

***The Daily Item, Sunbury, in support of IRE training.***

*From their final report:*

Three Daily Item reporters — Marcia Moore, Chris Benson and Eric Scicchitano — and one editor — Bill Bowman — were able to participate virtually in the three-day IRE NICAR22 training conference thanks to a Foundation Fellows Grant from the Pennsylvania NewsMedia Association Foundation. It was a valuable experience to learn data skills that we use regularly across the newsroom.

Marcia Moore and Eric Scicchitano continue to use information they collected regarding composing Freedom of Information requests. While acknowledging that we do quite a bit with their FOIA and RTKL requests at The Daily Item, Marcia and Eric both noted precise tips in asking for information after the initial request is filed, with specific language. Moore said when filing be sure to “request data from whatever starting date we want to ‘the date this request is completed.’ Since responses can often be delayed this would cover anything that arises following our request for information.” That tip was helpful in a recent filing for information regarding access to a recent Selinsgrove council meeting audio and other records. [https://www.dailyitem.com/news/council-president-distancing-self-from-financial-decisions-regarding-regional-engagement-center/article\\_e8319260-3538-11ed-8247-7bc7e89436ae.html](https://www.dailyitem.com/news/council-president-distancing-self-from-financial-decisions-regarding-regional-engagement-center/article_e8319260-3538-11ed-8247-7bc7e89436ae.html)

Eric regularly uses key tips regarding FOIA request regarding specificity and to make sure to seek records from all internal messaging outlets. “When requesting emails, try to indicate the specific email account by the address and not just the recipient’s name AND also request internal messaging using Slack or similar computer-based instant messaging. Also, request that reasonable efforts be made for deleted emails/attachments,” he said. With more and more outlets using emerging technology to communicate, it remains vital to stay ahead of the curve.

Perhaps the most helpful session was by Mike Reilley of Journalist’s Toolbox covering mobile and desktop apps, sites that can aid in reporting and content creation. We use information and tools from this session almost daily in the newsroom. His emails pop into our inbox daily along with regular tweets of important links and tools to access. Weekly we use the [tinywow.com](https://www.tinywow.com) and [smallpdf.com](https://smallpdf.com) free app to covert PDFs to create accessible assets that we can upload to our website.

Also out of the Toolbox is a valuable link to the Society of Professional Journalists Code of Ethics and other links to important ethics information (<http://www.spj.org/index.asp>). It has proven valuable for Bill as he manages new staff members, including one who is somewhat new to journalism. A few conversations have been had and corrections made regarding social media posts with some links provided to our company policy and other outlets.

Additionally, we have used links to help in reporting on inflation, home prices, campaign financing, along with holding nonprofits accountable through accessing tax records. The Daily Item produced a story about the local United Way and its finances regarding a concert the nonprofit lost \$138,000 on, but filled budget gaps with American Rescue Plan funding. [https://www.dailyitem.com/news/united-way-lost-138k-on-two-day-con-cert-fundraiser-allowed-use-of-name-for-2022/article\\_5262e80a-b447-11ec-8e69-d3473b519b25.html](https://www.dailyitem.com/news/united-way-lost-138k-on-two-day-con-cert-fundraiser-allowed-use-of-name-for-2022/article_5262e80a-b447-11ec-8e69-d3473b519b25.html)

In the session regarding Roadmaps and Data for editors, the focus was on how to use data to determine if a program is working, did it do what was promised, was money spent the way it was supposed to. While The Daily Item tackled that in the above United Way content, we also circled back around with

counties ([https://www.dailyitem.com/news/valley-counties-exploring-how-american-rescue-plan-act-funds-can-help-communities/article\\_7f204024-11c4-11ed-b3ce-fb5733326d59.html](https://www.dailyitem.com/news/valley-counties-exploring-how-american-rescue-plan-act-funds-can-help-communities/article_7f204024-11c4-11ed-b3ce-fb5733326d59.html)) and schools to see how and what they have used their ARPA funding for so far. This continues to be an ongoing series of stories as we continue to track. [https://www.dailyitem.com/corona-virus/districts-finding-ways-to-spend-relief-funds/article\\_c9913626-95ba-11ec-ab50-a7373df0ddd8.html](https://www.dailyitem.com/corona-virus/districts-finding-ways-to-spend-relief-funds/article_c9913626-95ba-11ec-ab50-a7373df0ddd8.html)

During that session, Bill learned a series of questions editors should be asking to enable reporters to break through reporting barriers, particularly when it comes to data reporting: What questions are we having trouble getting answers to? Ask human sources what is the best way to measure this data? What question can this data help answer? Also, perhaps most important: Don't make assumptions about the data. If you don't understand it, ask someone.

Marcia said she found the training helpful, despite the virtual program. "I felt the information was worthwhile and did connect me with other journalists in a way that I haven't in years since I've attended training. Thank you for the opportunity."