



Educational Communications Board

ECB FY 2024-2027 Strategic Plan

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Introduction

MISSION: 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 implementation and distribution of advanced technologies that support education, information, and public safety. As part of that mission, public radio and television programs and services that reflect and respond to the educational needs and cultural interests of the state are made available throughout the State of Wisconsin.

VISION: The Educational Communications Board is committed to ensuring that Wisconsin residents have equitable and uninterrupted 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 Board of Regents of the University of Wisconsin System. ECB is the licensee of 5 television stations and 6 TV translators; 19 radio stations and 4 radio translators and provides infrastructure and maintenance for all the stations within the Wisconsin Public Radio (WPR) and PBS Wisconsin networks. Additionally, ECB maintains 28 National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) weather stations (13 federal/15 state) located throughout Wisconsin. Under contractual agreement, ECB serves as television master control for Milwaukee PBS which is licensed to Milwaukee Area Technical College.

ECB's core focus is the network transmission of public radio and TV. This work includes the construction, maintenance and security 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, as well as compliance with state and federal regulations.

ECB serves as the primary broadcast relay for the statewide Emergency Alert System, which includes AMBER Alert and the NOAA weather alerts. ECB networks provide PBS WARN (Warning, Alert, Response Network) which ensures uninterrupted distribution of Wireless Emergency Alerts (WEA) from local, state and national government agencies. When disruptions or cybersecurity events occur at carrier facilities, PBS WARN provides an immediate alternate source of inbound WEA messages.

ECB also coordinates with other public safety organizations for the efficient use of resources. These entities include: the Wisconsin Highway Patrol, Wisconsin Division of Emergency Management and the Department of Military Affairs, the Department of Homeland Security, U.S. Coast Guard, Civil Air Patrol, 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 agencies including the Wisconsin Division of Emergency Management and the Department of Military Affairs, the Department of Transportation, and the Department of Natural Resources. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Federal Bureau of Investigation, U.S. Coast Guard, U.S. Customs and Border Patrol, County emergency responders, Minnesota DOT, university research entities, school districts, local hospitals, utility service providers, local broadband and cellular service providers are also tenants at ECB facilities.

Agency policy allows for excess tower capacity beyond public service needs to be made available to commercial entities, producing joint benefits of increasing agency revenue and maximizing communications services to Wisconsin residents.

Strategic Directions

In adherence to board policy requiring a three-year strategic planning cycle, the Board met in October 2023 to initiate the development of the plan for FY24-27. As a result, the Board directed the agency to:

- I. Strengthen the impact, reach and performance of the ECB to better serve all of the residents and unique communities of Wisconsin;
- II. Assure responsible stewardship of agency resources in carrying out the work of the ECB; and
- III. Serve and engage current and new audiences using methods that support ubiquitous statewide service.

These directives will inform the operational strategy of the agency. Actions taken to meet these objectives may range from one-time events to multi-year initiatives. 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 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 residents and unique communities of Wisconsin.

Actions:

1. Plan, construct, develop, maintain and secure a reliable statewide broadcast communications system that equitably serves the public.
 - Establish, maintain, modernize and secure the statewide broadcast network interconnection and transmission facilities.
 - Monitor public safety responses regularly to ensure system reliability.
 - Sustain ECB’s role as the backbone of the broadcast relay for the state’s Emergency Alert System.
 - Support PreK-12 education and home learning by creating and offering Wisconsin-focused curriculum-based media to parents, teachers, caregivers and students.
 - Deliver news, issues and conversations of national, state and regional interest, and provide cultural enrichment through music and arts programming on the Wisconsin Public Radio networks.
 - Deliver educational content, public affairs programming and cultural enrichment on the PBS Wisconsin television network.
2. Prioritize network expansion to underserved and/or remote audiences throughout Wisconsin. Identify opportunities for increased, enhanced, or new services.
3. Inform legislators and the public about the value ECB delivers to Wisconsin. Engage with state and federal legislators to demonstrate the value of our services and infrastructure while advocating for continued public support as leverage for private fundraising.
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. Support the staff by prioritizing their ongoing professional development; advocating for appropriate compensation; and fostering a culture of belonging in the organization.
2. Strengthen coordination of cross-organizational strategy with our partners at UW-Madison to make most effective use of resources and talent.
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: Serve and engage current and new audiences using methods that support ubiquitous statewide service.

Actions:

1. Continually evolve and evaluate relevant methods of media delivery to the statewide audience.
2. Provide reliable delivery of PBS Wisconsin, Wisconsin Public Radio, Milwaukee PBS, NOAA weather alerts and all other public safety services and messaging.