

Minutes

IRE Emergency Board meeting

Dec. 3, 2021

IRE president Mark Walker called the meeting to order at 5:05 p.m., Dec. 3.

The following board members were present: Jodie Fleischer, Jennifer Forsyth, Cindy Galli, Josh Hinkle, Marisa Kwiatkowski, Jennifer LaFleur, Mark Rochester, Barbara Rodriguez, Brian Rosenthal, Neena Satija, Kat Stafford, Jodi Upton, Mark Walker and Cheryl W. Thompson.

Staff present: Diana Fuentes, Stephanie Klimstra, Denise Malan, Heather Feldmann Henry and Anna Lopez

Motion from Walker to waive 10-day notice requirement for board meeting. **Second** from Galli.

Vote: Passed unanimously

FOR REFERENCE: Section 6.07 Waiver of Notice. At any meeting at which all Directors are present, a notice of the time, place and purpose thereof shall be deemed waived, and similar notice may likewise be waived by absent Directors, either by written instrument or by electronic mail.

Motion from Rochester to go into executive session to discuss a code-of-conduct matter. **Second** from Upton.

Vote: Passed unanimously

Motion from Kwiatkowski to leave executive session. **Second** from Upton.

Vote: Passed unanimously

Budget update (See [proposed budget](#))

Fuentes presented the budget. She said that IRE's PPP loan had been forgiven.

She also explained that a grant that normally goes to TNT training was used for operations last year because of the pandemic.

She said they budgeted conservatively for the next year as far as attendance at the NICAR and IRE conferences, which are the biggest sources of revenue.

Discussion about the budget and raises.

Forsyth asked about raises for staff and whether the lowest paid employee was given a raise as the board had discussed previously. Fuentes said that the staff got 2% raises from the University of Missouri. Henry confirmed later in the meeting that the raise is reflected in the budget document provided to the board.

Kwiatkowski asked how likely it is that IRE will get the Park Foundation funding this year.

Henry said it was not officially in the budget because it has not yet been received. Lopez said we usually find out in mid-December.

Rodriguez asked about watchdog training and other in-person training that is listed as zero in the budget.

Fuentes said that staff is working on that training and planning to do some of it in person, pending receiving the anticipated funding for it.

Fleischer asked that with the new variant, is there even a possibility that NICAR is not going to happen in person in Atlanta and is that something we need to be prepared for budget wise.

Fuentes said staff is moving forward with a hybrid conference and that they are getting lots of inquiries from people who want to attend in person.

Klimstra said that unless there is a shutdown in Atlanta that invokes force majeure, IRE would need to go forward with an in-person event, even if it is a smaller conference because of the potential loss in fees. At this point, we would have to pay the full cancellation fee if we were to cancel the conference outright.

Upton clarified the budget process for newer board members. Even though all of our staff are university employees. Their salaries go through the university, but IRE provides the funding.

She explained that the PPP loan was “pretty controversial because most of the Board didn't know about it.” But the fact that Henry was able to get the loan forgiven is important. That was a large liability that was of concern.

Upton said that as treasurer, a couple of things worry her. She said we were able to get through last year because expenses were low due to lack of travel. We also had funders that agreed to their money being used for operations, allowing for more flexibility.

We now have a budget that is balanced, but to balance it we're using more of our earnings that would have been added to the endowment than we have in quite some time, as well as some of the money that in June we had said was going to be rolled back into the endowment.

Upton also said that total salaries have increased from \$1.1 million in June 2019 to \$1.35 million, (including benefits). That's a 23% increase in two years.

We voted to give Fuentes a significant raise over the previous executive director's salary. Upton said she wasn't questioning it, but it should be something we're aware of. We don't really know what's coming ahead and we need to be a little bit careful.

Fuentes said the uncertain future is why Henry's budget estimates are conservative and why staff pushed for the conference rates they recommended. She also said she is hopeful they won't have to take the whole \$200,000 from the money that had been earmarked for the endowment fund.

Fuentes said whether the full \$200,000 will be needed depends on how well we do at the conferences, how many people attend, and how we do on our custom training during the year.

Rosenthal said that IRE had a surplus last year of \$380,000 and that the \$200,000 we are rolling over into the budget is part of that surplus.

Walker asked for a motion to approve the budget. Motion from Forsyth to approve the budget. **Second** from Galli.

