



INSIDE THE FUNDING PROCESS

The ins and outs of subsidizing education

“Since I became active on the Foundation about ten years ago, we have funded close to one million dollars in educational initiatives for the Association. My guess is it will continue at that rate for the next ten years, and we must keep pace.”

— Joe Neighbors, SR/WA

BY BARBARA BILLITZER

The ongoing pursuit of educational excellence has been the Association’s focus since it was first established in 1934. However, to keep pace in an evolving marketplace, it is essential that IRWA’s courses and professional development programs be current and relevant. So how does the Association manage to enhance, evolve and adapt its educational offerings? That’s where funding comes in.

IRWA is fortunate in that two separate entities work tirelessly to generate funding for educational projects. In the United States, it is the Right of Way International Education Foundation (RWIEF) and in Canada, it is the Canadian Right of Way Education Foundation. These two foundations share one core mission – to expand and enhance educational materials and professional development programs for right of way professionals.

With so much at stake, we asked the RWIEF Officers and Board of Trustees to explain how funds are generated, how they are allocated and why education is so important to the right of way profession.

A Dire Need

As an IRWA Course Facilitator since the early 1990’s, Bernard Lea, SR/WA had become concerned about the poor quality of the course materials. Both the student and facilitator manuals seemed to lack professionalism and consistency. Some course content was obviously outdated, and the lack of standardization was becoming more and more noticeable. For an organization focused on delivering high quality education and professional development programs, there was an obvious disconnect.

Involved with the foundation since 1996, RWIEF President David Sinclair, SR/WA also had strong opinions about what was lacking in IRWA's education curriculum. He continued to voice his opinions until Alan Wurtz, SR/WA and Connie Williford, MAI approached him about joining the cause. They believed he could help by serving as a Trustee and decided to recruit him. As David recalls, "I wasn't certain what to expect. But once on board, it was immediately evident. When I looked at the enhancements needed in the area of curriculum, and compared those needs with the funding available, there was a huge gap. It was time to build a funding mechanism that would enable the Foundation to grow and fund more courses. This was important to me and definitely an area where I thought I could bring some value."

In 2003, Carol Croft, SR/WA asked Bernie if he would be interested in serving on the board. "It was an opportunity I couldn't pass up," he says. "Clearly, improving our education program was the single most important task I could take on. I wanted to see if I could make a difference. I hoped that I would. Soon after, I was asked to represent RWIEF at the 2005 Education Summit, where we created a strategy for upgrading the entire IRWA education program. That was a real honor for me."

How Funds are Allocated

Through donations from IRWA members, Chapters and Regions, as well as funds generated through the annual auction and golf tournament, the Foundation has played a vital role in helping fund IRWA educational initiatives. Over the last few years, funding has been allocated to projects that fall within the categories of new course development, revamping of existing courses, web-based training, educational summits, career development and outreach programs. Since 2005, the RWIEF has funded approximately \$630,000 in course updates and new course development.

With over \$1.2 million in assets, the RWIEF takes a strategic approach in determining which right of way educational programs to support. In describing the decision-making process, Foundation Vice President Vickie Turpin, SR/WA, says, "It typically starts with the International Professional Development Committee (IPDC). They work with the International Executive Committee (IEC) and determine which new courses are most needed by our members and which courses need content updates. Then they rank the courses in order of importance and assign an estimated cost to each one. Working closely with the IEC, the IPDC compares their budget to determine what they can fund on their own. For the funds needed, a request is presented to the RWIEF that includes the proposed new courses, a proposal for revamping existing courses and, if appropriate, the cost to adapt existing courses to an online format."

Once the proposal is received, the Trustees use a fairly basic approach in evaluating each request. First, they estimate their projected income for the year. Next, they review the amount of funds already pledged to education development and verify the sunset dates of those funds. Then, they calculate what they have remaining in unpledged funds. Once the merit of each request is discussed in detail, it is time for a vote. With all the data in hand, determining whether or not to grant the request seems fairly evident.

FOUNDATION OFFICERS



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Bill Milton, SR/WA



Craig Poorker, SR/WA, R/W NAC



Kevin Winner, SR/WA

Current Funding Commitments

Prior to the Annual Conference in June 2010, the RWIEF had already committed funding of \$271,380 to online course development and for revamping the Principles of Right of Way textbook.

