



**EDUCATIONAL COMMUNICATIONS BOARD MEETING**

**October 15, 2021**

**9:30 A.M.**

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**MINUTES**

**Roll Call and Introductions**

Board Chair Dr. Rolf Wegenke called the meeting of the Educational Communications Board to order at 9:30 A.M. In lieu of a roll call, Dr. Wegenke requested that board members introduce themselves for the benefit of new members. The complete attendance list follows:

**Board Members Present:**

- Representative Dave Considine
- Niles Berman
- Senator Janet Bewley
- Amy Bogost
- Jim Zylstra (WTCS President Designee), Vice-Chair
- Alyssa Kenney
- Eileen Littig
- Leah Lechleiter-Luke
- Chris Patton (DOA Secretary Designee)
- Heather LaRoi (UW System President Designee)
- Tessa Schmidt (DPI Superintendent Designee)
- Rolf Wegenke, Ph.D., Chair
- Bohdan Zachary

**Absent:**

- Senator Alberta Darling
- Tara Senter
- Representative Pat Snyder

**Approval of Minutes from the July 23, 2021 ECB Board Meeting**

Jim Zylstra moved, seconded by Niles Berman, to approve the July 23, 2021 meeting minutes. The motion carried by unanimous voice vote.



**AGENDA ITEM 1. Report of the Board Chair**

Dr. Wegenke discussed the tragic accident involving Gene Purcell which occurred a few days after the Board met in July. Dr. Wegenke noted that Mr. Purcell had served as the ECB Executive Director for many years before moving to Wisconsin Public Media at UW Madison. Dr. Wegenke discussed Mr. Purcell's tenure and many accomplishments at ECB and added that Mr. Purcell was fully engaged in supporting public media no matter where he served. Dr. Wegenke asked the Board to take a moment of silence before continuing the meeting.

Following the moment of silence, there were no questions or comments regarding the Board Chair report.

**AGENDA ITEM 2. Report of the Executive Director**

Dr. Wegenke introduced Marta Bechtol, ECB Executive Director, and reminded board members that a copy of the Executive Director's report was included in the board packet distributed in advance of today's meeting.

Ms. Bechtol thanked Dr. Wegenke for honoring Gene Purcell's service at ECB and Wisconsin Public Media. Ms. Bechtol reported that Mr. Purcell's passing has been a sad and traumatic event for the staff and partnership as a whole. Ms. Bechtol reassured the Board that despite the tragedy, the work of the partnership continues. Ms. Bechtol shared that following the accident, Heather Reese was named Interim Director of Wisconsin Public Media. Ms. Reese had served as Associate Director at Wisconsin Public Media during Mr. Purcell's tenure as Director. Ms. Bechtol noted that she has been in constant contact with Ms. Reese since the accident and is working side by side through issues the partnership faces. Ms. Bechtol introduced Ms. Reese to the Board, and Ms. Reese described her previous experience at Wisconsin Public Media and working with Gene Purcell.

Ms. Bechtol continued her report and reminded board members to complete the FCC Broadcast Ownership Questionnaire they received. Ms. Bechtol noted that ECB is required to collect these forms from all statutory members of the Board in order to comply with FCC regulations. Ms. Bechtol encouraged board members to let her know if they have any questions about completing the forms. Ms. Bechtol noted that David Cobb would contact board members who have yet to complete the forms following today's meeting.

Ms. Bechtol provided an update on the Federal Budget. Ms. Bechtol reported that appropriations bills are still in Senate sub-committee, and funding levels for the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB) match those passed by the full House of Representatives earlier this year. Ms. Bechtol reminded the Board that CPB is forward funded for two years, and there are no immediate impacts to ECB.



Ms. Bechtol reported on the ECB's Biennial Report to the Wisconsin State Legislature which the agency is required to submit in odd numbered years. Ms. Bechtol informed the Board that she submitted the report earlier today and will be providing a copy to board members electronically after today's meeting. Ms. Bechtol noted the report followed instructions to be brief and provide hyperlinks for data in order to minimize the size of the overall report. Ms. Bechtol added that the report will be included on ECB's website as well.

