who contribute to this organization. *Transparency:* We believe in conducting our business openly; following well-executed governance policies; being accountable to our members; and setting an example for the journalism industry. *Courage:* We believe in leading with conviction, driven by journalists' responsibility to inform the public, and being willing to innovate, evolve and take risks necessary to move IRE and its membership into the future.

### **Executive Director Search Firm Spending Authorization**<sup>2</sup>

President Hinkle gave the group an update on the hiring process for the vacant role of executive director after Fuentes' death. Vice President Kate Howard then presented a proposal to authorize the IRE Executive Director Search/Hiring Committee to spend up to \$50,000 to engage a search firm to assist in the executive director hire. Howard discussed pros and cons with using a firm and said she obtained proposals and brought options so the board could consider it. Howard talked about conversations that she had with external search firms that could be contracted in the event that the committee determine it needs help finding qualified candidates. Howard said the vote would ensure the committee could move quickly if it decided to use a firm and prevent the need for another special Board meeting to vote later. Board member Jodie Fleischer objected to the proposal by expressing concern about the turbulent climate of the journalism industry and said there are many experienced journalists out of work. At-Large Member Alejandra Cancino said it was too soon to call for such a vote. Treasurer Mark Greenblatt said the amount was too large and he would feel more comfortable if the amount was smaller. After robust discussion, Ley made a motion to approve the proposal with a friendly amendment from Chair Brian Rosenthal, who asked that the money only be spent if the hiring committee unanimously agrees to enlist a search firm. The group took a roll call vote, approving the motion 9-3, with Cancino, Fleischer and Greenblatt dissenting.

### **The Diana Fuentes Service to IRE Award**<sup>3</sup>

President Hinkle presented a proposal to establish a service award named in honor of Fuentes to annually recognize one IRE member for outstanding volunteerism for the organization, to be selected by staff. The first recipient will be honored in 2026 and recognized at the IRE Conference in June. The award would also have a page with a summary and list of future recipients on [ire.org](http://ire.org). Hinkle made a motion to approve the proposal and Board Member Caresse Jackman seconded. The group voted unanimously by voice vote to approve it.

### **Consent Action Items**

Ley made a motion to approve one consent action item. Hinkle seconded, and the motion passed unanimously by voice vote:

- **Approval of Minutes of Recent Emailed Votes**<sup>4</sup>

### **Executive Director's Report**

- Interim Executive Director Lauren Grandestaff said a search/hiring committee had interviewed its top five candidates this week for a new director of development. She said the group intended to make an offer the week of April 13.

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<sup>2</sup> **Executive Director Search Firm Spending Authorization:** Authorize the IRE Executive Director Hiring Committee – upon unanimous decision by the committee – to spend up to \$50,000 to engage a search firm to assist in the executive director hire.

<sup>3</sup> **The Diana Fuentes Service to IRE Award** – Criteria/Description: The Diana Fuentes Service to IRE Award honors exceptional volunteer contributions to Investigative Reporters & Editors (IRE) and the global community of investigative journalists it serves. Established in 2026, the award commemorates Diana Fuentes, IRE's beloved former executive director, who died unexpectedly on March 20 of that same year. Fuentes was deeply committed to IRE's mission, championing diversity and inclusion while expanding affordability and access for members. Each year, IRE staff – through discussion and majority agreement – will select one recipient who is not compensated by the organization and whose service reflects Fuentes' dedication and impact. No one may receive the award in consecutive years. The honoree must also be an active IRE member and exemplify the essential role of volunteerism in strengthening investigative journalism. The award is announced each May and includes a one-year IRE membership renewal and a ticket to the IRE Awards Luncheon during the annual IRE Conference in June. A plaque will also be presented during that event.

<sup>4</sup> **Approval of Minutes of Recent Emailed Votes:** On March 6, the Board voted to approve a statement written by IRE that urged the release of Nashville reporter Estefany Rodríguez by federal immigration authorities. Ley voted to approve the minutes and Hinkle seconded, and the group voted unanimously to pass the motion.

- The filing period for the Board election period opened on April 7, with a deadline of May 5. Seven seats are up for election.
- The website's resource center is being worked on by staff, and staff member Krista Sporleder is working with the chairs of the academic, press freedom, international and employment committees, subcommittee and task force on resource pages for the website. Staff is working on a new setup for virtual mentoring on [ire.org](http://ire.org) to replace [journalismmentors.org](http://journalismmentors.org), and the platform will connect to the member database.

### **IRE26 Conference Update**

Conference Committee Chair Cindy Galli said a group of committee members had come up with a plan for the keynote speaker at the conference. The conversation will be about 20 to 30 minutes long. The Board will vote on the keynote speaker via email. Grandestaff said the team received nearly 250 pitches for the conference and added it is much more than in years past. She said many of the pitches focused on press freedom and that there are also a lot of deep dive sessions in the works. The group briefly discussed brainstorming ways to honor Fuentes at the conference and Grandestaff asked people to send their ideas to [conference@ire.org](mailto:conference@ire.org).

### **Spring Member Drive**

The organization has about 1,500 lapsed memberships since November. Hinkle asked board members to reach out to at least 25 names on the list of lapsed members the next week when the spring member drive launches.

### **Executive Director Goals 2026-27**

The group briefly reviewed goals that were set for Fuentes before her death as a collaboration between her and the Board's executive committee, which included leading a forward-looking strategic plan, strengthening and diversifying revenue, investing in marketing and visibility and growing and retaining membership. The goals have been set with the following intention: "By the end of the next Board year, IRE should have a clearer long-term direction, stronger financial footing and better alignment between mission, programs and resources – positioning the organization for confidence and growth amid change and challenges to the journalism world." Hinkle said the goals could still apply to a new executive director, as they were intended to be centered on that general role's work and expectations for the full organization.

### **Diana Fuentes Training Fund**

The group briefly discussed a training fund paid for with money that was donated in Fuentes' name. Staff said they would like to endow the money and use it for a workshop in Fuentes' name, and they are considering its focus. Ideas include workshops and fellowships centered on border reporting, public records or press freedom – themes that were important to Fuentes.

### **Budget Brainstorm**

The group began to think of how to allocate funds in the next fiscal year. Ideas included spending money to create a strategic plan, finding the funding to turn the organization's marketing/social media role to a full-time position, and carrying out a fundraising audit. Hinkle prepared a brainstorm document to share with staff, who will be working to draft the budget ahead of the Board's next regular meeting in June.

### **Committee/Task Force Reports**

#### [Member Services Committee](#)

Co-chairs Alejandra Cancino & Andy Lehren submitted their report in writing.

### **Officer Reports**

#### [President's Report](#)

Hinkle submitted his report in writing.

### **New Business**

Some IRE members have asked that the Board make video recordings of its meetings available to the membership. Hinkle recommended that, in the upcoming Board year, the group consider revisiting the

existing policy on meeting recordings, which currently states: "Meetings typically will be recorded for the purposes of taking minutes and destroyed after minutes have been approved."

Hinkle made a motion to adjourn at 11:03 a.m. CT, and Howard seconded. The group voted by voice vote to adjourn.