

**EDUCATIONAL COMMUNICATIONS BOARD
QUARTERLY MEETING
ECB Board Room
3319 West Beltline Highway
Madison, WI
Remote attendance by Microsoft Teams or phone
January 17, 2025
9:30 A.M.**

MINUTES

Roll Call and Introductions

Board Vice Chair Alyssa Kenney called the meeting of the Educational Communications Board (ECB) to order at 9:33am. A roll call was taken, and a quorum was verified. A complete attendance list follows:

Board Members Present:	Alyssa Kenney
	Paul Hammer
	Dr. Darrell Williams
	Anne Chapman
	Leah Lechleiter-Luke
	Senator Romaine Quinn
	Senator Chris Larson
	Roy Christianson
	Deborah Hamlett
	Janet Botz
	Anne Hanson

Absent:	Amy Traynor
	Dr. Eric Fulcomer
	Representative Patrick Snyder

Approval of Minutes from the October 18, 2024, ECB Quarterly Board Meeting.

Leah Luke moved to approve the October 18, 2024, meeting minutes. Roy Christianson seconded. The motion carried.

AGENDA ITEM 1. Report of the Board Chair – *Alyssa Kenney (Vice Chair)*

Board Vice Chair Alyssa Kenney opened the meeting. She acknowledged the recent retirement of Board Chair Jim Zylstra, who was present, and commemorated his 20 years of service to the ECB. Mr. Zylstra thanked the board and noted that he enjoyed his long term in support of the agency.

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

Executive Director Marta Bechtol welcomed new board members and thanked Mr. Zylstra for his advice during his term as board chair.

Ms. Bechtol introduced Jordan Siegler, interim executive director of Wisconsin Public Media (WPM). Mr. Siegler commented on the statutory partnership between ECB and WPM and the importance of a strong working relationship.

Ms. Bechtol shared that at the beginning of the new legislative season, she and Jordan Siegler sent letters to new and returning legislators to let them know about the work of public media in Wisconsin. They will follow up with office visits for legislators who would like to know more. Ms. Bechtol noted that she will also advocate for ECB's cost-to-continue budget request during the spring.

Ms. Bechtol shared that ECB has received a \$1.5 million Next Generation Warning System (NGWS) grant from FEMA through the Department of Homeland Security. This is a reimbursement grant for capital equipment that will help ECB strengthen the agency's public alert capacity. This is one-time funding for television equipment that will make ECB's network more resilient, expand coverage in rural areas, and upgrade emergency alerting. Funds must be expended by the end of 2025 so ECB will be moving forward quickly to get this project into place.

Ms. Bechtol noted that the agency undergoes an annual audit for CPB compliance. The results that will be presented in this meeting demonstrate that ECB is responsibly managing state funds as well as money that is donated to us from members and businesses that support our work, in keeping with the directives of the Board's strategic plan.

Ms. Kenney asked how ECB determines when to seek out grants. Ms. Bechtol replied that grants must align with ECB's strategic plan. The work ECB does is so specific that there are not often opportunities for grants. When the federal government authorized the NGWS program, ECB knew that this was mission-focused and something to pursue. Ms. Bechtol noted that this equipment will allow ECB to run a new a new type of emergency alerting service and supports ECB's rotating 20-year capital plan.

AGENDA ITEM 3. Action: Election of Board Officers (Bylaws Article II, Section 3)

Vice Chair Kenney called for nominations to elect officers annually as required in the bylaws. Leah Luke nominated Alyssa Kenney for Chair. Jan Botz nominated Paul Hammer for Vice Chair. Roy Christianson nominated Eric Fulcomer for secretary. There were no other nominations from the floor.

Roy Christianson motioned to elect the slate of nominees, seconded by Leah Luke. The motion was carried by unanimous voice vote.

AGENDA ITEM 4. Presentation of FY24 Audit – *Leah Gaffney, Baker Tilly*

Ms. Kenney offered kudos to the staff for the work that an audit process requires and the great results of the audit.

