Note: *On 10-18-26, Fleischer made a motion via email to approve these minutes. It was seconded by Hinkle and received 10-2 approval on 10/20/26. Rosenthal did not vote by deadline.*

IRE Board of Directors

Board Retreat Meeting Minutes | Sept. 25-27, 2026

University of Missouri School of Journalism | Columbia, Missouri

Day 1: Sept. 25

Board members in attendance: Secretary Jodie Fleischer, Vice President Cindy Galli, Ashley Graham, President Josh Hinkle, Kate Howard, Member-at-large Caresse Jackman, Aaron Kessler, Ana Ley (virtual), Andy Lehren, Brian Rosenthal (virtual), Paroma Soni, Katie Wilcox

Not in attendance: Treasurer Alejandra Cancino

Staff members in attendance: Executive Director Jonathan Kealing, Deputy Director Lauren Grandestaff (virtual), Development Director Lynnie McIlvain,

Meeting called to order at 2:02 p.m. CT by President Josh Hinkle. Secretary Jodie Fleischer called roll.

University of Missouri Journalism School Dean David Kurpius welcomed the board and discussed the school's strong partnership with IRE, including opportunities for further collaboration and the university's annual support in IRE-related costs.

Former IRE Executive Director and Missouri Professor Mark Horvit provided an update on a proposed 12-credit-hour data certificate program awaiting federal approval, with potential teaching opportunities for IRE members.

The board also completed onboarding, including a first-ever board handbook. The training included a governance review covering board and staff roles, fiduciary duties, oversight, policies and procedures, conflicts of interest, confidentiality, access to board materials and fundraising.

Day 2: Sept. 26

Board members in attendance: Treasurer Alejandra Cancino, Secretary Jodie Fleischer, Vice President Cindy Galli, Ashley Graham, President Josh Hinkle, Kate Howard, At-Large Member Caresse Jackman, Aaron Kessler, Ana Ley (virtual), Andy Lehren, Brian Rosenthal (virtual), Paroma Soni, Katie Wilcox

Staff members in attendance: Executive Director Jonathan Kealing, Deputy Director Lauren Grandestaff (virtual), Director of Development Lynnie McIlvain, Financial Officer Heather

Feldmann Henry, Director of Member Services Amy Eaton, Training Director Benét Wilson (virtual)

Members in attendance: Douglas Price (virtual)

President Josh Hinkle called the meeting to order at 9:00 a.m. Secretary Jodie Fleischer called roll.

Hinkle officially welcomed the new executive director, Jonathan Kealing.

Executive Director's report: Jonathan Kealing

Kealing provided updates on AccessFest planning, with 116 registrants and 90 fellowships awarded from a record 155 applications. IRE also secured a major grant and submitted additional grant proposals. Staff are developing membership recruitment and retention initiatives, including promotions targeting lapsed members and support for student chapters. Kealing also discussed new marketing efforts, potential collaborations with other journalism organizations, opportunities to generate additional revenue and ongoing assessments of IRE's operations to improve efficiency and inform the strategic planning process.

Treasurer's Report: Alejandra Cancino

Cancino reported an improved financial outlook, with more than $300,000 in grant commitments and additional budget cuts. The Finance Committee unanimously recommended budget approval while suggesting further review of conference pricing and luncheon costs to maintain affordability. Board members discussed potential adjustments, and the committee supported the proposed endowment spending based on strong investment performance and gala expenses.

Budget Discussion:

Kealing presented a revised budget reflecting stronger fundraising, additional cost savings and targeted investments. He expressed confidence in meeting revenue and surplus goals, with plans to reassess finances midyear and strengthen reserves if possible. Board members discussed grant projections, conference pricing and affordability, fiscal agency fees and potential website improvements. Kealing plans to revisit conference pricing in October and evaluate additional spending as funding allows.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

Hinkle made a motion to enter executive session to discuss potential grants. Galli seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously by voice vote.

Hinkle made a motion to leave the executive session. Galli seconded the motion.The motion passed unanimously by voice vote. Regular session resumed at 10:26 a.m. CT.

ACTION ITEM

Budget Approval

Alejandra Cancino made a motion to approve the final fiscal year 2027 budget as proposed by staff and recommended by the Finance Committee, with a note to direct Kealing to collaborate with the Affordability Subcommittee and Conference Committee to evaluate future IRE conference rates, including whether to separate the cost of the awards luncheon from the main conference rate. This evaluation shall be conducted in the spirit of the fiscal year 2026 affordability initiative with the aim of meeting budget goals while enhancing conferences' financial accessibility.

Hinkle seconded the motion.

Board members discussed the timing of 2027 conference rate announcements and reviewing student registration costs. Kealing recommended approving the budget as presented, with potential adjustments after staff reviews the data.

The motion passed unanimously by voice vote.