Ms. Bechtol continued her report by highlighting construction projects carried out by the agency and identified how those activities were related to the ECB Strategic Plan. In the area of Direction I, Item 2: "Seek opportunities to expand service...", Ms. Bechtol noted that ECB has replaced three television transmitters during the summer of 2021, which will improve and expand service in those parts of the state. In the area of Direction II, item 3: "Responsibly manage state assets to maximize service, minimize costs and mitigate risk," Ms. Bechtol highlighted the ECB's Broadcast IT unit's (BIT) network security initiative and internal changes to the organization of the BIT unit to better help navigate and administer the agency's security needs. Ms. Bechtol noted that Adam Hargrove, ECB Director of Engineering would be providing additional details during the Engineering Projects Update portion of today's meeting.

There were no questions or comments regarding the Executive Director report.

**AGENDA ITEM 3.** Engineering Projects Update – Adam Hargrove, Director of Engineering

Marta Bechtol introduced Adam Hargrove, ECB Director of Engineering to report on engineering construction projects which took place in 2021.

Mr. Hargrove reported that ECB has replaced a total of five transmitters during 2021 which included three full power television transmitters, and two FM transmitters. Mr. Hargrove reported that the goal of these projects was to increase power and signal strength. Mr. Hargrove reminded the Board that in 2017 the FCC authorized a maximization effort for the effective radiated power for all five ECB television transmitters. Mr. Hargrove indicated that transmitters in Green Bay and La Crosse had previously been upgraded during the last FCC Spectrum Auction and repacking process, and the most recent ECB Capitol Budget included upgrades for the remaining three. Mr. Hargrove reported that other goals achieved with the upgrades included making all five ECB television transmitters NextGen TV(ATSC 3.0)-ready; increasing energy efficiency and reducing utility bills; and increasing equipment reliability and parts availability.

Mr. Hargrove presentation included data charts and contour maps to illustrate the increased power, efficiency and expanded service for each site. The specific sites Mr. Hargrove discussed included television transmitters at WHWC near Menomonie, WLEF in Park Falls, WHRM in Wausau, and FM transmitters in Wausau and Green Bay. Mr. Hargrove also explained how the new transmitters are more energy efficient because they are liquid-cooled. This technology



reduces the draw on HVAC systems to control transmitter room temperatures, thereby lowering the overall energy consumption at the transmitter sites.

For the WHWC site near Menomonie, Mr. Hargrove reported an estimated annual utility savings of \$36,378. Mr. Hargrove reported that WHWC transmitter upgrade increased the potential viewer audience by 51,848.

For the WLEF site in Park Falls, Mr. Hargrove reported an estimated annual utility savings of \$38,620 and increased potential viewer audience of 9741.

For the WHRM site in Wausau, Mr. Hargrove reported an estimated annual utility savings of \$11,670 and increased potential viewer audience of 35,406. Mr. Hargrove indicated that the utility savings at the WHRM site are less than WHWC and WLEF as the output power was more than doubled.

For the new FM transmitter in Wausau and Green Bay, Mr. Hargrove reported there was no power increase but the new equipment offered greater reliability and efficiency. Mr. Hargrove estimates annual utility savings of \$7,488 at the Wausau site and \$10,031 at the Green Bay site.

Following Mr. Hargrove's report, there were no questions or comments from board members.

**AGENDA ITEM 4.** Television Audience Information – Garry Denny, Director of Programming

Dr. Wegenke asked Jon Miskowski to introduce Gary Denny, PBS Wisconsin Director of Programming, to report on television audience demographics.

Mr. Miskowski thanked Dr. Wegenke for recognizing Gene Purcell's work and commitment to public broadcasting with a moment of silence and went on to share a personal story about his last meeting with Mr. Purcell.

Mr. Miskowski referenced a discussion regarding public media audiences that took place at the July 2021 ECB Board of Directors meeting, and informed the Board that Gary Denny, PBS Wisconsin Director of Programming, has prepared a presentation to provide that information and discuss PBS Wisconsin's strategic priorities to expand audiences. Mr. Miskowski reported that in general, the PBS audience closely mirrors the American public in terms of demographics, age, income and race. Mr. Miskowski reported that audience data is expensive and designed for commercial broadcasters to provide audience data to their advertisers, but it is also helpful in identifying who PBS Wisconsin is reaching. Mr. Miskowski also discussed the growing complexity with which content is delivered to PBS Wisconsin viewers including over the air, online streaming, and social media apps; with audience data available from each of those delivery platforms. Mr. Miskowski stated that understanding the reach and demographics of evolving digital platform audiences is a strategic priority, and that data is becoming more refined and useful. Ms. Miskowski added that measuring audience engagement with content is



a priority as well. Mr. Miskowski then introduced Mr. Denny to the Board to discuss market coverage and audience reach for the PBS stations across Wisconsin.