Leah Gaffney, manager at Baker Tilly, introduced herself and Olivia Dew, and acknowledged John Rader, the managing director of the audit who was not able to attend the meeting. Ms. Gaffney

outlined the audit schedule. The bulk of testing is done in mid-November. They obtain and test the financial statements provided by ECB in December. And in January they test the three annual financial reports that are required to be submitted to CPB. Their deliverables include: an opinion on the financial statements; the reporting and insights document; and three opinions on the three different required annual financial reports.

The reporting and insights document is communication to the board on the audit including some required communications. No internal control deficiencies were found. No audit adjustments were made during the testing.

The Governmental Accounting Standards Board (GASB) typically introduces new rules that governmental entities need to follow each year. Coming up for this current fiscal year are “compensated absences” (GASB 101) and “certain risk disclosures” (GASB 102). Baker Tilly will work with ECB to ensure that these are implemented accurately, and that the financial statements reflect the current and the new standards.

Ms. Gaffney then reviewed the financial results. ECB’s net position in the current year has increased over the previous year by about 4.7 percent. The income statement showed that revenues were slightly lower than last year, and operating expenses showed a similar decrease. Non-operating revenues and expenses pointed to investment income earnings, which increased.

Ms. Kenney asked what the agency needs to know about the new GASB rules for next year. Ms. Gaffney noted that some of the GASB standards don’t apply to ECB. However, ECB has employees who carry forward leave balances, so she anticipates there will be effort needed for GASB 101 including a valuation of leave balances. Instead of a probability percentage, the new standard will be based on historical data. She has not heard many details about GASB 102. Baker Tilly will look more closely at 103 and 104. There is possibly a 105 coming as well.

Ms. Kenney asked whether a standard applied to the last day of the fiscal year applies to the whole fiscal year. Ms. Gaffney answered affirmatively. There were no other questions from the board.

Mr. Christianson commented that the audits are in such good shape not only here but throughout the Wisconsin public media environment.

Ms. Kenney congratulated the ECB finance team again and thanked Baker Tilly.

AGENDA ITEM 5. Information: Q2 Financial Report – *Aimee Wright, Director of Finance*

Director of Finance Aimee Wright presented the second quarter financial report for FY25 which ended December 31, 2024.

Ms. Wright shared that agency financials are right where they are expected to be at this point in the year.

Beginning with Revenues, Ms. Wright noted that now that the audit is complete, ECB can expect to receive additional tranches of grant funding from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB). CPB provides about 10% of ECB’s annual funding.

Ms. Kenney asked why the endowment revenue is so much larger than in FY24. Ms. Wright answered that per the spending policy for the endowments at the Foundation, ECB may spend up to five percent of the previous 12 quarters on strategic initiatives. ECB decided to tap those funds to lend additional support to radio's network realignment project. This money has not been transferred from the WPBF to the agency yet, as we prefer to keep money in the investment accounts as long as possible.

Ms. Wright moved on to expenses noting that everything is tracking to budget. ECB has paid some bills early to take advantage of discounts making the percentages for those lines look a little higher than typical for this point in the year. Engineering expenses may appear lower than expected because they do not include encumbrances. There is a large, planned expense coming up that will appear toward the end of the fiscal year so funds are being tracked for that.

Ms. Kenney said that since this is just an informational item no approval is required.

There were no other questions or comments from the board.

AGENDA ITEM 6. Information: Radio Reception and WPR Coverage – *Adam Hargrove, Director of Engineering*

Engineering Director Adam Hargrove introduced himself stating that he has worked with ECB for the last seven years. He is retired from the U.S. Air Force where he worked with reconnaissance and direction-finding radio frequency (RF) systems. His informational presentation will focus on FM reception and WPR network coverage.