Vote: Approved unanimously

NICAR registration fees (see [rate proposal](#))

Galli reviewed the recommendations from the Conference Committee, which worked with staff to decrease the early bird registration fee for in-person early bird \$295. \$325 for regular registration and \$405 for on-site. Virtual would come down to \$195 for early bird and to \$225 for regular registration.

Fuentes said that the staff felt that the on-site rate needed to be more than \$400 because the whole point of having a high on-site rate is to discourage people from waiting to register on site because it makes it harder to plan. It also increases the burden on staff to do last-minute registration at the conference site.

We set the virtual earlybird rate to \$195 and the regular to \$225 with the idea that a hybrid is more expensive than an all virtual, Fuentes said. She said student rates are \$100 for in-person and \$50 for virtual.

Rosenthal asked what the reason was for an early bird rate and a regular rate for virtual attendance.

Fuentes said we offered early bird rates for previous virtual conferences. It's part of the planning process and is accounted for as revenue in the budget.

Fuentes said that most of the recent interest has been for in-person participation. Most people are willing to do a half-day workshop virtual, but people don't seem to want to do a virtual conference this time around. People have said ~~that~~ they end up having to work during a virtual conference.

Klimstra said that from an operational side, the reason to have an early bird rate for virtual is on the logistical side of things. We still must process all the registrations. If we keep the price the exact same, we're going to end up getting a lot right there at the end, and especially now that we're going to be doing virtual and hybrid, it will take up a lot of time.

Klimstra said that having that differentiation between prices is going to help us get more people in at that early bird price, so we have more time to process them.

Rodriguez said that with all the unknowns going on with variants, we might want to consider being more lenient with the early bird rate. People are going to be making decisions based on the information that they know as we get closer to the conference about whether they feel comfortable attending or not. She asked whether virtual attendees would be getting as much as in-person attendees.

Fuentes said that the in-person conferences will be offering more overall than we did for the all-virtual conference. Virtual attendees will be getting several events live-streamed and will have access to recorded sessions like they did before.

The in-person event will have networking sessions that they didn't have before so there is that addition, but there'll be virtual versions and in-person versions of those sessions. Fuentes said that virtual attendees won't be getting less. It will just be different.

Fuentes said that our biggest thing is that the expenses are going to be higher than an all in-person or an all-virtual event. So it seems only practical that would show up in what we charge.

Rodriguez said that there could be the possibility of tying people's hands if we're telling them here's the deadline to decide whether you're going to do virtual or not.

Galli said that if people are going to go virtual, they kind of know. We explored a flat fee of \$200 or something and just said that's our virtual fee.

Rosenthal said that he understands that the hybrid costs more but that he proposes setting a flat rate of \$195 for virtual registration.

Motion from Rosenthal to accept the in-person fee recommendations but set virtual flat fee at \$195 with no separate early bird fee. **Second** from Satija.

Vote: Passed 7 to 6 (Yes: Fleischer, Galli, Hinkle, Rodriguez, Rosenthal, Satija and Stafford; No: Forsyth, Kwiatkowski, LaFleur, Rochester, Upton and Walker,)

Vaccination requirement

Discussion about how to manage a vaccination requirement at the NICAR conference in Atlanta.

Fuentes said that the board needs to decide whether to require vaccination and if so, would we want to pay for verification. She noted that many of the companies that do verification are already booked. One estimate was \$4 a person. So, if we had 900 people that would be like \$4,100 if we decided to do that. If we booked that company before Christmas, they would waive the \$500 set-up fee.

Fuentes said that if we did it, we would tell people that an independent company would be reaching out to them and then they would have to upload their card to this company. The company would then check to make sure the card is real and then they would give them a QR code. At the conference, we'd have to have someone checking the QR codes.

Fleischer said that if other people in the hotel and hotel staff are there, attendees could be exposed to someone not at the conference. Fleischer said she didn't see the value in spending the money for verification. Rather, we could have people attest to vaccination when they register.

Rodriguez suggested having rapid tests on site if we feel strongly about showcasing to members that this is important to us.

Upton said that would require we have a policy as to what to do if someone tested positive.

Motion from Fleischer to mandate vaccines and require in-person registrants to attest to vaccination. **Second** from Satija.

Vote: Passed unanimously

Discussion with Dean Kurpius

Walker updated the board on his discussion with Missouri School of Journalism's Dean Kurpius about whether IRE would be charged rent for office space. The Dean said that unless something changes with the University

of Missouri starting to charge them it will not be an issue. Walker said he would be taking a trip to Columbia to meet with the Dean.

The Dean also would like to meet the full board.