Mr. Denny's presentation focused on identifying whom PBS Wisconsin serves; market specific information for each PBS Wisconsin station; and a broad overview of PBS Wisconsin viewer demographic data. Mr. Denny discussed the origins of public broadcasting in Wisconsin. According to Mr. Denny, PBS Wisconsin came from a shared vision between the University and State to provide trusted, vetted content designed to connect with communities, and share the learning and resources of the University with the people of Wisconsin free of charge. Mr. Denny stated that PBS Wisconsin provides barrier-free access to world-class educational and cultural content; ensures that diverse voices and issues of our state are amplified and prioritized; provides content and professional development for our state's K-12 educational community; and is the technical backbone of the Emergency Alert System. Mr. Denny added that PBS Wisconsin also serves as part of the State's archive of history, people, stories and places.

Mr. Denny reported that PBS Wisconsin is considered a "variety service" in the broadcasting community in that it's one of very few broadcast services that offer every possible genre of content including: kids, news and public affairs, science, nature, drama, arts, history, comedy, "how to," and independent film. Mr. Denny noted that many of the programs on PBS Wisconsin are unique to public television.

Mr. Denny continued his report by displaying maps that identify designated market areas (DMAs) related to Wisconsin stations which include Milwaukee, Green Bay/Appleton, Madison, La Crosse/Eau Claire, and Wausau/Rhineland. Mr. Denny reminded the Board that PBS Wisconsin isn't broadcast in the Milwaukee market as that area is served by Milwaukee PBS. However, some PBS Wisconsin-produced shows are broadcast on Milwaukee PBS. Mr. Denny reported that of the 210 DMAs in the United States, the Green Bay/Appleton DMA is the 69<sup>th</sup> largest, Madison is the 81<sup>st</sup> largest, La Crosse/Eau Claire is the 129<sup>th</sup> largest, and Wausau/Rhineland is the 136<sup>th</sup> largest. Mr. Denny reported that collectively, PBS Wisconsin DMA's include 1,289,120 television households across the state, which is among the top 20 largest markets in the United States.

For the Green Bay/Appleton market, Mr. Denny reported there are 466,440 television households. Of those households, 32.7% receive content from cable TV providers, 14.8% satellite, 21.8% over the air, and 26% broadband only.

For the Madison market, Mr. Denny reported there are 417,250 television households. Of those households, 30% receive content from cable TV providers, 20.5% satellite, 27.4% over the air, and 28.1% broadband only.

For the La Crosse/Eau Claire market, Mr. Denny reported there are 219,230 television households. Of those households, 31.7% receive content from cable TV providers, 17% satellite, 25.3% over the air, and 27.5% broadband only.



For the Wausau/Rhineland market, Mr. Denny reported there are 186,200 television households. Of those households, 30.4% receive content from cable TV providers, 27.3% satellite, 17.3% over the air, and 24.8% broadband only.

Mr. Denny reported that 7 counties on the western edge of Wisconsin are actually part of the Minneapolis, Minnesota DMA, and 5 counties in the northwest corner of the state are assigned to the Duluth, Minnesota DMA. As with Milwaukee, Mr. Denny reported there is some crossover of PBS Wisconsin content in these markets but residents in those areas rely on broadcast signals from Minnesota.

Senator Bewley asked how PBS Wisconsin measures demographic data and the programming needs of Wisconsin households situated in Minnesota DMAs. Mr. Denny responded that it can be difficult because PBS Wisconsin does not subscribe to ratings data from markets outside of PBS Wisconsin DMAs and the practice is not allowed by the Nielsen Media Research company. Senator Bewley noted that the northwest corner of Wisconsin can be a desert in terms of information and content specific to Wisconsin. Mr. Denny responded that in some cases, PBS Wisconsin-produced content is broadcast by Minnesota public broadcasters. Mr. Denny noted that “Here and Now” airs weekly in the Duluth market but he agreed with the Senator that Wisconsin related programming is limited in those areas. Mr. Denny noted that “Wisconsin Foodie” and “Wisconsin Life” are both carried in the Minneapolis market. Mr. Denny added that households in Wisconsin counties that are part of Minnesota DMAs always have access to PBS Wisconsin online since they reside within the boundaries of Wisconsin. Senator Bewley pointed out that many of these counties lack access to broadband internet.

