

**EDUCATIONAL COMMUNICATIONS BOARD
QUARTERLY MEETING
ECB Board Room
3319 West Beltline Highway
Madison, WI
Remote attendance by Microsoft Teams or phone
July 19, 2024
9:30 A.M.**

MINUTES

Roll Call and Introductions

Board Chair Jim Zylstra called the meeting of the Educational Communications Board (ECB) to order at 9:32am. A roll call was taken and a quorum was verified. A complete attendance list follows:

Board Members Present: Jim Zylstra, Chair
 Paul Hammer
 Dr. Darrell Williams
 Alyssa Kenney
 Leah Lechleiter-Luke
 Dr. Eric Fulcomer
 Senator Romaine Quinn
 Senator Chris Larson
 Representative Patrick Snyder
 Representative David Considine
 Amy Traynor
 Roy Christianson
 Deborah Hamlett

Absent: Heather LaRoi
 Anne Chapman

Approval of Minutes from the April 19, 2024, ECB Quarterly Board Meeting.

Roy Christianson moved, seconded by Dr. Fulcomer, to approve the April 19, 2024, meeting minutes. The motion carried.

AGENDA ITEM 1. Report of the Board Chair – *Jim Zylstra*

Board Chair Jim Zylstra began the meeting acknowledging and thanking now-retired Board member, Eileen Littig, for her term of service beginning in 2005. Mr. Zylstra noted that Ms. Littig held the position of Secretary and was also a member of the Foundation Board of Trustees. A plaque was presented recognizing her passion and advocacy for public broadcasting, technology and education in advancing Wisconsin's future.

Ms. Littig said it has been an honor to serve on the board and to have been a part of many changes throughout the years. Ms. Littig thanked Ms. Bechtol and Mr. Zylstra and wished them good luck in the future. She signed off saying she loves public television and radio, adding that the engineering department is remarkable in the job they do.

Executive Director Marta Bechtol shared her appreciation for Ms. Littig being a constant champion for the organization, noting her deep understanding of the mission of public media and the aspirations of what the board is here to do. Ms. Bechtol told Ms. Littig that she would be dearly missed.

A round of applause and similar sentiments were given from the Board.

Mr. Zylstra moved on, introducing Amy Traynor as the newest member representing U.W. Board of Regents. Ms. Traynor informed the Board that she lives in Eau Claire and is currently working for Cooperative Educational Service Agency (CESA) 10 as the Director of Learning Services. She shared her excitement in joining the Board. Ms. Bechtol welcomed Ms. Traynor and hopes she will be on for many years to come.

Mr. Zylstra reminded the Board that the annual Adverse Adjudication reports are due to Megan Bellini, Executive Staff Assistant, by July 31st.

Mr. Zylstra concluded his report celebrating the June 13th event for the new WPR Music radio signal in Rice Lake (WEPP 90.7 FM) that honors former ECB executive director Gene Purcell.

Ms. Bechtol shared that Gene's wife Ruth flipped the switch at 11:25 A.M. and the maiden airing began with Norman Gilliland sharing a brief message about Gene. The first song played was *Más Que Nada*, a favorite of Gene's and his family.

There were no other questions or comments from board members.

AGENDA ITEM 2. Report of the Executive Director – *Marta Bechtol*

Executive Director Marta Bechtol began her report by reminding the Board that a new strategic plan was approved at the April meeting and is now charting the work of the agency. She pointed to *Direction II, Action 1: Assure responsible stewardship by supporting the staff by prioritizing ongoing professional development*.

Ms. Bechtol noted that the spring is professional development time, and per financial reports from Finance Director Aimee Wright, the bills for professional development usually roll through in fourth quarter statements. Ms. Bechtol added that there have been many opportunities for staff to grow professionally, including the PBS Annual meeting, the Public Media Business Association (PMBA) conference, the Walker Broadcast Management Institute, and the spring Engineering Division meeting.