Upton asked whether, in addition to the rent, the university was going to charge a tax to IRE. Walker said that wasn't going to happen.

Walker said that partnering with the university will go a long way. Having IRE staff teach a class also goes a long way and will provide an additional benefit to the students.

Walker also said that it can help in the future.

Fuentes said she did a workshop on diversity for the university.

Executive session and adjournment

Motion from Satija to go into executive session. **Second** from Forsyth.

Motion to leave executive session from Walker. **Second** from Kwiatkowski.

Vote: Passed unanimously

Motion to adjourn from Walker. **Second** from LaFleur

Vote: Passed unanimously

Meeting adjourned at 6:52 p.m.

Proposal:

A compromise for the rates so the staff can get going:

- **In person:** \$295 for early bird; \$325, regular; \$405, on site.
- **Virtual:** \$195, early bird; \$225, regular

Our conference expenses are based on real cost estimates and while we hope to negotiate some of these costs down, we need to operate on the assumption that the expenses are fixed. If negotiations are successful and we can reduce some expenses, we still need to be prepared for extra on-site expenses. There are almost always additional costs that come up in person and a well-planned budget allows for those costs.

As usual, our conference rates are in line with the rest of the journalism organizations and in some cases lower.

The total revenue needed to make NICAR22 a success and keep our budget in line is \$471,000 — with \$348,000 coming from registration. If we reduce rates lower than the proposed \$295, we will need to make up the funds in sponsorship money or make sure we have a larger attendance. Neither option is predictable. As it stands, the \$80,000 budgeted in sponsorship money is high for a NICAR conference so we may already need higher attendance if we don't reach that goal.

Our in-person events are expensive and NICAR22 will have the added virtual costs incurred by going hybrid. Yet we still offer one of the lowest registration rates out there. We need to be able to not only cover the costs but our overhead as well. If we go any lower, we are risking a break-even event, which could be very damaging to an already conservative budget.

Regarding the AV/labor costs:

Dee Dee said she has talked with Stephanie, and that \$80,000 figure she mentioned at the meeting was what she recalled as an estimate of what we would have spent at the hybrid conference in Baltimore for all AV expenses. She doesn't have an exact number for NICAR in Atlanta yet; she is working on that.

For the final, actual expense, Stephanie checks out numerous AV companies to get the best prices — that is her job and she is very thorough. Often, the best deal turns out to be the hotel's in-house AV because it comes as part of a deal Stephanie works out for internet service. A hotel is the sole provider of internet services on its property; hotels do not allow other providers. The cost for that can be in the tens of thousands; for Baltimore, for example, had we gone there in person, we were looking at \$17,000 for internet service if we had used an outside AV company. And that was for half the days we usually stay during a regular conference.

We are required to work with an AV company acceptable to the hotel (unions), which means paying employees of that company to operate cameras and do other tasks necessary for virtual production; we are not allowed to do it ourselves.

I appreciate that we want to keep expenses low for our members but we need to keep in mind our expenses; that's our fiscal responsibility. We were able to charge \$150 for virtual attendance when the conference was fully virtual because it

is considerably less expensive to put on a fully virtual conference. Just look at the numbers in the budget under tab FY2022, line 89, columns B and C, showing our anticipated in-person expenses (\$839,000) and our actual expenses for the virtual conferences (\$147,867).

Putting on a hybrid conference will be more expensive than a regular conference; we will have added virtual production costs and added staffing needs for the virtual part. It's like having two conferences in one.

Proposed Budget

	Approved YE 2021	Actual 6.30.21	Proposed YE2022	Revised YE2022	Actual 10.21
REVENUE					
MEMBERSHIP					
New Membership	\$75,000	\$180,630	\$110,000	\$110,000	\$14,760
Membership-student	\$10,000	\$26,275	\$22,000	\$22,000	\$4,475
Membership-international	\$6,000	\$9,935	\$9,000	\$9,000	\$1,110
Membership renewals	\$115,000	\$117,365	\$165,000	\$165,000	\$20,660
Renewals-student	\$5,000	\$5,210	\$5,000	\$5,000	\$502
Renewals-international	\$4,000	\$9,675	\$9,000	\$9,000	\$1,190
Membership revenue	\$215,000	\$349,090	\$320,000	\$320,000	\$42,697
IRE SALES & SERVICES					
Data analysis/visualization & database sales	\$7,500	\$12,318	\$15,000	\$15,000	\$5,473
IRE Journal subscriptions/advertising	\$3,000	\$5,401	\$5,000	\$5,000	\$245
Book sales and royalty	\$15,000	\$24,465	\$25,000	\$25,000	\$9,240
Story/tipsheet sales & Research Desk	\$2,500	\$470	\$2,000	\$2,000	\$578
Award Contest fees	\$40,000	\$37,785	\$40,000	\$40,000	\$200
Web ads/services	\$30,000	\$42,352	\$35,000	\$40,000	\$19,595
Fiscal Agent fees	\$12,000	\$13,502	\$20,000	\$20,000	\$9,000
Other	\$1,000	\$7,441	\$4,000	\$4,000	\$556
IRE Services / Products revenue	\$111,000	\$143,734	\$146,000	\$151,000	\$44,887

