



**EDUCATIONAL COMMUNICATIONS BOARD MEETING  
January 20, 2023  
9:30 A.M.**

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MINUTES

Roll Call and Introductions

Board Chair Jim Zylstra called the meeting of the Educational Communications Board to order at 9:30 A.M. A roll call was taken and a quorum was verified. A complete attendance list follows:

Board Members Present: Chris Patton  
Darrell Williams  
Heather LaRoi  
Jim Zylstra  
Alyssa Kenney  
Leah Lechleiter-Luke  
Representative Dave Considine  
Niles Berman  
Eileen Littig  
Bohdan Zachary  
Héctor Colón

Also Present: Eric Fulcomer, Ph.D.

Absent: Rolf Wegenke, Ph. D.  
Anne Chapman  
Representative Pat Snyder

**Approval of Minutes from the October 21, 2022 ECB Board Meeting**

Eileen Littig moved, seconded by Alyssa Kenney, to approve the October 21, 2022 meeting minutes. The motion carried by unanimous voice vote.

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

Mr. Zylstra began with congratulations to Al Ritchie and his team in the Operations Center (OC) for the work they've been doing to integrate Milwaukee PBS. The agency is currently shadow-casting and plan to cut over on January 30<sup>th</sup>, 2023 when ECB will be broadcasting Milwaukee PBS full time.

Bohdan Zachary added his congratulations to Marta Bechtol, ECB Executive Director, and the entire ECB team for working alongside the Milwaukee PBS Engineering team to make this all possible.

Mr. Zylstra then noted that immediately following this meeting will be the Public Broadcasting Foundation meeting, where the main focus will be accepting the audit of the Foundation.

Lastly, Mr. Zylstra mentioned that in recent talks with Ms. Bechtol, they discovered the ECB bylaws had not been updated since 2007. Mr. Zylstra stated that Ms. Bechtol will look through the bylaws, and present any recommended updates at a future meeting.

There were no questions or comments from board members.

## **AGENDA ITEM 2.** Report of the Executive Director

Ms. Bechtol opened her report with the announcement of ECB's new Executive Assistant, Megan Bellini. She comes to ECB from the Senate Chief Clerk's office so she's well experienced in State systems and technology. She began onboarding the week of this meeting. The entire ECB team has been excited to bring her on board.

Ms. Bechtol continued her report expressing sincere admiration for the Finance Team, led by Finance Director, Aimee Wright. Ms. Wright, along with her team and John Rader and Leah Wipperfurth of Baker Tilly, recently completed the FY22 audit. While sharing the accolades of the outstanding report itself, Ms. Bechtol also praised the preparedness and professionalism of the team. She noted they would be presenting the specifics shortly.

Ms. Bechtol then shared the impressive work the Engineering and Technology departments have done in the OC to make the Milwaukee PBS integration not only operational, but even ahead of schedule. Ms. Bechtol expressed her pride in each of these teams.

Ms. Bechtol continued her report noting the upcoming Advocacy Day in relation to *Direction 1 Action 3: Informing Our Legislators*. She stated that on February 16, 2023, she and Heather Reese, Director of Wisconsin Public Media, would be meeting with advocates and Legislators to share the "good work". With 25% of the Assembly members being new, this will be an important opportunity to build new relationships, thank continuing legislators for the state support, and remind them how important public broadcasting, emergency and public safety alerting, and the infrastructure are to the residents of this state.

At the end of February, Ms. Bechtol and Ms. Reese will travel to Washington D.C. along with Reed Hall, President of the Friends of PBS Wisconsin, to do similar advocacy work with our federal delegation.

Ms. Bechtol then handed it off to Jennifer Dargan, Deputy Director, for an update on the search for the Director of Wisconsin Public Radio, as she is the head of the Search and Screen Committee.

Ms. Dargan noted that the committee is made up of nine members representing WPR, the WPRA board, PBS Wisconsin and ECB. Ms. Dargan informed the Board that almost all of the pieces are in place to have this position officially posted. Ms. Dargan shared that along with the committee, Ms. Bechtol and Ms. Reese have committed to conducting outreach once this has been posted and asked for support of the Board in sharing the posting with their contacts. After it has been posted for four weeks, the committee will evaluate the applications and qualify a first group for Zoom interviews. From there they will select a smaller semi-finalist for finalist group for in-person interviews. Ms. Dargan invited the Board to bring forth any feedback they may have regarding how candidates should be assessed.

There were no questions or comments from board members so at that, Ms. Dargan handed it back to Ms. Bechtol, who handed it back to Mr. Zylstra.

### **AGENDA ITEM 3.** Election of Board Officers

Mr. Zylstra reported according to the bylaws new board members are elected each January. He opened the table for nominations and Niles Berman moved to nominate James Zylstra as Chair, Alyssa Kenney as Vice Chair, and Eileen Littig as Secretary. Representative Dave Considine seconded this move.

Mr. Zylstra asked if there were any other nominations, then asked again twice more, per the requirements in the bylaws. Hearing no other nominations, he called for a voice vote in favor of the slate to which all agreed. Asking if anyone opposed and hearing none, the officers were unanimously elected.

