

“The time is always right to do what’s right.” - Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Dear members of the IA community and of the IA Institute,

I’m sharing with you a few notes on my experience over the past year with the IA Conference and its organizing body, the IA Institute (IAI) because I feel strongly that the entire community will benefit from exposing these events to some sunlight.

In March 2018 I attended the IA Summit, organized by the IA Foundation (IAF), in Chicago. While at the conference, I was subjected to two incidents of inappropriate and unprofessional behavior by a single individual. In early April I filed a formal complaint, following the procedures in the Code of Conduct that every participant agreed to when registering for the event. And shortly thereafter I learned that other, more serious, complaints have been recorded over the years at this same annual conference against this same individual.

The situation became complicated because at that time the IAF was in the process of transferring ownership of the IA Summit (now known as the IA Conference) to the IAI, and because neither the IAF nor the IAI had any process in place for handling complaints. After a few false starts, new procedures were put into place, an investigation was conducted, and the complaint was resolved, to my satisfaction, in early August.

In December I was contacted by representatives of the IAF, requesting my permission to transfer the investigative materials and documentation surrounding my complaint to the IAI, and inquiring whether I wished for my identity to be redacted. I gave my permission for the materials to be released, unredacted, to the entire board of the IAI.

This month I learned through conversations with various members across the community that the IAI has refused to accept the previous resolution of my complaint. I also learned that they will conduct their own investigation, at some unknown point in the future, with the possible outcome of reversing the original decision. No one from the IAI reached out to inform me of this. I asked the organizers of this year’s IA Conference whom I should contact if I had a question about my complaint, and they referred me to the current Conference Chairs and the President of the IAI. They also informed me at this time of the Institute’s plan to hire a third-party investigator to look into the complaint. I inquired as to the process and timeline for a response, and the President told me “I am not at liberty to discuss these issues. The investigation process for last year’s incident is emerging. We will not be deviating from the CoC for IAC this year’s conference.” (sic). When I pursued the question, I received no response.

The Code of Conduct that was referenced comes with a process for handling complaints; why is that process not being followed in this case? Why does this complaint need re-examination at all? Why have multiple documented complaints about the behavior of one person accumulating over years been insufficient to uphold the original decision? Why is this complaint being treated with such secrecy and a delayed timeline? Will all past decisions about Code of Conduct

violations at the IA Summit (the former name for the IA Conference) be subject to similar review? The IAI is our democratic professional organization for the promotion of the field. Are these actions representative of who we are as a profession? Is this the sort of opacity we want to demonstrate? And so I ask you, my peers, my colleagues, my friends: Is this how you wish your dues and the proceeds for your conference registrations to be used? Is this consistent with the [stated goals of the IA Institute](#)?

For the first time since 2003, I will not be attending the IA Conference. For the first time since its inception in 2012, I will not be attending World IA Day. I will not be recommending either event to my students at UCLA or to my colleagues. It makes me very sad and angry that I have to take this action. I have no desire to wait while the IAI develops another new process to address violations of their Code of Conduct. This is not something that should be asked of someone who has filed a complaint. And I cannot continue to support any activity undertaken by a group that does not strive to create a safe place for their participants' professional development, and does not take seriously complaints that are brought to them for redress.

Lynn Boyden  
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21 January 2019

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Update 25 January 2019: There is a recall petition for members of the IA Institute, available here:

<https://www.change.org/p/information-architecture-institute-the-members-of-the-iai-publicly-call-for-a-recall-election-for-the-position-of-president>

Update 27 January 2019: Membership in the [IA Institute](#) is open to anyone, at no cost. Please sign the petition and help the community resolve this process through democratic means.