CONFERENCES					
Registrations and fees (IRE20, NICAR21, IRE21 for B & C; columns D, E & F include DBEI symposium)	\$766,000	\$735,963	\$961,000	\$839,195	\$21,195
Hands-on training classes	\$34,000	\$13,835	\$40,000	\$40,000	\$0
Other revenues	\$47,000	\$27,990	\$40,000	\$38,000	\$0
Sponsorships	\$495,000	\$462,250	\$440,000	\$386,250	\$46,250
Conference revenue	\$1,342,000	\$1,240,038	\$1,481,000	\$1,303,445	\$67,445
Program Revenue					
Watchdog workshops	\$20,000	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
TV watchdog workshops	\$4,000	\$6,370	\$0	\$0	\$0
Custom newsroom training	\$30,000	\$25,653	\$80,000	\$75,000	\$14,293
IRE on Campus program	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Boot camps	\$96,000	\$51,000	\$75,000	\$75,000	\$17,425
Program Revenue	\$150,000	\$83,023	\$155,000	\$150,000	\$31,718
GRANTS / FOUNDATIONS Released					
Google News Initiative: Data in Local Newsrooms (restricted)	\$16,000	\$0	\$16,000	\$16,000	\$5,333
John S. and James L. Knight Foundation: TV initiative (restricted)	\$142,000	\$97,000	\$45,000	\$45,000	\$15,000
TNT Program (restricted)	\$217,000	\$150,000	\$0	\$150,000	\$50,000
Fellowship grant (restricted)	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$100,000	\$33,333
Inasmuch Foundation (unrestricted)	\$100,000	\$100,000	\$100,000	\$100,000	\$33,333

Lumina Foundation: IRE On Campus (restricted)	\$94,000	\$94,000	\$0	\$80,000	\$26,667
Dow Jones Newspaper Fund: intern data boot camp (restricted)	\$0	\$21,560	\$0	\$0	\$0
McCormick (\$50,000) Chicago newsrooms (restricted)	\$0	\$0	\$50,000	\$50,000	\$16,667
Arnold Ventures (unrestricted)	\$150,000	\$150,000	\$0	\$0	\$0
Jonathan Logan Family Foundation (unrestricted)	\$75,000	\$75,000	\$75,000	\$75,000	\$25,000
Syracuse University-IRE on Campus Program (restricted)	\$0	\$9,500	\$0	\$0	\$0
Park Foundation (unrestricted)	\$0	\$50,000	\$0	\$0	\$0
Grants / Foundations revenue	\$794,000	\$747,060	\$286,000	\$616,000	\$205,333
INDIVIDUAL DONATIONS					
Unrestricted/temporary restricted	\$30,000	\$58,939	\$40,000	\$40,000	\$5,525
Perm. Restricted -Endowment	\$25,000	\$11,968	\$20,000	\$20,000	\$10,067
Individual donations revenue	\$55,000	\$70,907	\$60,000	\$60,000	\$15,592
INVESTMENT INCOME					
Income released-fellowships, administrative	\$150,000	\$0	\$250,000	\$225,000	\$0
Income not released		\$150,000	\$0	\$0	\$0

