



Educational Communications Board

2023 – 2025 Biennial Report



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To: The Honorable Tony Evers, Governor of Wisconsin
Members of the Wisconsin State Legislature
People of the State of Wisconsin

The [Educational Communications Board \(ECB\)](#) is an independent state agency overseen by a [Board of Directors](#). ECB is charged with the responsibility of planning, developing, constructing and operating non-commercial radio and television broadcasting systems for the presentation of educational, informational and public service programming, along with public safety communications to the people of Wisconsin. In a [statutory partnership with the University of Wisconsin System Board of Regents](#), ECB operates the [PBS Wisconsin](#) and [Wisconsin Public Radio \(WPR\)](#) networks statewide, and provides support for the K-12 services of [PBS Wisconsin Education](#). The agency also serves as the master control for Milwaukee PBS (licensed to Milwaukee Area Technical College) on a contractual basis.

ECB stewards 86 Federal Communications Commission (FCC) licenses for public radio, public television, satellite uplink and downlink, Educational Broadband Service and studio transmitter microwave links on behalf of the State. ECB operates and maintains the statewide network of 28 [National Weather Service](#) transmitters and provides the primary broadcast relay for the state's Emergency Alert and AMBER Alert systems.

1. 2023 – 2025 Agency Performance

- [Wisconsin Public Radio](#) – The weekly audience grew consistently and by the end of the biennium had achieved 129% of the monthly goal. Membership revenue also grew with more than 50,000 memberships.
- [PBS Wisconsin](#) – Monthly broadcast viewership exceeded our biennial goal with more than 1.3 million viewers. Membership numbers continued to increase and also exceeded our goal with more than 77,000 members across Wisconsin. Aggregated monthly engagements across all delivery platforms achieved 105% of goal.
- [PBS Wisconsin Education](#) – An average of 73,344 monthly online K-12 instructional media sessions reflected continued growth in engagement of Wisconsin students with the online instructional media created by PBS Wisconsin Education staff and Wisconsin educators.
- [Network reliability](#) – remained steady at 99.99%. ECB's safety and security practices along with our robust backup systems ensure the ongoing health of our networks and the staff that maintain them.

Public Broadcasting

ECB's primary focus is the network transmission of 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's specific functions related to public broadcasting are focused on guaranteeing efficient and reliable transmission to state residents via a fiber-based broadcast interconnect system and transmitters located throughout Wisconsin. ECB is responsible for delivering WPR and PBS Wisconsin's state-centered content and bringing the outside world to Wisconsin.

Over the 2023-2025 biennium, PBS Wisconsin and WPR continued their strong traditions of producing content that celebrates the stories of people from every corner of our great state. Together, they added to the ongoing series [*Wisconsin Life*](#), a statewide storytelling project that is now in its tenth season. The series showcased unique stories and people from Wisconsin such as [*a Madison veteran who served as a medic, motorcyclist and bugler during WWII*](#) and a [*Wisconsin Rapids family that has fostered generations of excellence and community connection through their waterskiing performances*](#).

Both services celebrated the creativity and artistry of young musicians through broadcasts and digital streams of the Wisconsin School Music Association [*High School State Honors concerts*](#) and [*The Final Forte*](#), a concert that pairs young artists with the Madison Symphony Orchestra.

Both services co-presented the [*Wisconsin Remembers*](#) exhibit, a partnership with the Wisconsin Veterans Museum, which was displayed in the State Capitol Building, the [*Highground Veterans Memorial*](#) and locations around the state. This traveling exhibit features a photo for each of the 1,161 Wisconsin residents listed on the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C.

PBS Wisconsin

PBS Wisconsin marked its 70th anniversary in 2024. For seven decades, PBS Wisconsin has enriched, educated, and entertained audiences across the state through impactful storytelling and programming. Last year, PBS Wisconsin connected with more than 1.3 million monthly broadcast viewers. The reach and engagement with PBS KIDS® programming on PBS Wisconsin reached new milestones, with 4.1 million views per month on average across all platforms.

On television, PBS Wisconsin continued to tell the story of our state's communities and the people who have forged their history with the newest installment of the [*Wisconsin Hometown Stories series*](#) in Beloit. [*Wisconsin Lighthouses*](#) illuminated the history, architecture and lifesaving stories of the state's navigational beacons, while [*an innovative interactive feature*](#) invited viewers to explore every facet of Door County's Cana Island lighthouse.