### **AGENDA ITEM 4.** Audit Presentation – *John Rader & Leah Wipperfurth, Baker Tilly*

Mr. Zylstra introduced John Rader from Baker Tilly to begin the audit presentation.

Mr. Rader introduced himself as the Director at Baker Tilly, and his colleague, Leah Wipperfurth, the audit manager.

Before presenting the results of the audit by screensharing summarized tables, Mr. Rader expounded on the overall process of audits, specifically pertaining to ECB. Mr. Rader explained that this year was more involved than in the past due to a new accounting rule – GASB 87 – pertaining to leases. In anticipation of this, Mr. Rader and Ms. Wipperfurth worked closely with Ms. Wright and her team along with folks over at DOA in advance which allowed for audit week to go more smoothly. This, along with the fact that Ms. Wright prepared the financial statements herself (which is uncommon with most of Baker Tilly's clients), allowed for audit week and all of the analyzing and legal terminologies it encompasses to be not only successful, but also timely.

As a generalization of the results, Mr. Rader congratulated ECB on achieving the highest level of assurance one entity can receive from an external auditor. Baker Tilly has issued clean opinions to the Corporation of Public Broadcasting based on their requirements.

Specifically, Mr. Rader stated that the audit didn't identify any material weaknesses, significant discrepancies or control deficiencies, which is exceptional.

Mr. Radner then turned it over to Ms. Wipperfurth to talk specifically about the numbers. While sharing her screen, Ms. Wipperfurth discussed summarized and condensed versions of what the complete financial statements show.

Ms. Wipperfurth described the changes in pension and assets that caused a reduction in liabilities for the operating fund, and the lease liability that was implemented for 2021 with GASB 87.

Regarding final numbers, Ms. Wipperfurth reported that from 2021 to 2022, ECB had a very stable net position, with a deficit of 1.2 million overall, and the operating fund had a net income of just under 1 million. The full audit report can be found [here](#).

Dr. Darrell Williams commented that while he is new to this board, he has previously been involved in many audits and to achieve this level of greatness is a huge feat. He continued, saying these results are a testimony to the hard work and efficiency of Ms. Wright and the entire ECB Finance team.

There were no other questions or comments from board members.

#### **AGENDA ITEM 5.** Quarterly Financial Report – *Aimee Wright, Director of Finance*

Following the audit results, Mr. Zylstra asked Aimee Wright to review the quarterly financial report.

Ms. Wright began by sharing her screen, showing a spreadsheet that was also distributed in the Board meeting packet.

Ms. Wright reported that the GPR and EBS revenue are at 50% and right where they should be at this time of the year. She shared that there are a few pieces of revenue that haven't been billed yet. The broadcast interconnect (BIC) support provided by the WPRA and the Friends groups will be billed later this quarter.

Similarly, upon their approval of the audit ECB will receive 70% of the grant funding anticipated from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB). Once the SAS and SABS benchmarking surveys are complete, ECB will receive the remaining 30% of the CPB revenue.

Ms. Wright walked through the debt service appropriations, operating expenses, and lease status. Rounding out her report with rollovers and encumbrances, Ms. Wright stated that ECB finances are in an excellent position at the year's midpoint.

Mr. Zylstra questioned the status of COVID funds, to which Ms. Wright informed the Board that the last bit of COVID funding was received in FY22 which was used to update

technology in the conference rooms. This offered up a segue into carryover funds, with Ms. Wright affirming that after a fiscal year full of supply chain issues, the FY23 carryover should return to stasis. Ms. Bechtol pointed out that the matters regarding supply chain issues directly stemmed from transmitter replacements and equipment purchased to build out the Operations Center for Milwaukee PBS. Ms. Wright concurred.

There were no questions or comments from board members.

**AGENDA ITEM 6.** WPR Update – *Tom Luljak, Interim Director of Radio*

Mr. Zylstra introduced Tom Luljak, interim Director of Wisconsin Public Radio.

Mr. Luljak expressed that he has been with WPR for the last sixteen months – coming in during a period of transition at Wisconsin Public Media. The changes in leadership have presented an opportunity to evaluate WPR services toward creation of a plan for network optimization.

Mr. Luljak expounded on this, stating that the optimization project will build the next generation of WPR broadcast and digital services. WPR has been around on the radio side for more than 100 years, and this effort will ensure it not only remains, but will also be relevant and useful for many more decades to come.

With pride, Mr. Luljak reported that this effort has involved nearly every person on the WPR team which has ensured diversity of thought and ideas for reimagining WPR services, with the goal of reaching larger audiences both on air and online.

Mr. Luljak stated that as times and technologies change, people’s behavior changes. With more than 5 million podcasts available – something not even in existence when radio was first broadcast – and morning and afternoon drivetimes directly affected by the COVID crisis, WPR must sustain pertinence.

