



# **Educational Communications Board**

FY 2021 – FY 2024 Strategic Plan

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## Introduction

The mission of the Educational Communications Board (ECB), as described in Wis. Stat. 39.11, is to provide a statewide telecommunications system and assistance in the diffusion of advanced technologies in support of education, public broadcasting, public safety and media. As part of that mission, public radio and television programs and services that reflect and respond to the educational and cultural interests and needs of the state are made available throughout the State of Wisconsin.

The Educational Communications Board is committed to ensuring that Wisconsin residents have equitable access to telecommunications services and advanced technologies in support of educational and public safety goals.

## The Role of ECB

The Wisconsin public broadcasting network operates as a formal partnership between the ECB (a state agency) and the University of Wisconsin-Madison. ECB is the licensee of 5 television stations and 6 TV translators; 18 radio stations and 4 radio translators. Additionally, ECB maintains 28 National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) weather stations (13 federal/15 state) located throughout Wisconsin.

ECB's core focus within the public broadcasting partnership is the network transmission of public radio and TV. This work includes the construction and maintenance of broadcast towers, transmitters, translators, the broadcast interconnect, and operation of the television network master control. It also includes expansion of service area through signal improvements and new station licensing, and compliance with state and federal regulations.

ECB provides the technical backbone of the Emergency Alert System which includes "Amber Alert" and the NOAA weather alerts. Additionally, ECB networks back up wireless alerting systems throughout Wisconsin. ECB also serves as a conduit for critical non-weather emergency alerts in coordination with other public safety organizations such as the Wisconsin Division of Emergency Management and the Department of Military Affairs, the Department of Homeland Security, Wisconsin Highway Patrol, U. S. Coast Guard, Civil Air Patrol, and first responders and 911 centers across the state.

ECB's robust tower system not only serves public broadcasting, but provides important signal points for other state agencies including the Wisconsin Division of Emergency Management and the Department of Military Affairs, the Department of Transportation, and the Department of Natural Resources. ECB policy allows for excess tower capacity to be made available to private entities, producing joint benefits of increasing agency revenue and maximizing communications services to Wisconsin citizens.

## Strategic Directions

In adherence to Board Policy requiring a 3-year strategic planning cycle, the Board met in October 2020 to initiate the development of the plan for FY21 – 24. As a result, the Board reinforced existing priorities directing the agency to:

- I. Strengthen the impact, reach and performance of the ECB to better serve all of the citizens of Wisconsin while recognizing and striving to serve an increasingly diverse population;
- II. Assure responsible stewardship of agency resources in carrying out the work of the ECB; and
- III. Grow and engage public media audiences using the most effective forms of content delivery.

The Board also recommended that the agency take steps to:

- Remain relevant in the world of advancing technology.
- Leverage partnerships and assets for better outcomes.

These directives and recommendations will inform the operational strategy of the agency. Actions taken to meet these objectives could be one-time events or involve longer processes. The Board should be aware that some outcomes may take time to actualize due to the length of project terms or the pace of technology.

## Measurement

As stewards of both public and donated funds, ECB is accountable to the public and reports regularly to the people and organizations that provide its support. Agency actions upholding the directives and recommendations of the Board will be routinely measured and reported. Outcomes may apply to specific directives, yet should also be evaluated in a holistic way that responds to the overarching mission of the agency.

### **Direction I: Strengthen the impact, reach and performance of the ECB to better serve all of the citizens of Wisconsin while recognizing and striving to serve an increasingly diverse population.**

#### Actions:

1. Plan, construct, develop and maintain a reliable statewide broadcast communications system that ubiquitously and equitably serves the public.
  - Establish, maintain, modernize and secure the statewide broadcast network interconnection and transmission facilities.
  - Monitor public safety responses to ensure system reliability.
  - Support PreK-12 education and home learning by creating and offering Wisconsin-focused curriculum-based media to teachers, parents and students.
2. Prioritize network expansion to underserved and remote audiences throughout Wisconsin. Identify opportunities for increased, enhanced, or new coverage in preparation for FCC license application and modification events.
3. Inform legislators and the public on the value public media delivers to Wisconsin. Engage with state and federal legislators to demonstrate the value our service and advocate for continued public funding of ECB activities.
4. Sustain and advance ECB's essential statewide communications role through collaborations that maximize our expertise and broaden our public service.

## **Direction II: Assure responsible stewardship of agency resources in carrying out the work of the ECB.**

### **Actions:**

1. Improve the capacity of our human resources through skills training and implementation of equity and inclusion strategies; strive to compensate staff commensurate with skillsets and merit.
2. Continue to refine the organizational structure within our broadcast Partnership with UW-Madison to make most effective use of talent and human resources.
3. Responsibly manage state assets to maximize service, minimize costs and mitigate risk.
4. Facilitate the optimization of the state's communications infrastructure by assisting with broadband deployment when possible.

## **Direction III: Grow and engage public media audiences using the most effective forms of content delivery.**

### **Actions:**

1. Continually evaluate and evolve methods of content delivery to ensure that ECB is providing relevant forms of media to the statewide audience.
2. Provide reliable delivery of public safety content and alerting.
3. Stay abreast of changes in the Emergency Alert System (EAS) by being an active participant in the state EAS committee. Sustain ECB's role in direct service to Wisconsin as the essential backbone of the EAS technology infrastructure.