

## EDUCATIONAL COMMUNICATIONS BOARD MEETING

July 23, 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
- Kurt Kiefer (DPI Superintendent designee)
- Leah Lechleiter-Luke
- Chris Patton (DOA Secretary designee)
- Rolf Wegenke, Ph.D., Chair
- Bohdan Zachary

Absent:

- Senator Alberta Darling
- Heather LaRoi (UW System President designee)
- Tara Senter
- Representative Pat Snyder

#### **Approval of Minutes from the January 22, 2021 ECB Board Meeting**

Niles Berman noted there were instances in the summary of the Executive Director's oral report from the January minutes where "Diversity" was mistakenly replaced with "Diversion" and suggested that the minutes be edited before approval. Dr. Wegenke asked David Cobb to update the minutes to reflect Mr. Berman's suggestion.

Eileen Littig moved, seconded by Leah Lechleiter-Luke, to approve the updated January 22, 2021 meeting minutes. The motion carried by unanimous voice vote.

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

Dr. Wegenke thanked everyone who reached out to him following his accident. Dr. Wegenke expressed that he was grateful for all the support during his time at the hospital and during recovery, and he is pleased to be back in good health and attending today's meeting.

Dr. Wegenke complimented the Board's willingness to work together during challenging times and noted that the Board's unity of spirit and commitment to education and educational communications is stronger than ever.

Dr. Wegenke reported that Kurt Kiefer has retired from the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) following a distinguished career in education and public service. Dr. Wegenke thanked Mr. Kiefer for his service to the ECB Board of Directors and noted that he always enjoyed Mr. Kiefer's input at meetings and especially appreciated his focus and ability to "cut to the chase." Dr. Wegenke displayed a plaque to recognize Mr. Kiefer and shared the plaque's inscription with the Board.

Following Dr. Wegenke's comments, Mr. Kiefer thanked the Board and expressed that he is proud of the work of ECB during the pandemic and the continuing partnership between ECB and DPI to ensure access to educational media for Wisconsin schoolchildren.

There were no further 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 started her report by introducing Jennifer Dargan who has been appointed as ECB's Deputy Director. Ms. Bechtol shared that Ms. Dargan has an extensive background in civil service and public media, and most recently served as the Assistant Director of WPR's Ideas Network. Ms. Dargan addressed the Board and highlighted her career in public media and state government. Ms. Dargan shared that she was grateful for the opportunity to serve as the ECB Deputy Director.

Ms. Bechtol continued her report by highlighting agency activities during the past six months and relating how those activities aligned with the ECB Strategic Plan.

In the Strategic Plan area of Direction 1, Action Item 1: "Plan, construct, develop and maintain a reliable statewide broadcast communications system that ubiquitously and equitably serves the public," Ms. Bechtol reviewed the agency's budget development and updated the Board on the status of the state and federal budgets.

Ms. Bechtol reported that ECB has submitted the agency budget request which has been approved by the Joint Committee on Finance. Ms. Bechtol reported there were no budget increases and the request includes nearly \$12 million in General Purpose Revenue (GPR) which represents 28% of the overall ECB budget, and nearly \$30 million in Program Revenue (PR) which represents 72% of the overall ECB budget. Ms. Bechtol also reported that the Joint Committee on Finance passed a motion to eliminate long term vacancies and this included one GPR and two PR funded positions at ECB, all of which are vacant and have no impact on current staff.

Regarding the Federal budget, Ms. Bechtol reported that a \$545 million budget for the Corporation for Public Broadcasting has been included in the House of Representatives first draft budget, as well as \$20 million for the Interconnect Fund, \$20 million for the “Next Generation Resilient Alert and Warning System,” and \$31.78 million for the Ready to Learn initiative. Ms. Bechtol noted that Federal funding accounts for approximately 10% of the ECB budget.

Ms. Bechtol reported that the funding levels for the Ready to Learn initiative actually increased in the House draft budget which she attributed to the positive work of public broadcasters during the ongoing COVID pandemic. Ms. Bechtol also reported that PBS WI has brought some of that funding to Wisconsin in the form of community grants related to educational outreach activities.