Ms. Bechtol moved on to the middle phrase in this action: *advocating for appropriate compensation*. Ms. Bechtol noted that there has recently been an

extensive I.T. adjustment within state government, and potentially more changes coming upon the conclusion of the I.T. Survey. She stated she has been working closely with the Department of Personnel Management (DPM) Compensation and Classification group to discuss the impacts of these changes on ECB classifications. She is also preparing for the biennial budget cycle by sharing input on the comp plan related to ECB payroll.

She continued with the last portion of that action: *fostering a culture of belonging in the organization*. Ms. Bechtol informed the board that she and Deputy Director Jennifer Dargan have been certified as trainers for a Workplace Integrity program. With the stated intention as “tone from the top,” they put this training to work at the June Engineering Division meeting. Their goals were to guide the staff through what a workplace that is psychologically safe and respectful of all people looks like, and to ensure that staff trust and respond to each other respectfully in workplace conversations. Ms. Bechtol expressed her satisfaction with ECB’s workplace culture being a welcoming environment for all.

Ms. Bechtol then turned the focus of the meeting to Direction I; Action 1. She stated that the theme of this meeting is to talk about how our pre-K, TV and Radio networks are moving the plan forward to equitably serve the public, and to highlight their focus on Wisconsin content.

Ms. Bechtol concluded her report noting that the Corporation of Public Broadcasting (CPB) has recently revised its Community Representation Statement directive which now requires an annual review with the governing body. To remain eligible for CPB grants, ECB’s response was distributed to board members in advance of the meeting for review. Ms. Bechtol asked if there were questions or comments from the board concerning this statement and there were none.

AGENDA ITEM 3. Action: Election of new WPB Foundation Trustee

Board Chair Jim Zylstra informed the board that Eileen Littig’s departure leaves an empty seat on the Wisconsin Public Broadcasting Foundation (WPBF) Board of Trustees to fill.

Roy Christianson nominated Leah Lechleiter-Luke to fill the vacancy and Ms. Lechleiter-Luke accepted the nomination. There were no other nominations from the floor. Roy Christianson moved for approval, seconded by Dr. Fulcomer. The motion carried by unanimous voice vote.

Mr. Zylstra stated that a new secretary of the board will be elected at the October board meeting.

AGENDA ITEM 4. Information: Wisconsin Public Radio Updates – *Sarah Ashworth, WPR Director with*

- *Jeffrey Potter, Marketing and Communications*
- *Noah Ovshinsky, Content*
- *Lisa Nalbandian, Senior Regional Director*

Board Chair Jim Zylstra introduced Sarah Ashworth, Director of WPR. Ms. Ashworth stated that she and her team will be sharing some of the work WPR has done over the past year to improve statewide service. She noted that the defining project of the last year has been “optimization” – a word we’ve used often that ultimately culminated with the launch of two new networks, WPR News and WPR Music.

Ms. Ashworth introduced Jeffrey Potter, Head of Marketing and Communications, to talk about outreach. Mr. Potter first noted that with the level of changes being made to the radio service, ensuring that existing audiences were well informed and prepared was top priority. With the assistance of PBS Wisconsin, an explainer video was produced to describe the network changes and why they were being made in a direct and personable way. The video was distributed on social media, at regional events, as well as on a purpose-built section of the website: wpr.org/new.

Mr. Potter shared data from this outreach that showed over 60,000 visitors to the new information page, thousands of views on social media accounts, over 2,000 phone calls and emails sent to Audience Services, and approximately 700 people at the in-person “Learn More” events. Mr. Potter shared a graph that showed a very high increase in correspondence to Audience Services from May 19-25, the week the new networks went live. He remarked that after that brief spike, inquiries reverted to more typical numbers. Mr. Potter commended Audience Services for their response efforts which supported both WPR’s audience as well as WPR itself.

Mr. Potter then turned the presentation over to Noah Ovshinsky, who oversees WPR’s content. Mr. Ovshinsky informed the board that new content was created along with the new networks. The new morning show on WPR News, “Wisconsin Today,” explores the people, places and ideas shaping life in Wisconsin. It airs each weekday morning at 9 A.M. and is also available as a podcast.