At their Foundation meeting in Calgary, two additional online course conversions were approved, as well as funding for a three-year Leadership Institute Program.

Breakdown of Funding Commitments:

Course 100 Online Conversion	\$ 69,900
Course 900 Online Conversion	\$ 34,950
Leadership Institute Program (\$58,800/year for three years)	\$176,400
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Subtotal for 2011-2013	\$281,250
Subtotal previous commitments	\$271,380
TOTAL FUNDING COMMITTED	\$552,630

Who Benefits Most?

When asked about the role of education, Carol explains, “Today, our laws, practices and procedures seem to be constantly changing. There is only one way to stay in tune with these changes, and that is through education. Online courses have become an important link for education resources, especially for those who are unable to travel or take time off work to attend a class. While hard work is absolutely necessary, education is the foundation for furthering your endeavors.”

A new recruit to the Foundation, Trustee Craig Poorker, SR/WA has experienced the value of professional development first hand. “The IRWA educational curriculum has served me very well since becoming involved in the right of way profession in 1984. At that time, I knew nothing of how to acquire right of way, so attending courses and networking with others in my same field was a terrific opportunity. I’ve learned so much since that time.”

A longstanding trustee, Bill Milton, SR/WA stresses that contributing to the Foundation is really an investment in yourself, adding, “It is important to realize that we, as Trustees, are also members of IRWA. Therefore, we have the same goal as the Association - improvement of the profession through education.”

Financial Generosity

Donating to any worthy cause instills a sense of pride. Giving back to one’s profession takes that feeling of pride to an entirely new level.

RWIEF Treasurer, Clyde Johnson, SR/WA, R/W-RAC can attest to the generosity of IRWA members. “This past year, roughly 33% of our members made donations to the Foundation through their annual membership dues renewal,” notes Clyde. “In 2009, more than 3,700 members elected to use this option, and RWIEF collected over \$55,000.”

In addition to contributions, the RWIEF relies on two major fundraising events held annually. The golf tournament and the auction are both held in conjunction with IRWA’s Annual International Education Conference. According to Clyde, the 2010 Northern Lights Golf Tournament generated a strong turnout. “While the total figures are still being crunched, the tournament will probably net close to \$20,000 this year. Two affiliates sponsored golf holes this year, as well as 15 chapters, a number that represents roughly 18% of all chapters. Regional support for the tournament was a little over 50% this year.”

Given the state of the economy and the impact on the right of way profession, these numbers represent a significant investment. Is there room for improvement? Clyde’s answer is, “Obviously, I would say yes. The way I look at it, you can never buy enough raffle tickets at the annual auction.” Clyde is confident that the continued support will facilitate success in the development and delivery of a truly professional educational program.

Bernie originally thought that one of the biggest obstacles to giving was a result of the economy. “When requesting funds at the region forums, I believed that almost everyone contributes what they can afford. But I’ve seen an increase in donations when we explain how their funds are used and that giving is actually an investment in their own future. I think we have just turned a major corner and I expect to see an increase in contributions in the future.”

Visibility Leads to Dividends

Over the years, many IRWA members may have been reluctant to contribute to the RWIEF. “This was primarily because so many folks did not understand the role of the Foundation,” says Bill. “We have made an effort to provide information to our members about who we are and why we need their support. Once the membership realizes that their contributions are, in fact, returned to them through improved education, they become more willing to contribute. Their contribution is an investment not only in their future in this profession, but also for the next generation of right of way professionals.”

Joe Neighbors concurs. “I think the primary obstacle preventing some members from contributing is they simply don’t know about us and the work we do to assist the Association with its educational initiatives.”

In recent years, the Foundation has taken steps to increase awareness. They created a brochure that was mailed with all IRWA dues renewals and launched a new website that explains who they are and how they allocate resources. “We are trying to make ourselves as transparent as we can. We have also created a way for members to donate by credit card through PayPal and are hopeful that this will help make it easier to make contribute,” notes Joe. This awareness has increased significantly over the last two years, as more members are contributing through their annual IRWA dues renewal.

Region and Chapter Support

The Foundation has also become more visible over the past few years by attending region forums and speaking at chapter meetings. This increased visibility has led to more individuals, chapters and regions making monetary commitments.

According to David, the short term goals of the Foundation are threefold:

- 1) Raise money to fund education projects;
- 2) Be in a ready position to fund projects;
- 3) Educate members on the Foundation’s role in funding right of way education projects and how they fit into this plan.