Ms. Bechtol informed the Board that her written report included notes which summarized COVID support funds ECB received as indirect financial support as part of CARES and ARP grants received by the State of Wisconsin and the Corporation for Public Broadcasting.

In the Strategic Plan area of Direction 2, Action Item 3: “Responsibly manage state assets to maximize service...,” Ms. Bechtol discussed the agency’s efforts to protect the health of employees by implementing COVID mitigation and safety protocols while returning employees to the workplace. Ms. Bechtol reported that a majority of agency employees have returned to the workplace and measures to protect employee health have been effective.

Ms. Bechtol provided an update to the Board regarding the agency’s activities related to the Equity and Inclusion Plan. Ms. Bechtol reported that the newly appointed Deputy Director will spearhead efforts to implement and monitor the agency Equity and Inclusion Plan. Ms. Bechtol reported that ECB managers recently completed a Diversity, Equity and Inclusion training. Ms. Bechtol noted that the training will enhance managers’ abilities to identify and understand the needs of current employees, as well as building and maintaining an environment which fosters diversity and inclusion as future vacancies are filled.

In the Strategic Plan area of Direction 2, Action Item 5: “Facilitate the maximization of the state’s communications infrastructure by assisting with broadband deployment when possible,” Ms. Bechtol reported on ECB’s partnership with the Public Service Commission to create Public Service Announcements (PSA) for TV and radio which focus on the Federal Communication

Commission's Emergency Broadband Benefit, a program that helps low income families get access to broadband internet access. Ms. Bechtol added that the PSA's developed were made available to all Wisconsin broadcasters. Ms. Bechtol reported that as of mid-July, 15% of Wisconsin households who are eligible have applied for this benefit, and the national average is 8%.

Alyssa Kenney added that 78,000 households in Wisconsin have applied for this benefit, and the State has seen between 2000 and 5000 enrollments per week. Ms. Kenney added that if a Federal Infrastructure bill is passed into law, this benefit could be extended further.

Ms. Bechtol reported that the Governor's Taskforce on Broadband Access has completed its report which she shared with board members via email. Ms. Bechtol noted she believes this is greatest economical and educational issue facing the State, and she is grateful to have been a part of the process during the last year. Ms. Bechtol added that ECB is now better informed and has built good relationships with other state and local agencies to help improve broadband access in Wisconsin.

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

### **AGENDA ITEM 3.** Approval of the 2021 – 2024 Strategic Plan

Dr. Wegenke asked Ms. Bechtol to present the 2021 – 2024 Strategic Plan. Ms. Bechtol shared that a draft Strategic Plan was presented to board members at the January 2021 ECB meeting and that version was provided to board members prior to today's meeting. Ms. Bechtol requested the Board to consider one update to the plan in Direction 2, Action Item 3. Ms. Bechtol suggested adding the words "mitigate risk" so the action item reads as "Responsibly manage state assets to maximize service, minimize costs and mitigate risk." Ms. Bechtol noted that particularly during the COVID pandemic, she has learned that protecting employee health is amongst the highest priorities necessary to maintain a public broadcasting network. Ms. Bechtol added that mitigation of risk also applies to cybersecurity measures which are necessary to protect the ECB's technical infrastructure.

Following Ms. Bechtol's comments, Eileen Littig moved, seconded by Kurt Kiefer to approve the amended 2021 – 2024 ECB Strategic Plan. The motion carried by unanimous voice vote.

Senator Janet Bewley shared an observation regarding organizational strategic plans in general and noted that our efforts to achieve diversity and an expanded audience could be hampered by the idea that people who are not currently part of our audience are not ready to listen or watch because they don't see themselves as part of the public media audience. Senator Bewley encouraged the Board to consider how public media could appeal to listeners and viewers who are not now part of the audience, as part of the organization's strategic plan.

There were no additional questions or comments from board members.

#### **AGENDA ITEM 4.** Financial Reports

Dr. Wegenke introduced ECB Finance Director, Aimee Wright, to review the quarterly ECB financial reports.