Priorities Presentations

Fundraising: Director of Development Lynnie McIlvain, Fundraising Subcommittee Chair Andy Lehren and Brian Rosenthal reviewed IRE's fundraising efforts, including past challenges, current strategies and opportunities for board involvement. McIlvain outlined secured and potential funding, confirmed commitments from key past funders, and said future budgets would include only committed funds.

Membership Retention & Recruitment: Member Services Committee Co-Chairs Paroma Soni and Aaron Kessler outlined membership recruitment and retention strategies, including upcoming membership drives targeting lapsed members and efforts to improve student-to-professional transitions. The board discussed expanding year-round training, mentoring, networking and career resources to increase member engagement. Members also raised concerns about diversity and gaps in membership data, with staff planning to improve reporting and explore targeted outreach and member feedback opportunities. Kealing also said a member drive would happen in October.

Conferences: Conference Committee Chair Galli and Deputy Executive Director Lauren Grandestaff reviewed the June conference in Washington, D.C., which drew 1,959 attendees, IRE's second-highest turnout, and received positive evaluations. The board discussed fellowship funding, networking opportunities, conference affordability and expanded programming for managers and educators. Galli outlined future priorities, including press

freedom sessions, and requested board input on keynote speakers. Grandestaff also encouraged promotion of October's AccessFest conference.

Hinkle made a motion to suspend the meeting until the next day. Kate Howard seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously by voice vote.

***NOTE**: The board and key staff spent the remainder of the day working with an outside consultant to advance IRE's strategic planning process. The group reviewed organizational materials and feedback from members, staff and funders, brainstormed priorities and discussed next steps. Kealing is expected to provide an update at the next board meeting.*

Meeting Day 3: Sept. 27

Hinkle called the meeting to order at 9:02 a.m.

Fleischer called roll. All board members were present, in addition to staff members Kealing, McIlvain, Grandestaff, Wilson, Eaton and Feldmann Henry

EXECUTIVE SESSION

Hinkle made a motion to go into executive session to discuss Code of Conduct complaints. Galli seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously by voice vote.

Hinkle made a motion to leave the executive session. Galli seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously by voice vote.

The board resumed regular session at 10:20 a.m.

ACTION ITEM

Code of Conduct Revision

Hinkle presented proposed Code of Conduct revisions recommended by the Code of Conduct Task Force and Governance Committee, including clearer definitions of prohibited behavior, complaint procedures, timelines, confidentiality and appeals. The board discussed enforcement options, anonymous and third-party complaints, potential criminal conduct and communicating the changes to members. Kealing emphasized the need for discretion in handling complaints and determining appropriate action.

Hinkle made a motion to approve the Code of Conduct revisions. Galli seconded the motion.

The motion passed unanimously by voice vote.

Financial Authorization Policies

Kealing plans to review and update spending authority policies. The item was tabled for Governance Committee review and will return to the board in November.

Consent Action Items:

Hinkle moved to approve the following consent action items related to previous email votes:

1. NYT Subpoenas Press Freedom Statement
2. Finance Committee Appointments
3. MS NOW, Politico, CNN / White House Press Freedom Statement

Howard seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously by voice vote.

DISCUSSION ITEM

Race & Culture Task Force

Race & Culture Task Force Chair Ashley Graham and Diversity & Inclusion Committee Chair Caresse Jackman presented slides outlining task force priorities, emphasizing greater inclusion, diverse programming and stronger responses to inappropriate conduct. Citing incidents at the June membership meeting,they called for consistent enforcement of the Code of Conduct, timely intervention and greater awareness of power and cultural dynamics. The task force also encouraged more diverse committee appointments, outreach to underrepresented communities and expanded year-round programming.

Discussion also focused on equitable conference speaker selection, with board and staff members encouraged to recruit qualified, diverse speakers to pitch sessions while balancing opportunities for underrepresented voices and longtime/established members.

This discussion became heated and, at times, contentious. Some in attendance expressed differing views on whether established members should be considered for sought-after panels outside the formal pitch process and whether such exceptions could disadvantage others.

The group also discussed expanding mentorship, advanced training and other opportunities to engage veteran members beyond conference speaking roles.

Kealing made clear that any member who wants to be on a panel should pitch their ideas during the open call period and that the organization must also do a better job of engaging veteran members outside of conferences.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

Hinkle made a motion to go into executive session to discuss a sensitive financial/contract/personnel topic. Galli seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously by voice vote.

Hinkle made a motion to leave the executive session. Galli seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously by voice vote.

Upon returning to regular session, Hinkle made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Lehren seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously by voice vote.

The meeting adjourned at 11:55 a.m.

Additional written reports submitted in advance of the board meeting:

President's Report
Academic Committee
Diversity & Inclusion Committee
Executive Committee
Finance Committee
Press Freedom Committee
Conference Committee
Member Services Committee