Mr. Luljak pointed out how critical it is to have a strong brand, which WPR does. Additionally, WPR is in a solid financial position and has the advantage of having seven regional offices with news and community outreach bureaus located around the state. WPR claims a long tradition of engaging and serving the audience in an authentic, transparent, and service-oriented manner which ultimately lays the foundation for success.

Mr. Luljak noted that the news and music network has not only been stable but has actually seen growth, particularly with the national programming that comes in the form of news magazines like “Morning Edition” and “All Things Considered”. However, over the last 5-7 years there has been significant audience erosion on The Ideas Network – by about 30%. This is not unique to WPR, as public radio stations and even NPR itself are experiencing similar trends.

Mr. Luljak informed the board that since his arrival at WPR, UW-Madison’s Office of Strategic Consulting, along with most of the WPR staff, hit the ground running to identify changes and adjustments that should be made to address the aforementioned issues. Not only was staff involved, but the conversations were also opened with donors and audience members. With that direct feedback, a few key ideas formed.

Stating that decision have yet to be made, Mr. Lujack shared with the board some thoughtfully vetted proposals. The most foundational change would be realigning the existing networks. Currently there are 38 stations that operate in partnership with ECB, with about two-thirds of them carrying The Ideas Network service and a little over one-third carrying news/music services. The two networks are essentially competing with themselves much of the day. An environmental scan has shown that other radio services around the country have programming that celebrates the arts and showcases music in a way that provide both entertainment and information. One idea under consideration would be to shift all of the news and talk content to one set of stations and use the other half of the stations to expand our music services.

On a proposed news and talk network, the morning would begin with NPR's "Morning Edition" and the afternoon would feature "All Things Considered". During the middle of the day, WPR would have the spotlight – original and impactful talk programming that allows the people of Wisconsin to literally hear their voices and be a part of a conversation about the big ideas and challenges we face in this state.

Mr. Luljak shared that a reimagining of the music network to include arts programming would put a spotlight on people who create and perform music. The daytime would still showcase classical music – which is an incredibly robust and enduring format around the country – and programming such as "Simply Folk" and "The Road to Higher Ground" would air as it does on evenings or weekends. Essentially, the thought is to create a space where the audience wouldn't have to keep switching from one station to another if they want to receive information or entertainment of the same type or genre.

Corollary changes to the broadcast service would also be proposed for the digital services. The WPR.org website has become extremely popular, with over 6 million people a year visiting the site to get news and stream programming they would otherwise be unable to receive over the air. Our networks need to be firmly rooted in a strong digital service including content one would hear in the broadcast programming.

Mr. Luljak noted that the WPR.org site and the app are in the process of being rebuilt and should be completed soon. The goal is to adopt a new content management system to significantly increase the ease of navigation.

In terms of implementation, Mr. Luljak explained that WPR has been working with Jacobs Media Services – one of the top research firms in the broadcast industry, with National Public Radio being one of their clients. WPR is also working with Madison-based consulting and marketing firm, KW2. These two teams, along with the 140-plus WPR team members mentioned previously, are developing a menu of programming options as well as strategies on working with underwriters. Much research has been and is being done toward developing an optimization plan. Multiple conversations and focus groups have been held with members and sponsors alike that demonstrate love and appreciation for WPR and the impact it has on daily lives. That goodwill has created a brand that is enormously powerful in this state, and gives assurance to the hope that going forward, this optimization will do exactly what is being aspired – that WPR will not only remain, but will also be relevant and useful for many more decades to come, engaging and serving the audience in an authentic, transparent, inclusive, informative and entertaining manner.

Bohdan Zachary offered congratulations on all the work that is going into this, and opined that this is a fantastic time to build on all that WPR has done.

Jim Zylstra asked for examples of arts programming that may be seen down the road, to

which Mr. Luljak offered the possibility of expanding the repertoire for classical music lovers interspersed with an "Arts Minute" that could feature information on an exhibit opening; a "Critic's Corner" where people are reviewing a show that recently opens; or hosted interviews with Wisconsin artists.

Mr. Zylstra asked about the percentage of audience members who listen to broadcast versus streaming, and Mr. Luljak noted that depending on the programming day, 85%-90% are still tuned to broadcast, but the digital numbers are still growing significantly. He added that Nielsen has a device that captures the number of audience members who stream, and it is critical to know this information. He noted that younger audiences gravitate toward streaming but they are still a very small share of the audience, so the health of both platforms is imperative.

Eileen Littig asked if any youth groups have been interviewed, noting that younger groups may not relate to or even know about what WPR offers. Mr. Luljak stated that the youngest groups surveyed have been in their twenties, but he does see incredible marketing opportunities in high school or even grade schools with music teachers, especially if those young folks could be featured on a program, much like PBS does with "Final Forte".

With no other questions or comments from board members, Mr. Luljak ended his update expressing pride and confidence that WPR will ultimately produce wonderful programming that will serve Wisconsin for many years to come.

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

There were no questions or comments from board members.

#### **AGENDA ITEM 8.** Adjournment

Eileen Littig moved, seconded by Representative David Considine to adjourn. The motion passed by unanimous voice vote. Jim Zylstra announced the meeting adjourned at 11:05 AM.