He then shared that WPR Music is Wisconsin’s only local, live-hosted, all-day classical music service. It presents expertly curated classical music featuring the best of Wisconsin and the world, with jazz, world and folk music featured on the weekends. Mr. Ovshinsky shared a clip from one of these programs, “The Middy”.

Mr. Ovshinsky moved focus to another big and heartfelt accomplishment, the launch of WPR’s 39th station – WEPP 90.7 in Rice Lake. This expands WPR Music’s rural service so that area residents now have access to both networks. He reminded the board that the call letters honor former ECB and WPM director, Gene Purcell.

Mr. Ovshinsky continued with upcoming projects of note, including election coverage, “America Amplified” and “Wisconsin Life”. He stated that WPR provides statewide coverage from 8 news bureaus and produces 1,500 news stories each year covering state politics, business, agriculture, education, the environment and more. Mr. Ovshinsky stated that content is available on broadcast, web articles, and digital streaming.

He then handed the presentation back to Jeffrey Potter to cover the WPR Music campaign in Milwaukee. Mr. Potter explained that there has always been classical

listeners in Milwaukee, but the city hasn't had a classical music station since 2007. WPR Music is now attempting to bring that audience back to locally hosted/expertly curated content on FM. He shared images of billboards, digital and social media ads, streaming audio and YouTube video spots. He noted that this campaign is running from late June through August.

Mr. Potter then introduced Lisa Nalbandian, Senior Regional Manager, to talk about community connection work done this year. Ms. Nalbandian informed the Board that there are six regional offices around the state that she oversees. The function of these regional offices is to ensure WPR has a strong in-person presence throughout the state. She added that those who work in these regions are truly embedded in their respective communities.

Ms. Nalbandian pointed to segments during "Morning Edition" that focus on regional issues and people, then shared an example with a recent clip about Stable Hands equine therapy program in Wausau. Ms. Nalbandian described recent community events including "Garden Talk Live" in Bayfield and the Tallgrass Chamber Music Festival recording as examples of WPR's commitment to statewide outreach. Ms. Nalbandian returned the presentation to Sarah Ashworth.

Ms. Ashworth sees this past year as strengthening WPR's foundation by putting the audience first when thinking about building and developing programs and communicating those changes. She noted that this week celebrates her first anniversary as Director of WPR. She is filled with pride for the organization and its future and believes that during this past year WPR has renewed its commitment to Wisconsin.

Board member Dr. Eric Fulcomer commented that this has been a remarkable year for Ms. Ashworth and WPR with so much accomplished. He commended WPR's willingness to go out and meet the public and listen to what folks have to say. Dr. Fulcomer was curious to know how these changes have impacted philanthropy, noting that the giving portion of the WPRA budget appears significantly down. Ms. Ashworth explained that with the uncertainty of how the network changes may translate into membership in the Milwaukee market, WPR lowered the target for the amount they hope to raise and will reassess this number midyear. She added that they are also shifting some positions around to focus on major and planned giving.

Jordan Siegler, Interim Chief Development Officer, added that declining membership is a public radio issue across the country, not just for WPR. Mr. Siegler's team has been speaking with internal and external colleagues regarding engaging new memberships and identifying new fundraising opportunities. Mr. Siegler also noted that in reviewing the preliminary numbers for FY24, membership hit their goal which is an extraordinary feat.

Board member Roy Christianson shared that he is looking forward to an upcoming trip to Milwaukee where, as an avid listener of classical music, he will be able to tune in to 90.7 for the first time.

Board member Leah Lechleiter-Luke commented that she is also an avid listener of WPR. Due to her geography, broadcast isn't always received clearly. When that happens, she happily switches over to the WPR News app. She wondered if there will be another push to encourage app use, and if they'd taken into consideration those who are less technologically adept. Jeffrey Potter responded saying they are absolutely planning to push that more and have that particular audience in mind.

There were no other questions or comments from the board.

