

*These minutes received approval by the IRE Board of Directors via email and were finalized on March 10, 2023.*

- *Hinkle moved for approval on March 8, 2023.*
- *Vo seconded that motion and voted “yes” on March 8, 2023.*
- *The final/total board vote was unanimous 13-0.*

# **IRE Board of Directors Meeting Minutes**

## **March 3, 2023 | In-person & via Zoom**

### **NICAR Conference | Nashville, TN**

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President Mark Walker called the meeting to order at 1:10 p.m. CST.

Secretary Josh Hinkle called roll:

- Directors present in-person: Darla Cameron, Jodie Fleischer, Cindy Galli, Mark Greenblatt, Josh Hinkle, Kate Howard, Aaron Kessler, Brian Rosenthal, Lam Thuy Vo, Simone Weichselbaum
- Directors present via Zoom: Barbara Rodriguez, Neena Satija
- IRE staff present: Financial Officer Heather Feldman Henry, Executive Director Diana Fuentes, Director of Programming & Resources Lauren Grandestaff, Director of Events Stephanie Klimstra, Training Director Adam Rhodes, Director of Diversity & Inclusion Francisco Vara-Orta

#### **University of Missouri School of Journalism Update**

Dean David Kurpius provided the board an overview of potential fundraising initiatives between the university and IRE. A large focus dealt with the university’s fundraising team partnering with IRE and targeting foundations for financial support, including the Knight Foundation. He also gave an update on the university’s high school summer journalism program, which could eventually be expanded and include even more investigative focus.

#### **President’s Remarks**

Walker spoke about recently signing a letter related to his employer - The New York Times - and its union. He apologized to the board and staff for the “blowback” that followed and for any negative perception of his intention when signing that letter - specifically apologizing to Training Director Adam Rhodes.

#### **Executive Director’s Report**

##### **NICAR Conference Update**

- Executive Director Diana Fuentes said more than 250 speakers were attending the conference this week with more than 175 sessions. As of Friday, there were more than 950 attendees.
  - Financial Officer Heather Feldman Henry gave a preview of revenue for the conference but said she anticipated a final update by the end of March. The most recent anticipated total revenue had been \$269,250, which was when the staff was conservatively estimating that there would be 620 attendees. The actual revenue as of Friday was \$349,406.

- Fuentes said many attendees had been waiting until the last minutes to see if their employers' would pay for the conference; others paid out-of-pocket because they wanted to update their skills and look for jobs.
- Sponsorships for the NICAR Conference were 27% higher than anticipated. The goal was \$85,000, and the actual amount raised was \$108,000.
- Director of Partnerships Anna Lopez gave a review of the sponsorship for the upcoming IRE Conference in June. The goal was \$260,000, and the current total raised is about 50% of that - \$129,000. She walked the board through confirmed sponsors and prospective sponsors - including Florida-based media outlets and schools.

### **AccessFest Proposed Rates**

- Fuentes discussed this virtual conference planned for October 12-14. The [proposed rates](#) are: \$149 (early bird), \$199 (regular) and \$50 student.
- Treasurer Brian Rosenthal said he thought the rates seemed a little high, given that the event is meant to be our most accessible and affordable event. He also noted that the staff had not presented any projections for attendance, revenues or expenses. He suggested waiting to vote until reviewing projections.
  - The board decided to delay a vote on those proposals, instead waiting for more information, which Fuentes said she would provide within one week. Walker said the board would discuss and vote on the options/proposals at a future meeting later in March or via email.
  - Fuentes indicated an earlier decision would let staff market and start outreach sooner.
- At-Large Member Jodie Fleischer asked for clarification that this event would not solely focus on DBEI like its predecessor event and that there would be sessions for students.
  - Fuentes said DBEI would be a major focus but not the only programming, and staff was exploring a track specifically for students.
- Hinkle suggested the training and conference committees could play a greater role in planning this event than they had with its predecessor event. Vice President Cindy Galli agreed. Fuentes said staff would welcome board ideas and suggestions.

### **Committee Reports**

#### **Governance Committee**

- Director Kate Howard laid out an [action item related to the executive director's annual review](#), offering language updates on its process, timing, IRS requirements and retention/filing.
  - Walker added that as president, he would reach out to each member of the board and staff for thoughts on the executive director's performance prior to the completion of the annual review.
  - Howard made a motion to approve the updated language. Hinkle seconded the motion, which received unanimous approval 13-0 by show of hands. **(ACTION ITEM)**

#### **Training Committee**

- Hinkle reviewed the [committee's recommendations for staff in planning training initiatives](#) for the upcoming year. Highlights included:
  - Inclusivity/Representation Working Group
    - Director Lam Thuy Vo explained this working group has started compiling links and summaries for resources related to this topic (inclusivity/representation). Vo has pitched a resource page on IRE's site specific to this topic. Vo will next work with staff to explore what's already in place and how to build on that work, then create additional online tools for IRE members. The goal is to have this in place by AccessFest in October.

