

EDUCATIONAL COMMUNICATIONS BOARD MEETING

July 23, 2021

9:30 A.M.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR REPORT

Marta Bechtol, Executive Director

Announcing ECB's new Deputy Director

After months of vacancy, I'm pleased to announce that Jennifer Dargan has been appointed as the agency's new deputy director. Jennifer has established credibility as both a civil servant and a mission-focused member of the public media family. She began her professional career working in software solutions implementation and database programming, which included five years of service to the Wisconsin State Legislature. She transitioned to Wisconsin Public Radio in 2004 where she has managed activities ranging from on-air fundraising and membership to, most recently, Assistant Director of The Ideas Network.

A lifelong learner, Jennifer received a rare John S. Knight Journalism Fellowship at Stanford University in 2018 where she took a deep dive into journalism, equity, leadership and organizational behavior. Jennifer is designated as ECB's AAEO Officer and will head our Equity & Inclusion initiatives. She will also focus on staff development and training; reimagining our recruitment strategy; and attending to other internal concerns of the agency.

The Post-COVID Normal

The health emergency and subsequent orders affecting our work patterns have permanently changed the employment environment. Given the nature of ECB's work and equipment, there are some jobs that can never be effectively performed remotely. However, we have learned that given the right technology, there are some staff that can work remotely very effectively. In light of the lessons learned through COVID, we are rethinking some of our former processes and making changes where appropriate, cost-effective and reasonable.

In the last few months, I have worked with agency supervisors to build return-to-work plans that meet the productivity requirements of each work unit; respond appropriately to health concerns; and sustain morale among the employees. We are in the process of upgrading technology in our conference and board rooms to more easily accommodate employees and board members at a distance. And we are adjusting our staff evaluation methodology to account more specifically for 'benchmarks achieved' rather than simply 'hours clocked.'

Budget Updates

STATE: Wisconsin's FY21-23 state budget was signed by the governor on July 8, 2021 and it is good news for ECB. Overall, the new budget is 1.44% smaller than the previous biennium. The new budget reflects significant reductions (just over 13% respectively) in our debt service and utilities appropriations that correlate with our strategic priorities to reduce our capital and

carbon footprints. The approved budget is generally the same as proposed in the Executive Budget released in February with the exception of 3 FTE eliminated in an across-the-board JCF action reducing long-term vacancies.

The final figures are:

- \$ 11,892,000 GPR (28% of the operating budget)
- \$ 29,995,400 PR (72% of the operating budget)
- 25.94 GPR/26.24 PR FTE (a reduction of 1 GPR FTE and 2 PR FTE)

The two PR FTE losses are in the Education unit, and the GPR FTE is in agency administration.

The agency had prepared to absorb a \$243,500 GPR lapse in the FY21 budget at the governor's request. The lapse was repealed on June 8. The agency still lapsed \$125,000 in our utilities budget, as we had prepared for and managed those costs accordingly over the course of the fiscal year.

FEDERAL: The House of Representatives has initially drafted the FY22 federal request as follows:

- \$565M for the Corporation for Public Broadcasting in FY24 (an increase of \$90M over the FY23 appropriation which is forward funded, and is the amount requested by CPB)
- \$20M for Interconnection funding (continuing appropriation from FY21; the amount requested by CPB)
- \$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
- \$30M has been requested for Ready to Learn (an increase of \$.5M over FY21 appropriation), but as of this writing the actual number for the draft is still in question.

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.

COVID SUPPORT FUNDS:

ECB has not received any direct federal grants due to COVID, but we have received indirect financial support through CARES and ARP grants received by the State of Wisconsin and the Corporation for Public Broadcasting.

During FY21, the State of Wisconsin transferred \$109,236 in CARES Act funding to reimburse agency expenses incurred in adherence to social distancing protocols.

CPB was given \$175M for emergency station stabilization in the American Rescue Plan Act in April 2021. By virtue of our being a Community Service Grant-qualified licensee, ECB was allocated \$988,770 (\$485,823 to TV/\$502,947 to Radio) for station/network operational support. Congress directed that CPB's ARPA funds be used to maintain current programming

and services and to preserve the ability of public media stations to respond to the pandemic's impact by providing essential information, educational content, and public safety services despite the COVID-related decline in non-federal revenues.

CPB noted in the grant award that:

“The station’s licensee [the State of Wisconsin] may not impound or otherwise withhold or restrict the station’s use of these funds. These funds may not be used to supplant funds or reduce budgets for other support already being provided to the station(s) by licensee. The funds cannot offset a licensee’s overhead or cover other expenses not directly related to the operation of the station, unless such overhead and expenses are enumerated in Section 4, Operational Requirements, in the 2021 television and radio CSG General Provisions and Eligibility Criteria.”

These ARPA funds have been used to support the normal programming and operational expenses that are budgeted with program revenue. Though we are now seeing upward economic trends as COVID numbers decline, these funds cover the losses of the past year and shore us up in the event of future COVID spikes.

Equity & Inclusion

Agency executive leadership have completed an educational DOA-sponsored leadership series entitled, “Diversity, Equity, Inclusion & You.” The program was designed to foster inclusive, thoughtful, and aware leaders that create work conditions in which our employees are valued for their contributions and have a sense of belonging so that they can bring their best to the table each day.

Position descriptions and job ad postings for vacant positions have been reviewed and revised to eliminate biased language and unnecessary requirements that limit the potential candidate pools. We have worked with DOA HR Region 1 to expand job opportunity outreach to audiences with whom we have not previously engaged.

Broadband Access

As an outreach partner for the Federal Communications Commission’s Emergency Broadband Benefit program, ECB coordinated with PBS Wisconsin, WPR and the Public Service Commission to develop air-ready and digital public service announcements for broadcast on WPR and PBS Wisconsin. These announcements began airing in June and have been made available to all broadcasters in the state through the Wisconsin Broadcasters Association. The Emergency Broadband Benefit provides discounts towards broadband service for eligible households and offers a one-time discount of up to \$100 to purchase a device for those households in a ‘co-pay’ arrangement.

I continue to engage with educational entities, regional economic planning groups and most recently, the new Office of Rural Prosperity on ways ECB might be helpful in broadband expansion initiatives.

I was honored to have served on the Governor's Task Force for Broadband Access this past year. The report was issued at the end of the fiscal year and can be found [here](#).