AGENDA ITEM 5. Information: PBS Wisconsin Updates – *Jon Miskowski, PBSW Director with*

- *Christine Sloan Miller, Director of Production*
- *Megan Monday, Director of Education*
- *Holly De Ruyter, History Producer*

Board Chair Jim Zylstra introduced Christine Sloan-Miller, Director of Production for PBS Wisconsin. Ms. Sloan Miller stated that PBS Wisconsin has had a long-time commitment to exploring Wisconsin by building community partnerships and celebrating Wisconsin's deep pride of place and history. In this meeting her team will share updates from one of PBS WI longtime history projects, *Hometown Stories*, along with a new series from the Education unit, *The Look Back*.

Hometown Stories premiered in 2006 and is the only project of its kind in public media – a documentary series that tells the history of our state, one town at a time. She noted PBS WI partners with the Wisconsin Historical Society (WHS) to share these stories and build an archive.

Ms. Sloan-Miller introduced Holly De Ruyter, a project producer for *Hometown Stories*, to describe the community engagement and everything else that goes into producing an episode – specifically the most recent, Beloit, which will be airing in October.

Ms. De Ruyter explained that each episode begins by working with local historians, libraries, and people in the community through listening sessions. She noted that after months of research, each hour-long episode is narrowed down to six or seven chapters created from archival photos and films, along with present day footage and interviews. Ms. De Ruyter concluded by sharing a clip from the upcoming Beloit program.

Ms. De Ruyter then introduced Megan Monday, Director of Education at PBS WI, to talk about her unit's newest project, *The Look Back*. Ms. Monday informed the board that her unit serves pre-K through 12th grade educators and learners using the power of public media to assist teachers in their practice across the state. Ms. Monday noted that *The Look Back* focuses on the needs of upper-elementary learners and is designed to support PBS Wisconsin's place-based media collections such as *Wisconsin Biographies* and *Jo Wilder and the Capitol Case*.

She stated that the team went about creating *The Look Back* using an iterative focus group approach with current educators followed with pilot testing with groups of students. Ms. Monday noted that the insights included incorporation of artifacts

and historical context, and modelling inquiry, collaboration and problem solving. The program needed to align with instructional standards, the eras defined by the WHS, and the DPI Social Studies K-12 scope-and-sequence.

Ms. Monday told the board that this project made possible through partnership with: PBS Wisconsin Education's Education Innovators; the Wisconsin Historical Society; UW-Madison Libraries; UW-Madison Center for Campus History; five local historical hosts; and a group of students who had the opportunity to watch the pilots and provide direct feedback. Ultimately the collection will include episodes for each of the 12 WHS eras with the potential for growing more robust in subsequent years.

Board member Leah Lechleiter-Luke applauded Ms. Monday and her team on this project, stating how important it is to tap into the expertise of those in the field and develop resources that incorporate their suggestions.

Board Chair Jim Zylstra asked how many seasons are anticipated, and the useful life expectancy of each video. Ms. Monday responded saying five seasons are planned for now, with reevaluation after the first year. She added that currently some collections are over 10 years old and are still deeply loved, using *Wisconsin Biographies* as an example. Ms. Monday continued, saying that over time there may be some minor changes to "keep things fresh" rather than a full retirement, but that does happen sometimes after reassessment.

There were no other questions or comments from the board.

AGENDA ITEM 6. Information: Q3 Financial Report – *Aimee Wright, Finance Director*

Director of Finance Aimee Wright presented the fourth quarter budget report of FY24.

She noted at the end of June, agency revenue was at 96% of the total budget but that some transactions still need to be input. Expenses are tracking at 98%, also appropriate for this time of year.

The agency anticipates coming in on budget through the first quarter of FY25. A full and final report of FY24 will be presented at the October board meeting.

There were no other questions or comments from the board.

AGENDA ITEM 7. Adjournment

Roy Christianson moved, seconded by Dr. Fulcomer to adjourn. The motion passed by unanimous voice vote.

Jim Zylstra announced the meeting adjourned at 11:00am.