The [Garden and Green Living Expo](#) and [The Great Wisconsin Quilt Show](#) continued to grow as they engaged community members from across Wisconsin — and across the United States — at two three-day events in Madison. The 2025 Garden and Green Living Expo had 12,947 attendees (an increase of more than 2,000 from the previous event), 140 educational classes, 255 vendor booths, and more than 230 community volunteers. The Great Wisconsin Quilt Show was one of the largest quilting events in the country, with 18,253 attendees (an increase of nearly 3,000 people from the previous event), 600 quilts on display, 200 educational classes, 350 vendor booths, and more than 450 community volunteers.

PBS Wisconsin Education

PBS Wisconsin Education provided access to compelling educational content aligned with state academic standards for children at all stages of learning. Fourteen new standards-aligned multimedia resources were released, including [The Look Back](#) and [Wisconsin Biographies](#) that celebrate Wisconsin history, people, and culture — all original and completely cost-free to use by educators in public, private, and home school environments. Through outreach and professional learning, connections with 4,976 educators sparked inquiry-based learning and built background knowledge with these resources.

Working with early childhood education partners, PBS Wisconsin Education’s early learning programs helped Wisconsin’s littlest learners build early literacy skills needed to be successful in school and life.

PBS Wisconsin Education partnered with libraries, schools, educational agencies, and professional associations across the state. They worked with 46 partners in FY25 to support educational priorities like teaching about Wisconsin First Nations, civics education, and digital citizenship with learners of all ages. PBS Wisconsin Education noted that 98% of its surveyed partners saw positive outcomes from their relationship with PBS Wisconsin Education.

Public media supports and strengthens education for all children, families, and educators in Wisconsin, providing educational materials and professional development opportunities created in collaboration with Wisconsin educators. PBS Wisconsin Education was presented with the [“Overall Excellence in Education” Public Media Award](#) in September of 2024.

Wisconsin Public Radio

After more than two years of analysis, audience research and careful planning, Wisconsin Public Radio (WPR) reorganized its statewide service to help listeners more easily find and enjoy news and music programs. In May of 2024, WPR’s two networks — *NPR News & Music* and *The Ideas Network* — were renamed and restructured as *WPR News* and *WPR Music*.

At the same time, WPR launched the new daily program [Wisconsin Today](#) that covers current and emerging issues with a decidedly Wisconsin point of view.

WPR is the only statewide Wisconsin-owned and focused broadcast network. With reporters and studios in seven cities around the state and in the Capitol, WPR invited listeners to ask questions of their elected officials, guest experts and interesting people from around the world. Hosts and guests offered useful tips for everything from home renovation, to gardening, and wildlife on popular segments like [Home Improvement](#) and [Garden Talk](#). Events like [Bayfield in Bloom](#) had gardening experts answer questions from live audience or callers about trees, shrubs, flowers and vegetables at the Bayfield Lakeside Pavilion. [WPR Classical Music Day](#) featured young Milwaukee musicians in a live statewide WPR broadcast.

Public Safety

Wisconsin's broadcast infrastructure, constructed and maintained by ECB, delivers essential statewide emergency communications at the lowest possible cost to taxpayers. These systems serve as the critical backbone for public safety alerts throughout the state, offering redundancy when less resilient forms of communication, like cellular technology, fail in the stress of emergencies. ECB's radio and television stations serve as the relay points for national and state Emergency Alert System (EAS) activations and their required monthly tests. Wisconsin Emergency Management (WEM) relies on ECB's operations center as its designated backup site in the event its operations center is ever compromised. ECB is also a key partner with the Department of Justice in distributing AMBER alerts. Additionally, ECB operates PBS WARN (Warning, Alert, and Response Network) in Wisconsin, the federally mandated over-the-air backup to the Wireless Emergency Alert System that reinforces cellular alert systems across Wisconsin.

ECB manages and maintains all 28 state and federal National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) transmitter stations in Wisconsin. These sites receive weather information directly from National Weather Service offices and broadcast 24 hours a day. First responders, law enforcement officers, farmers, sailors, fishers, hunters and outdoors enthusiasts alike rely on these alerts when they are outside cell phone range.