Investment income revenue	\$150,000	\$150,000	\$250,000	\$225,000	\$0
General Operating funds-from YE21	\$0	\$0	\$200,000	\$200,000	\$66,664
TOTAL REVENUE	\$2,817,000	\$2,783,852	\$2,898,000	\$3,025,445	\$474,336
EXPENSES					
PERSONNEL					
Salaries: full-time staff	\$987,000	\$1,008,000	\$985,000	\$1,008,000	\$328,246
Benefits: full-time staff	\$326,000	\$322,000	\$328,000	\$339,000	\$108,630
Part-time wages	\$75,000	\$42,000	\$45,000	\$45,000	\$8,350
Student wages	\$40,000	\$25,000	\$25,000	\$25,000	\$6,900
Personnel expenses	\$1,428,000	\$1,397,000	\$1,383,000	\$1,417,000	\$452,126
IRE SALES & SERVICES					
Membership	\$2,000	\$1,464	\$2,000	\$2,000	\$200
Data Library	\$2,000	\$1,331	\$2,000	\$2,000	\$50
Journal	\$35,000	\$33,488	\$37,000	\$37,000	\$9,617
Book costs	\$15,000	\$14,443	\$15,000	\$15,000	\$4,306
Resource Center	\$10,000	\$13,255	\$7,500	\$7,500	\$4,304
Contest (platform, plaques, awards)	\$15,000	\$13,768	\$12,000	\$12,000	\$11,332
Web services	\$2,000	\$2,166	\$2,000	\$2,000	\$80
Other	\$1,000	\$8,938	\$1,000	\$1,000	\$0
Sales/Products	\$82,000	\$88,853	\$78,500	\$78,500	\$29,889

PROGRAM EXPENSES					
Conferences	\$839,000	\$147,867	\$1,089,000	\$987,000	\$49,166
Watchdog workshops	\$5,000	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
TV watchdog workshops	\$5,000	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Total Newsroom Training (TNT)	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$53,000	\$0
Lumina-IRE on Campus	\$5,000	\$0	\$0	\$53,000	\$0
Custom newsroom training	\$5,000	\$3,080	\$15,000	\$15,000	\$1,618
Boot camps	\$5,000	\$2,290	\$10,000	\$10,000	\$400
Fellowships/scholarships	\$100,000	\$158,175	\$30,000	\$120,000	\$16,898
Program Expenses	\$964,000	\$311,412	\$1,144,000	\$1,238,000	\$68,082
PROFESSIONAL SERVICES					
Investment management fees	\$18,000	\$18,000	\$18,000	\$18,000	\$0
Accounting	\$25,000	\$31,231	\$25,000	\$25,000	\$0
Legal	\$5,000	\$658	\$2,000	\$2,000	\$0
Professional services expenses	\$48,000	\$49,889	\$45,000	\$45,000	\$0
BOARD OF DIRECTORS					
Retreat-audio/visual, room rental, faciliator	\$0	\$0	\$5,000	\$5,000	\$4,527
Board travel assistance	\$1,000	\$0	\$1,000	\$1,000	\$889
Election software	\$2,500	\$2,210	\$2,500	\$2,500	\$0
Board of directors expenses	\$3,500	\$2,210	\$8,500	\$8,500	\$5,416

GENERAL OFFICE					
Telephone and fax	\$6,000	\$7,574	\$10,000	\$10,000	\$606
Postage	\$3,000	\$1,941	\$3,000	\$3,000	\$675
Office supplies	\$6,000	\$1,302	\$5,000	\$5,000	\$11,542
Photocopying	\$3,000	\$1,800	\$2,000	\$2,000	\$604
Insurance	\$20,000	\$26,000	\$18,000	\$18,000	\$8,666
Computer supplies	\$2,000	\$655	\$2,000	\$2,000	\$0
Credit card service fees	\$40,000	\$51,658	\$50,000	\$50,000	\$1,200
Dues/fees/subscriptions	\$2,500	\$1,373	\$3,000	\$3,000	\$249
Office Travel/Executive Director Travel & search costs	\$5,000	\$1,846	\$5,000	\$5,000	\$4,307
Marketing/promotions	\$9,000	\$1,254	\$6,000	\$6,000	\$100
Staff retreat / professional development	\$3,000	\$900	\$2,000	\$2,000	\$0
Software/equipment/maintenance/hosting	\$30,000	\$28,332	\$35,000	\$35,000	\$7,354
Web design/updates	\$40,000	\$48,175	\$20,000	\$20,000	\$187
Office relocation expenses	\$0	\$0	\$15,000	\$10,000	\$0
Other office expense	\$4,000	\$5,120	\$5,000	\$5,000	\$65
General office expenses	\$173,500	\$177,930	\$181,000	\$176,000	\$35,555
Fundraising expenses	\$10,000	\$4,711	\$10,000	\$10,000	\$92
Depreciation	\$10,000	\$10,000	\$7,000	\$7,000	
TOTAL EXPENSES	\$2,719,000	\$2,042,005	\$2,857,000	\$2,980,000	\$591,160

