



EDUCATIONAL COMMUNICATIONS BOARD MEETING

January 21, 2022

9:30 A.M.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR REPORT

Marta Bechtol, Executive Director

Tom Luljak serving as Interim Director of Wisconsin Public Radio

Following Mike Crane's resignation from WPR in the fall, ECB contracted with the National Educational Telecommunications Association (NETA) for executive support services. On October 18, 2021, Tom Luljak was assigned to temporary fill the vacancy at the head of WPR.

Tom is the recently retired vice chancellor for university relations & communications at University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee and brings a wealth of experience in broadcast journalism, strategic communications and management to the interim position.

Tom started his career in communications as a student at UW-La Crosse and UW-Oshkosh where he worked at student radio stations WLSU and WRST, both of which later became part of the WPR network. During his professional broadcast career, Tom served as news director for WTMJ-AM and WTMJ-TV where he won a prestigious Peabody Award for investigative journalism. He also has more than two decades of leadership experience within the University of Wisconsin system, which is very helpful on the university side of the partnership. The Director of WPR is a split report between ECB and UW-Madison; Tom jointly reports to Heather L. Reese, Interim Director of Wisconsin Public Media, and me.

Tom has spent the last couple months meeting with the staff and strengthening his knowledge of WPR activities and concerns. In addition to sustaining essential services, Tom is helping the leadership team plan for the future and prepare to recruit a new full-time director later this year. That process will begin immediately following the permanent hire of the new director at Wisconsin Public Media.

Annual Audit

ECB is required to undergo an annual financial audit in order to remain qualified for Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB) funding. The audit team from Baker Tilly was able to be on site for a couple of days in early November, then conducted the remainder of the work remotely. Everything went smoothly and on schedule.

I'd like to thank our finance team (Aimee Wright, Natalia Sutyagina and Dawn Okon) for their ongoing good work and preparation, and congratulate them on the excellent result!



Federal Budget Update

From our friends at America's Public Television Stations (APTS) in Washington, D.C. – Though Congress has spent the last few months negotiating the Build Back Better budget reconciliation package, that legislation has stalled. The current version does not have the required support of all 50 Senate Democrats. It is unclear if or when negotiations will resume.

The government is operating under a Continuing Resolution, a short-term funding measure that extends government funding, including funding for public media, at fiscal year (FY) 2021 levels through February 18, 2022. This extension buys Congress time to finalize the FY 2022 funding bills.

While negotiations among appropriators and leadership are ongoing, it is possible that another short-term funding measure may be needed before a long-term funding bill can be passed.

As a reminder, public media remains in as strong a position as possible with both the House-passed bill and Senate Chair's markup containing the full funding we are seeking for the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB):

- \$565M for the Corporation for Public Broadcasting in FY24 (an increase of \$90M over the FY23 appropriation which is forward funded)
- \$20M for Interconnection funding (continuing appropriation from FY21)
- \$30M for Ready to Learn (an increase of \$.5M over FY21 appropriation)
- \$20M for the Next Generation Resilient Alert and Warning System - a new request for a competitive grant program within the Department of Homeland Security/FEMA

However, it is possible that the overall allocation for the final Labor-HHS-Education bill will be lower than anticipated in the bills passed by the House and proposed in the Senate. If so, the funding levels for our programs — and many others in the bill — may be negotiated down.

As a reminder to the board, federal funding comprises only 10% of the agency's operating budget, but it provides critical leverage for our fundraising efforts and makes it possible for us to equitably serve the most rural parts of the state.

Advocacy

State and Federal Advocacy preparations are underway jointly with our partners at UW-Madison. As this is an off-budget year for Wisconsin, we'll be delivering "thank you" messaging rather than making a financial ask. These visits will be a combination of virtual and in-person (at the preference of the participants) and will take place between February 21 - March 4.

Federal Advocacy will focus on the annual requests of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, which are forward-funded by two years (FY24 dollars). Federal visits will be virtual and will be held the week of February 28-March 4 in conjunction with the APTS Public Media Summit.



Broadband Access

After submitting its initial report last summer, the Governor’s Task Force on Broadband Access will reconvene on January 19, 2022. I am happy to serve another term on the Task Force and look forward to advocate for and assist with the expansion of broadband service in our state.

Equity & Inclusion

We have updated our Equity and Inclusion Plan to indicate that Jennifer Dargan, ECB Deputy Director, is responsible for the Equity and Inclusion Professional duties (the document is available on ecb.org). One of the goals outlined in the plan is to provide training on topics of bias and equity for all those participating in the recruitment process. We are approaching this with a two-pronged strategy. First, our entire staff has been invited to *Bias Habit Breaking* training this month. Second, Jennifer will provide a briefing for every recruitment interview panel including a section on bias awareness.

In October I reported on an upcoming monitoring audit from the Bureau of Equity and Inclusion. We have received more information about the assessment which will measure the agency at a point in time with a goal to improve prior to the next audit. This audit will occur before July 2022 and will take two days.

ECB is required by statute to have an Equity and Inclusion Advisory committee. We are putting together the next iteration of this committee which will have two main priorities for the next six months: 1) propose and review topics and materials for quarterly E&I staff conversations and executive memos, and 2) map a process to create inventory of all agency locations, websites, and activities that are legally inaccessible to assigned staff.

Lower Level Renovation Project at the Beltline

The agency is taking advantage of the winter lull in outdoor construction projects by completing an interior renovation on the Beltline building’s lower level. Working with DOA’s Division of Facilities Development, we are expanding and modernizing the footprint of our Broadcast IT unit by reclaiming the old “inventory” space that formerly stored hardcopy teacher manuals and media, and by removing an old radio studio that has been used as a makeshift office for the last 20 years.

This project will create a large collaborative workspace for our BIT engineers and include ergonomic workbenches, desk spaces and flooring; create physical space for additional employees and interns; improve sight access to signal monitors; include brighter and more energy-efficient LED lighting; and update the look and feel of the facility as features for retention and recruitment of on-site employees.

The positive budget outcome of FY21 enabled us to pursue this project with operating funds and avoiding capital debt.