



Educational Communications Board

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EDUCATIONAL COMMUNICATIONS BOARD MEETING

ECB Board Room

3319 West Beltline Highway

Madison, Wisconsin

April 24, 2020

9:30 A.M.

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. A roll call attendance of Board Members was taken. Dr. Wegenke noted that only eight members were present when the roll was taken but the attendance will be updated to reflect members who joined late. The complete attendance list follows:

Board Members Present:

- Representative Dave Considine
- Jose Delgado
- Jim Zylstra (WTCS President Morna Foy designee), Vice-Chair
- David Hutchison
- Alyssa Kenney
- Eileen Littig
- Senator Luther Olsen
- Representative Pat Snyder
- Kurt Kiefer (DPI Superintendent Carolyn Stanford Taylor designee)
- Rolf Wegenke, Ph.D., Chair
- Bohdan Zachary

Absent:

- Chris Patton (DOA Secretary Joel Brennan designee)
- Heather LaRoi (UW System President Ray Cross designee)
- Senator Fred Risser
- Karen Schroeder



Approval of Minutes from the January 31, 2020 ECB Board Meeting

Eileen Littig moved, seconded by Representative Dave Considine, to approve the January 31, 2020 meeting minutes. Dr. Wegenke announced the Board was awaiting one more participant for a quorum and reported the motion would be tabled until a quorum was present.

AGENDA ITEM 1. Report of the Board Chair

Dr. Wegenke thanked everyone for attending and noted the COVID19 pandemic was certainly foremost on everyone's mind, as well as the human and economic effects related to the pandemic. Dr. Wegenke remarked that communications has become more important and appreciated while many people are working in isolation, and the services of the Educational Communications Board (ECB) are an important part of helping Wisconsin face the challenges that lie ahead.

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 in advance of today's meeting.

Ms. Bechtol thanked everyone for their flexibility in meeting by phone, and willingness to make time for today's meeting during a difficult time. In light of the national and state emergency, Ms. Bechtol noted that her report would focus on the ECB's response to the COVID19 pandemic, and operational changes happening at the agency.

Ms. Bechtol reported that ECB began developing a physical distancing plan in early March, and thanked Adam Hargrove, Jeff Ohnstad, Pete Dally, and Glenn Guy for the development of the ECB's plan to protect employee's health and safety.

Ms. Bechtol shared that Department of Administration Secretary Joel Brennon announced a telecommute plan for state employees on March 14, 2020 and most of the ECB staff have been approved to work from home whenever feasible. Ms. Bechtol reported that by March 18, 2020; only essential staff were physically present at the beltline facility with one or two persons in the Operations Center and one manager on duty per day on the fourth floor. Ms. Bechtol noted this was a smooth transition for ECB as many of the steps taken mirrored the agency's continuity of operations plan (COOP), and for the most part it's been business as usual for the agency.



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Ms. Bechtol reported that near the end of March, PBS Wisconsin implemented a broadcast schedule that includes 12 hours per day of educational programming on the Wisconsin Channel. Ms. Bechtol noted that the educational programming was identified by PBS Wisconsin Education staff working together with the Department of Public Instruction to make resources available for schoolchildren at home during the pandemic.

Ms. Bechtol reported that her highest priority has been the health and safety of ECB staff, and the morale of staff who are now isolated from co-workers. Ms. Bechtol has encouraged supervisors to monitor staff closely not only for job performance but also for morale and well-being. Ms. Bechtol reported that she has encouraged all staff to make use of leave and take time as needed in order to care for their families and themselves.

Ms. Bechtol also reported that three ECB staff have volunteered for Agency Interchanges to assist the Department of Health Services, Division of Public Health with contact tracing calls related to the COVID19 pandemic.

Ms. Bechtol went on to report that she anticipates the agency will incur additional expenses due to operational changes related to physical distancing such as travel reimbursements and overtime, as well as reduced underwriting related to the cancellation of corporate underwriting events and an uncertain economy. Ms. Bechtol anticipates that ECB will be able to offset these expenses for the remainder of the current fiscal year by making budgetary shifts, and those changes will be reflected in the next fiscal year's budget.

Ms. Bechtol provided an update regarding the Federal Budget. Ms. Bechtol reported that the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act passed by Congress at the end of March earmarked \$75 million for the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB). Ms. Bechtol noted that ECB would receive \$150,000 for radio licenses and \$200,000 for television licenses as fiscal stabilization grants to "maintain programming and services and preserve small and rural stations threatened by declines in non-Federal revenues."

Ms. Bechtol updated the Board on the State budget process, noting that ECB is working internally to develop a one year capital replacement project budget as part of a six year plan, and a biennial capital budget request due in June. Ms. Bechtol reported the agency operating budget request is due in September. Ms. Bechtol noted that she is unsure at this time what the financial impact of the COVID19 pandemic will be for the agency's budget. Ms. Bechtol mentioned that UW Madison has implemented a personnel furlough policy but it's too early to know if the State will consider similar measures.