- Local Journalism Working Group
  - Director Simone Weichselbaum explained that IRE is aiming to take its training to two university campuses within NBCU's existing, diverse network of colleges and universities during the 2023-24 academic year. Arizona State will be the first campus with a fall training schedule. As of February, ASU, NBCU and IRE have already started meeting to finalize plans for this three-day event for students and local (area) journalists.
  - Weichselbaum left at 2:05 p.m. CST for the remainder of the meeting.
- Advanced Training/Veteran (Longtime) Members Working Group
  - Launch a multi-week (extended) pilot program of online workshops organized around a certain topic surrounding a beat (investigating businesses, for example) or a specific skill (fighting for public records, for example). This recommendation may be rolled into the "professional certificate" or "online course" idea recently discussed as a potential partnership between IRE and the University of Missouri School of Journalism.
    - Hinkle made a motion to create an "Online Education Task Force" to be chaired by the Training Committee chair or their designee and the Finance Committee chair or their designee, with additional members appointed by the IRE president by March 31, 2023.
      - Walker, Galli and Fuentes expressed concerns over the timing and the need for a task force for this item. Walker said he would like to chair any related task force - since he has been a main point person with the University of Missouri - once the conversations with the university have developed further.
      - Rosenthal said one possibility for the programs would be to not involve the university and that a task force could help explore all possibilities.
      - Galli recommended tabling this motion until more information from the university is available. Walker said he would get details in writing and prepare a report for the board to be delivered in two weeks, and the board could then decide on next steps
- Hinkle then updated the board on the [status of the College Curriculum Toolkit Task Force's work](#).
  - The task force and staff discussed the small number of survey respondents (only seven out of 350 MSI contacts - a list that continues to grow and will be used for additional IRE purposes), but also noted respondents were unaware of existing IRE/NICAR programs for educators – like NICAR Courses. At this time, the group recommends delaying the creation of a full toolkit – instead moving forward with the following:
    - Toolkit chair (Hinkle) and staff liaison (Senior Training Director Liz Lucas) will meet with the IRE executive director following the conference to discuss more outreach/marketing of the organization's current teaching-related offerings for MSI educators, on-demand videos for some of the topics outlined in the survey, a timeline for revisiting a broader toolkit rollout – possibly in 2024 – who will develop it and how it could be funded.

## Member Services Committee

- Member Retention/Veteran Member Programs Subcommittee
  - Fleischer reviewed the report from the [latest committee report](#), including the member retention survey. Staff sent the survey to 7,294 former members, all of whom lapsed since IRE began using its new computer system in January 2021.
    - Once survey results are compiled, the member retention/veteran member programs subcommittee will engage in data analysis to share findings and trends with the board and to help craft strategies to assess and improve retention.
    - Galli suggested drilling down into the specific of who has not renewed ahead of the IRE Conference in June.

- Walker said he was planning to look at the list, then reach out directly to any past board members and committee members to try to get them to rejoin the organization.
    - Fleischer said staff indicated they'd received about 100 responses in the first few days after the survey went out. Many said they hadn't realized their memberships had lapsed.
      - Howard suggested many people might have lapsed during the pandemic and were waiting until closer to the conference to renew.
      - Fuentes said this number is typical for any timeframe when looking at lapsed memberships. Many have indicated they are no longer in the business.
    - Fleischer indicated the subcommittee would be looking at students who had lapsed, specifically campus campaign participants.
    - Rosenthal said that the turnover might indicate many members only renew their membership when they attend a conference. He suggested the board continue to think about how to emphasize the benefits of membership outside of just the conferences.
- **Regional Meetups Subcommittee**
  - Director Aaron Kessler explained recent efforts to expand in-person networking meetups around the country, including branding and promoting the meetups as IRE events. Some locations already in the early planning stages are New York City, Washington DC and Austin, Texas. There are also ongoing discussions with prospective organizers in Chicago, Boston, San Francisco, Los Angeles, New Orleans, Nashville, Atlanta, Sarasota/Tampa, Charleston, Richmond, Phoenix, Seattle, Lincoln, and West Texas.
    - Meetups will have an organizer in each city. The contact list will not be used for purposes beyond inviting members. Meetup.com will be the primary online tool recommended for use, which will allow for inclusion of IRE's Code of Conduct in the registration process.
    - Director Mark Greenblatt said making such meetups officially under the IRE brand would help with accountability.
    - Galli suggested the meetups should be posted as events on the IRE website. The group agreed but said there would be logistics to figure out.
    - Fuentes explained that there would be insurance for these events. Most will be held in public locations, which would have their own premises liability insurance, but staff and IRE attorneys are researching additional insurance options.
    - Fleischer made a motion to approve meetups as official IRE branded and promoted events. Greenblatt seconded the motion, which received unanimous approval 11-0 from members present by show of hands. Weichselbaum was absent, and Director Darla Cameron had left temporarily. **(ACTION ITEM)**