Mr. Denny continued his report by providing an overview of viewership data with charts that showed monthly and weekly viewership of PBS Wisconsin from August 2020 to July 2021. On average, Mr. Denny reported that PBS Wisconsin had 927,932 households view the main channel over a 28-day period, and that number climbed to 1,401,991 when combined with the PBS Wisconsin subchannels (Wisconsin Channel, Create, and PBS Kids). On a weekly basis, PBS Wisconsin averaged 556,571 household viewers and 798,571 when combined with the subchannels. Mr. Denny added that these numbers compare very favorably to other PBS stations, particularly those from similar size markets.

Following Mr. Denny’s presentation, there were no additional questions or comments.



**AGENDA ITEM 5.** Financial Reports and FY21 Budget Performance – Aimee Wright, Director of Finance

Dr. Wegenke introduced Aimee Wright, ECB Finance Director, to present the quarterly financial reports and report on the FY21 budget performance.

Ms. Wright displayed the Financial Report that was included in the board packet for today's meeting. Ms. Wright reminded the Board that she has updated the report to a one-page format. Mr. Wright indicated that the previous version of this report was divided into two pages which included a budget-to-actual report as well as a revenue report. Ms. Wright has combined these reports into one which she believes is a broader overview of the ECB revenue and expenses. Ms. Wright highlighted several details to help board members become familiar with the new report format and concluded that for the first quarter of FY22, ECB expenses and revenue are in line with those of FY21.

Ms. Wright continued her report by discussing the ECB budget results of FY21, and the FY22 budget. Ms. Wright reported that budgeting during the pandemic has been challenging, and revenue projections were conservative due to many unknowns presented by the pandemic. Ms. Wright reported that revenue projections were reduced by 8.5% from FY20. Ms. Wright added that planned budget lapses, anticipated reductions in underwriting, and partnership funding flow changes were factored into the FY21 budget as well. Ms. Wright reported that ECB's FY21 budget for expenditures was reduced by about \$350,000.

As a result of conservative budgeting, the ECB realized \$1.4 million more in revenue than projected. Ms. Wright added that ECB benefited from the recall of planned lapses for the State of \$250,000; distributions of over \$1 million in CARES and ARPA funds from the State and the Corporation for Public Broadcasting; and stronger than expected fundraising.

Ms. Wright reported that ECB expended 94% of the expected budget. Ms. Wright noted this compares well to 93.3% in FY20, and 91.4% in FY19.

Ms. Wright highlighted one GPR lapse in the budget of about \$120,000 in the utilities appropriation which was the realization of improved energy efficiency from the installation of the new liquid-cooled transmitters.

Ms. Wright continued her report by briefly reviewing changes to ECB's FY22 budget. Ms. Wright reported that ECB's FY22 budget anticipates a 3% increase in program revenue. Ms. Wright noted that she anticipates a \$50,000 reimbursement from the Department of Administration (DOA) for equipment upgrades in the ECB Boardroom and conference room. Ms. Wright reported that ECB's budget for expenditures has been increased 4% from FY21 to FY22.



Ms. Wright highlighted a change in the FY22 budget related to planned projects. Ms. Wright described these as ongoing equipment upgrades that are not considered capital items and are part of the ECB operating budget rather than the DOA Division of Facilities Development budget, thus planned project expenses will be represented in a separate budget line moving forward.

Following Ms. Wright's report, there were no questions or comments.

**AGENDA ITEM 6.** Proposed meeting dates for 2022

Dr. Wegenke asked to Board to consider the proposed dates for 2022 printed in the agenda and asked if there were any potential conflicts. Marta Bechtol noted that consideration was taken for holidays and the UW Board of Regent meeting dates. Ms. Bechtol pointed out that two dates have been proposed for April due to the Easter holiday. There were no conflicts reported on these dates from board members. Dr. Wegenke asked the Board to let Marta Bechtol know as soon as possible if there is a conflict for the April dates, and that date will be finalized at the January 2022 meeting.

**AGENDA ITEM 7.** Questions/Comments from Board Members

DOA Deputy Secretary Chris Patton commended Marta Bechtol for her leadership and helping guide the ECB through recent personal and professional challenges. Ms. Bechtol thanked Mr. Patton, ECB board members, and everyone in the partnership of Wisconsin public broadcasting for their support and concern during a difficult time following the traffic incident and subsequent passing of Gene Purcell.

There were no further questions or comments from board members.

**AGENDA ITEM 8.** Adjournment

Eileen Littig moved, seconded by Dr. Wegenke, to adjourn. The motion passed by unanimous voice vote. Dr. Wegenke announced the meeting adjourned at 10:50 A.M.