Ms. Bechtol reported that advocacy events with state legislators which were scheduled for April 15, 2020 were cancelled due to the pandemic. Ms. Bechtol shared that she was joined by Gene Purcell, Niles Berman, Bohdan Zachary, and Mark Foley (MATC) in late February in Washington DC to meet with Wisconsin members of Congress as part of the American Public Television Stations 2020 Public Media Summit. Ms. Bechtol reported the meetings were positive and followed by positive actions by Congress for public broadcasting.



Ms. Bechtol reported an increased interest in rural broadband as a result schools closures and stay at home orders. Ms. Bechtol shared that ECB has agreed to a pilot project with Novus Labs for potential implementation at our facilities in Bloomington and Highland. Ms. Bechtol also reported that she is scheduled to meet next week with the Department of Public Instruction and the Public Service Commission to discuss the possibility of future projects.

Following Ms. Bechtol's report, Eileen Littig asked if there has been any feedback regarding the addition of educational programming on PBS Wisconsin's main channel. Ms. Bechtol responded that audience feedback has been positive. Ms. Bechtol also relayed that she received a thank you note from Dr. Carolyn Stanford Taylor, Department of Public Instruction (DPI) Superintendent, for the ECB and PBS Wisconsin's cooperation with DPI to expand educational programming on broadcast television and online.

Ms. Bechtol asked Jon Miskowski if he wanted to add any comments. Mr. Miskowski reported that user numbers for the PBS Wisconsin website and online services have increased significantly with average visits over 23 minutes. Mr. Miskowski added that PBS Wisconsin and the PBS Wisconsin Education Unit are continuing to work with DPI, looking towards the summer and fall, to discuss future collaborations that will make educational programming and resources available to Wisconsin schoolchildren.

Kurt Kiefer added that the partnership between DPI, ECB and PBS Wisconsin has been something his agency takes great pride in. Mr. Kiefer reported that as many as 40,000 Wisconsin schoolchildren don't have access to online resources and the educational programming on PBS Wisconsin has been vitally important during the pandemic.

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

Dr. Wegenke noted that three additional members (Delgado, Hutchison, and Representative Snyder) were now on the line and a quorum was present. Dr. Wegenke reminded the Board a motion to approve the January 31, 2020 minutes was made by Eileen Littig and seconded by Representative Considine. The motion carried by unanimous voice vote.

AGENDA ITEM 3. Board Policy Amendments

Marta Bechtol reported that the ECB Board Policies needed to be updated to reflect the change in name of "Wisconsin Public Television" to "PBS Wisconsin." Dr. Wegenke noted this was a housekeeping matter rather than a substantive change in policy, and entertained a motion for the Executive Director to make the necessary changes in the policies to reflect the new name. Alyssa Kenney moved for the ECB Executive Director to update the ECB Board Policies as needed to reflect the name of PBS Wisconsin. The motion was seconded by Eileen Littig. The motion carried by unanimous voice vote.



Dave Hutchison commented that the change to “PBS Wisconsin” has been positive and now more clearly reflects that PBS Wisconsin is part of a larger, national broadcasting program.

There were no additional questions or comments from board members.

AGENDA ITEM 4. Financial Reports

Marta Bechtol reported that Financial Reports were included in the Board packet distributed prior to today’s meeting.

Ms. Bechtol noted that she anticipates underwriting figures for the last quarter of FY20 would be impacted by the COVID19 pandemic, and that impact will be clearer in the next Finance report at the July ECB Board of Directors meeting.

There were no further questions or comments.

AGENDA ITEM 5. Evaluation of the ECB Director

Dr. Wegenke announced that it will be necessary to move into closed session for the annual performance evaluation of the ECB Executive Director.

Dr. Wegenke moved, seconded by Jim Zylstra to move into closed session. The motion passed unanimously by roll call vote.

Pursuant to s. 19.85(1)(c), Wis. Stats., the Board convened in a closed session for the annual performance evaluation of the WECB Executive Director. Following the closed session, the Board reconvened in open session.

AGENDA ITEM 6. Questions/Comments from Board Members

The Board reconvened in open session at approximately 11:00 A.M. on the WisLine.

Jim Zylstra asked how the grant totals made possible by the CARES Act were determined, and if other broadcasters in Wisconsin were eligible for those grants. Ms. Bechtol responded that the grants were determined by license holders and there was \$75,000 allocated per radio license and \$200,000 per television license. Ms. Bechtol added that other public broadcasters and license holders in Wisconsin received these grants as well.

There were no further questions or comments.



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AGENDA ITEM 7. Adjournment

Eileen Littig moved, seconded by Jose Delgado to adjourn. The motion passed by unanimous voice vote. Dr. Wegenke announced the meeting adjourned at 11:07 A.M.