



Educational Communications Board

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EDUCATIONAL COMMUNICATIONS BOARD MEETING

ECB Board Room
3319 West Beltline Highway
Madison, Wisconsin
January 31, 2020
9:30 A.M.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR REPORT

Marta Bechtol, Executive Director

Annual Audit

The ECB is required to undergo an annual financial audit in order to remain qualified for Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB) funding. Baker Tilly conducted their on-site work at ECB in November, and the bulk of the work was completed before the holidays. John Rader from Baker Tilly will present their unqualified opinion at this January meeting.

I'd like to thank our talented finance team (Aimee Wright, Natalia Sutyagina and Dawn Okon) for their excellent preparation. It's the earliest in memory that the agency has completed its yearly financial reporting.

State Budget Update

ECB appeared before the State Building Commission and the Governor on December 12, 2019 and is pleased to report that our request for funds (\$1.185M) for equipment necessary to complete power increases at WPNE and WHLA was approved.

As part of the national spectrum repack project, the FCC authorized a one-time opportunity for ECB to increase television signal power. The installed equipment will expand our audience by approximately 28,000 in Green Bay and 67,000 in La Crosse, and provide greater reliability of the TV signals and public safety alerts. These upgrades are scheduled for completion by the end of 2020.

Federal Budget Update

On December 19, 2019, the Senate approved the package of Fiscal Year 2020 funding bills which included the Labor, Health and Human Services and Education Appropriations bill. Congress reached an agreement that provides the first increase in funding for the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB) in over a decade. The President signed it into law the following day, thereby avoiding a continuing resolution or government closure.

The deal will provide \$465 million in funding for CPB which is a \$20 million increase over the current funding level, and the first increase in CPB funding in over a decade. Additionally, the bill provided a \$1.259 million increase for Ready To Learn, funding it at \$29 million; and



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provided the full funding we sought for Interconnection and Infrastructure at \$20 million. As CPB is forward-funded by two years, these increases will take effect in 2022.

Advocacy Update

America's Public Television Stations (APTS), public television's advocacy organization, will hold its annual Public Media Summit in Washington D.C. at the end of February. This event includes visits on behalf of public broadcasting to each of Wisconsin's federal legislators. I will be joined by representatives from Wisconsin including: Gene Purcell from Wisconsin Public Media at UW-Madison, Niles Berman from the Wisconsin Public Radio Association (WPRO), Bohdan Zachary representing Milwaukee PBS, and Mark Foley, chair of the Milwaukee Area Technical College Board.

Meanwhile, planning is currently underway for our annual state advocacy event with UW-Madison, the Friends of PBS Wisconsin, and the WPRO. This will be held on Wednesday, April 15th.

Rural Broadband

The cooperative initiative between the Department of Public Instruction and ECB to determine the viability of broadband services in areas where ECB has tower presence proved useful in terms of making contacts with larger service providers. However, due to long-term scheduling and project priorities of the larger telecoms, there was no immediate interest in expanding their services through ECB sites. There might be some possibilities downrange though, so we will continue nurturing these relationships.

ECB has held meetings with smaller service providers such as Astrea (formerly Packerland Broadband) and Novus Labs to explore the use of broadcast whitespace and CBRS spectrum. We are in the process of developing potential pilot projects that could be implemented in underserved areas of the state.

The FCC's Tribal Priority Filing Window for Educational Broadband Service (EBS) licenses has been announced and will open on February 3, closing on August 3, 2020. ECB has been in regular contact with the Division of Intergovernmental Relations, the Legislative Council's Committee on State-Tribal Relations as well as interested members of tribes to ensure that information is being fully disseminated to those that may wish to take advantage of this one-time opportunity.