Many of the chapters and regions now commit on an annual basis and a contribution to the Foundation is a part of their annual budget. The biggest challenge is the third goal – educating members on the role of the Foundation and the importance of education for every right of way professional. “When we’re effective in meeting that third goal, the first two begin to take care of themselves,” notes David.

Giving Back to Ones Profession

When asked to become a Trustee this year, Craig said he was honored, and didn’t have to think twice. “My former boss, Gary Ostrom, SR/WA, was extremely supportive of IRWA and, in particular, the RWIEF, and he passed on that legacy,” notes Craig. “With the support of our employer, Great River Energy, we have routinely sponsored seminars and other events as fundraisers for the RWIEF. Likewise, all Chapters within Region 3 have been very supportive, and are always responsive when asked to give generously.”

Mike Pattison, SR/WA had just finished a five-year term on the IPDC when he was approached and asked to consider joining the Foundation. The Trustees recognized the value Mike could bring in the educational arena and jumped on the opportunity to recruit him. Mike felt that he had a lot of experience with



For more than 30 years, the RWIEF Officers and Trustees have been focused on a single purpose – generating funds to support IRWA’s educational initiatives. Their fundraising events, held in conjunction with IRWA’s Annual International Education Conference, include a silent and live auction, raffle ticket sales, a golf tournament and sponsoring a booth at the exhibit hall.



The RWIEF was established in 1976. In honor of their 30th Anniversary in 2007, the Foundation launched a new logo.

education and was pleased that he could share it. “I like to stay involved at the International level,” says Mike. “IRWA is such a great organization and there are so many wonderful people that we meet during our terms, that it is worth the time away from home. Plus, I feel that in my Region, the RWIEF has been misunderstood. I plan to make sure that every member becomes aware of what we do and why it is so important to the success of IRWA.”

Another new Trustee who joined the Foundation in 2010 is Kevin Winner, SR/WA, who looked at the Trustees of the RWIEF as legends in the Association. “I have admired them for many years and realized what an important function they serve to IRWA,” said Kevin. “My decision to get involved was based on the opportunity to be of service to the members. IRWA has meant so much for me both personally and professionally that I want to help keep it strong. Education is something that will help the industry to further its goals of being recognized as professional and credible. Without these two characteristics, it will be difficult to gain and keep the public’s trust. Once there is a lack of trust, the power of eminent domain can be a very threatening proposition.”

Craig adds, “The question isn’t what I hope to get out of being a Trustee, but what I can give back. Perhaps I can help more of our members to better understand what it means to contribute to the Foundation. Everything we give comes back to us. My satisfaction will be in convincing other members, as well as our employers, to see the value in IRWA education and professional development programs, like the SR/WA designation and specialty certifications. We hope that one day everyone will recognize the many benefits of giving back to the only organization that supports the right of way profession.”

Advancing in the Right Direction

Serving as RWIEF Treasurer for many years, Joe has witnessed enormous growth since he first became involved. “When I first became a Trustee, the Foundation didn’t seem to have an organized way to account for the funds. When questioned about what financial commitments were made to IRWA, no one knew the answers or even where to go to find out,” says Joe.

According to Joe, things really changed when Connie Williford implemented a system of financial accountability. Bank records for the Foundation and the Association were separated, and a tracking system was established so that each entity had a clear picture of their respective obligations, as well as the progress being made to meet that obligation.

“The Association has benefited mightily and now has a record of educational improvements made and what still needs to be done to affect a meaningful and relevant educational offering to its members. It focuses the Association on how to best proceed on developing new courses and updating existing ones. The leadership of both the Association and the Foundation are now pulling the wagon in the same direction and all the members are substantially better off for it,” says Joe.

A Synergistic Relationship

When asked to describe the relationship between IRWA and RWIEF, Bill explains it in a single word – partnership. He says, “As right of way professionals, we all benefit.”

There is no doubt that IRWA is the leader in educational programs for the right of way professional. Over the last few years, the leadership of the Association has taken on the task of improving our existing educational courses, bringing new courses on board, and providing online education. In order to do so, funding is necessary. This is where the foundation has been an instrumental partner.

By supporting the greater cause, right of way practitioners can make an impact on those who follow in their professional footsteps.

For more information, please visit the Right of Way International Education Foundation at www.rwief.org