Ms. Wright highlighted several items from the Revenue Report. Ms. Wright noted a slight reduction in fiscal goals from FY20 to FY21 and attributed this to the uncertainty brought on by the ongoing pandemic. Ms. Wright added that despite the uncertainty, fundraising has exceeded the FY21 goals.

Ms. Wright noted that the increased revenue from television underwriting is attributed to a change in funding flows between the ECB and the Friends of PBS Wisconsin, and has reached 100% of the FY21 goal. Ms. Wright reported that this change is in line with the ECB Strategic Plan Direction 2, Action Item 2: "Continue to refine the organizational structure of our broadcast Partnership with UW-Madison to make the most effective use of talent and human resources." Ms. Wright shared that she is considering adjusting the Revenue Report to reflect the sources of revenue to the ECB, in addition to revenue from contributions and corporate underwriting. Ms. Wright hopes to include these changes in Revenue Report at the October 2021 board meeting.

Ms. Wright moved on to the Budget to Actual Report and highlighted a number of items on the report. Ms. Wright noted the decrease in Media, Programming and Memberships from FY20 to FY21 and attributed this to another funding flow change between the public media partnership and does not reflect an actual decrease in media, programming or memberships.

Ms. Wright reported that debt service decreased by 8% from FY20 to FY21.

Ms. Wright reported a 5.8% decrease in administrative expense and attributed a majority of that to lower than predicted assessments from the Department of Administration (DOA). Ms. Wright noted that DOA assessments are difficult to plan for as they tend to fluctuate broadly.

Ms. Wright noted there are significant budget increases for equipment upgrades and security software purchases as well as interconnect charges. These are attributed to the proactive cybersecurity stance the agency has taken due to recent surges in nefarious internet activity.

Ms. Wright reported that a number of new equipment purchases have been delayed due to supply chain issues caused by the pandemic, which led to a lower than expected percentage of the equipment budget being spent within the fiscal year. Ms. Wright attributed a large share of the unspent equipment budget to delays in the buildout of the WPR studio Milwaukee.

Ms. Wright also noted decreases in expenses related to Professional Development and Outreach which she attributed to reduced travel and cancellation of activities due to the ongoing pandemic.

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

**AGENDA ITEM 5.** Election of Legislative Official to Wisconsin Public Broadcasting Foundation Board of Trustees

Dr. Wegenke announced that following the retirement of Senator Olsen, there was vacancy on the Wisconsin Public Broadcasting Foundation (WPBF) Board of Trustees for a legislative official. Dr. Wegenke shared a brief history of the Foundation and described the role of the Board of Trustees. Dr. Wegenke asked if there were any volunteers or nominations for the WPBF Board of Trustees.

Following a brief discussion, Eileen Littig nominated Representative Dave Considine as the legislative member of the WPBF Board of Trustees. Dr. Wegenke called three times for additional nominations and there were none. In the absence of additional nominations or objection, Dr. Wegenke announced that by unanimous consent, Representative Considine will fill the WPBF Board of Trustees vacancy designated for a legislative official.

Dr. Wegenke thanked Representative Considine and noted that he is looking forward to working with the Representative at the next WPBF Board of Trustees meeting.

**AGENDA ITEM 6.** Evaluation of the Executive 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. Dr. Wegenke cited Wisconsin statute 19.85(1)(c) and announced the purpose of the closed session as the annual performance evaluation of the Educational Communications Board Executive Director. 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.

The Board reconvened in open session at 11:20 AM. Dr. Wegenke announced that he will meet with Ms. Bechtol individually to discuss the evaluation and commended her for great work which he hopes will continue.

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

Niles Berman shared that Lincoln Elementary School in Appleton, WI has been renamed in honor of former Wisconsin Public Radio Association President and ECB member Ron Dunlap. Mr. Berman noted that in addition to his work with the WPRA, Mr. Dunlap was a well-respected educator in the Appleton area and had a distinguished career in professional basketball.

There were no further questions or comments from board members.

**AGENDA ITEM 8.** Adjournment

Jim Zylstra moved, seconded by Dr. Wegenke, to adjourn. The motion passed by unanimous voice vote. Dr. Wegenke announced the meeting adjourned at 11:30 A.M.