## Conference Committee

- Galli reviewed [recently-brainstormed ideas for welcoming new members at the IRE Conference in June](#), including: a welcome committee that would be largely made up of board members; a reporting help desk; and a "My First IRE..." campaign. She also added that the hotel was nearly booked. Director of Events Stephanie Klimstra said she is now working on an overflow hotel.
  - After NICAR, Galli plans to resume work with Director of Programming and Resources Lauren Grandestaff on general programming and also Hinkle on broadcast track programming.
  - Fuentes announced that an editor and three reporters from the Las Vegas Review-Journal had been secured as the keynote speakers for the IRE Conference luncheon due to their work after the murder of their colleague, Jeff German, last year.
    - Galli made a motion to approve those speakers. Walker seconded the motion, which received unanimous approval 12-0 from members present by show of hands. Weichselbaum was absent. **(ACTION ITEM)**

## **Treasurer's Report**

Rosenthal indicated the Finance Committee is working on updates to release soon, including a plan to increase legacy donations.

## **New Business**

### **Meeting Efficiency Discussion**

- Vo made some suggestions for running tighter meetings and being more constructive with the board's time. She said committee reports and action items should be prioritized - as they had been in today's meeting. She suggested proportionate time be allotted to the importance of the topic, because unexpected or unplanned items can be challenging to new board members or those not privy to the background of those items. Any items added to the agenda should be done so well in advance, giving members enough time to review materials and background. She planned to send a summary email of these thoughts to the board in the coming days.
  - Howard agreed that committee reports and action items should be prioritized.
  - Walker said prioritizing committee reports in the agenda was doable.
  - Fleischer said committee reports and other agenda items submitted in advance helps with preparation.
    - Rosenthal agreed and said board members should also read through those items fully to be better prepared for the meeting. He added that it's important not to rush through other pressing items that might arise during the meeting.
  - Walker said he would review the email Vo planned to send and see how the board could work to implement those points.

### **Conference Safety Discussion**

- Fleischer and Vo briefly discussed the need to focus a portion of the IRE Conference on safety surrounding the recent on-location murder of a television reporter in Orlando, the conference's host city.
  - The group said Director Barbara Rodriguez could also possibly help, as the Diversity Committee she chairs is currently working on a diversity statement.
  - Klimstra added a security guard had been hired to patrol during the NICAR conference.
- Howard and Vo left at 3:13 p.m. CST for the remainder of the meeting.

### **Threats to Democracy Event Discussion**

- Greenblatt gave a brief update on this event to be held at the National Press Club in Washington, D.C., at the end of March. It will feature two panels and partner with the University of Missouri.
  - Grandstaff said staff would welcome the board's attendance.
  - Walker said it would be no cost to IRE.

## **Strategic Planning Discussion**

- Greenblatt encouraged board members to read the latest list of topline items for each committee and speak with their committee liaisons about progress with those.
  - Fuentes explained these priorities came directly from the recent member survey.
  - Walker explained he plans to propose revised language surrounding the Public Engagement Committee to make it clear the committee makes recommendations but not decisions. He plans to send that out for an email vote of the board soon.

- Rosenthal questioned how often the need for public engagement comes up for IRE. Fuentes said it is rare - only once in the past year or so. She added that the creation of the committee moved forward because the member survey indicated that some members wanted IRE to do more public engagement.

### **President's Report**

#### **IRE Conference Donor Event Update**

- Walker said the board will move forward with the event in Orlando. A working group has met once and plans to meet again after the NICAR Conference.
  - Hinkle reminded the board that the event's "Save the Date" notifications are set to go out April 1. That is also the date the working group agreed to finalize the contact list, which is linked in the email Hinkle sent out last month.

Walker moved to adjourn the meeting at 3:20 p.m. CST. Galli seconded the motion, which received unanimous approval 10-0 of directors present by show of hands. Howard, Weichselbaum and Vo were absent.