Mr. Hargrove began by saying that ECB consistently monitors audience feedback to ensure quality. When ECB learns about poor reception issues, three things are evaluated: 1. Did something change in the listener's environment? 2. Is something broken in the broadcast? 3. Or do they just lack coverage?

Some of the factors that can affect FM reception are weather phenomena, geographical obstructions, human-made structures, and receiver sensitivity.

Tropospheric ducting is when a warm layer of air traps a cooler layer of air beneath it. Typically, the atmosphere gets cooler with altitude and that allows radio waves to disperse evenly. However, in a temperature inversion or a ducting situation, warm air acts like a cap that traps cooler air and causes radio waves to bend and travel farther than usual. This phenomenon can lead to unexpected signal reach which can cause interference for distant broadcast stations.

Rain and humidity can also disrupt radio signals. Water droplets in the air absorb and scatter radio waves, weakening signals as they travel. During heavy rain, signal degradation becomes more pronounced, often leading to static or reduced clarity in the broadcast. High humidity can also contribute to signal attenuation, but typically it's not as bad as heavy rainfall. Thunderstorms can wreak havoc. Lightning typically causes issues; it can create or generate a broad spectrum of electromagnetic noise, which raises the noise floor when a system is trying to receive an FM broadcast. That noise can interfere with FM signals, causing static and potential loss of broadcast

altogether. The severity of the interference depends on the proximity and intensity of the thunderstorm.

Another issue that ECB has to deal with on a regular basis is terrain or topography. Natural features such as hills, mountains and valleys can obstruct FM radio signals. Physical barriers block the line of sight of FM transmission. If there is not a clear line of sight, there will be dead zones for radio reception.

Dense forest and other forms of thick vegetation can absorb and scatter signals. The presence of trees and foliage can weaken signals, especially during wet conditions when the vegetation is holding moisture. This can lead to reduced signal clarity, particularly in dense forest areas like we have in our state. Additionally, reception changes for listeners as leaves come on and off seasonally. The Audience Services team gets more calls in the spring and autumn because of this.

Human-made structures can block reception. Materials used in construction like metal and concrete can absorb and reflect radio waves, leading to reduced signal quality. Tall buildings can create significant barriers, necessitating strategic placement of antennas to maintain clear line of sight. Reception changes when one drives into a parking garage, for example.

Electromagnetic interference can also wreak havoc on broadcasts. Electrical devices and infrastructure can generate electromagnetic interference, just like lightning. Sources of this interference could be power lines, industrial machinery and household electronics. These devices produce electromagnetic noise that can disrupt FM broadcasts and cause static and signal degradation.

Finally, receiver sensitivity really matters. Not every radio is built the same. Receiver sensitivity is measured as the ability to receive and demodulate to get information from a weak signal. Sensitivity is quantified as the lowest power level from which we can get the useful information desired.

When ECB gets feedback from audience members that they're having issues, one of the first things asked is the listener's address. That helps determine if it is a terrain issue.

When WPR worked through the recent optimization process, news was prioritized over music in each market. Most markets have both, but there are some holes in coverage. ECB helps with those markets by maintaining HD broadcasts of the alternate format. The WHAD analog FM signal serves a wide area and its HD2 signal does a good job of covering suburban areas but it doesn't quite get into downtown Milwaukee. Still, it is an option ECB is providing to compensate for the news service that was lost when WHAD's primary service shifted to music.

The problem with HD is there are simply not a lot of HD radios on the market. Most vehicles have it, but a lot of folks just aren't educated on what HD is and how to get it. The Audience Services team does a great job of working with listeners to figure out their issues. If board members hear anything that doesn't sound right on a broadcast, Mr. Hargrove invited them to let the agency know.

With no further questions, members of the board and Chair Kenney complimented Mr. Hargrove on his informative presentation.

AGENDA ITEM 7. Adjournment

Roy Christianson moved, seconded by Paul Hammer to adjourn. The motion passed by unanimous voice vote.

Ms. Kenney announced the meeting adjourned at 10:49 A.M.