ECB's robust tower system provides important signal points for critical non-weather emergency alerts in coordination with other public safety organizations such as the Wisconsin Highway Patrol, Wisconsin Division of Emergency Management and the Department of Military Affairs, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, U. S. Coast Guard, Civil Air Patrol, first responders and 911 centers.

ECB's excess tower capacity is utilized by other state agencies without cost, and on a contract basis with federal agencies such as NOAA, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and U.S. Customs and Border Patrol. Agency policy allows remaining capacity to be made available to outside entities, producing joint benefits of creating program revenue and maximizing communications services to Wisconsin residents. These tenants include county emergency responders as well as the Minnesota Department of Transportation, university research entities, school districts, local hospitals, utility service providers, and local broadband and cellular service providers.

ECB continued our partnership with the Department of Military Affairs, Division of Emergency Management in standing up the Wisconsin Interoperability System for Communications 800 (WISCOM 800). WISCOM 800 is the upgraded version of WISCOM, our state's radio system that permits emergency responders from varying public safety disciplines to communicate across jurisdictions during major disasters and large-scale incidents. ECB's tower infrastructure at Delafield, Wisconsin was chosen as the first site for the WISCOM 800 buildout.

2. 2023 – 2025 Major Program Goals and Objectives

Program 1: Instructional Technology

Goal 1: Broadcast Wisconsin Public Radio (WPR), PBS Wisconsin and Milwaukee PBS to all residents of the state. Utilize the reach these services for public safety purposes.

Objective/Activity:

- Construct, maintain, operate and secure the transmission facilities necessary to broadcast WPR and PBS Wisconsin.
- Engineer, maintain, operate and secure the broadcast interconnect which delivers content to these facilities.
- Construct, maintain and operate the master control center that distributes public television content statewide.
- Utilize public broadcasting infrastructure for Emergency Alert and Amber Alert systems needs as outlined in the Wisconsin Emergency Alert System plan.
- Operate and maintain state and federal National Weather Service transmitters.
- Where excess capacity exists, make facilities available to:
 - Federal agencies such as the Department of Homeland Security and the Coast Guard
 - State agencies such as the Department of Transportation, Department of Natural Resources and State Patrol
 - Local law enforcement agencies
- Assure all facilities function at a high level of reliability necessary for broadcast and public safety purposes.

Goal 2: Realize the Wisconsin Idea by producing, acquiring and delivering high-quality WPR programming statewide that serves the public's need for educational, civic and cultural discussion of significant issues.

Objective/Activity:

- Present programming designed to instruct, inform and educate the audience.
- Increase awareness of issues through in-depth news analysis, public affairs and call-in programming.

- Provide cultural enrichment through music and arts formats not served by commercial media.

Goal 3: Realize the Wisconsin Idea by producing, acquiring and delivering high-quality PBS Wisconsin educational, informational and entertainment programming.

Objective/Activity:

- Present programming designed to instruct, inform and educate the audience.
- Increase awareness of issues through public affairs programs and in-depth news analysis.
- Provide cultural enrichment through history, music and arts programs not served by commercial media.

Goal 4: Improve and enhance the learning experience for Wisconsin's K-12 students, educators and families by providing high-quality, standards-based instructional media that respond to the state's specific educational and content area needs.

Objective/Activity:

- Produce, acquire and deliver high-quality K-12 media to meet the specific needs of Wisconsin learners using current technologies.
- Provide user support and outreach services to Wisconsin educators and families through PBS Wisconsin Education.

3. Flexible Scheduling

Given the agency's 24/7 emergency alerting responsibilities, rotating shifts and non-standard scheduling have been part of agency operations for decades. Half of ECB's positions are associated with the operation, maintenance and management of significant infrastructure which require on-site presence.

ECB supports and makes available part-time and limited term employment. We also have a growing internship program for talent development.

ECB receives human resources services from DOA HR Region 1. The agency has adopted their telecommuting guidelines and policies. Employees that are eligible and interested in telecommuting may request it. In the 2023-25 biennium, 12% of ECB employees worked under telecommuting agreements.

ECB is proud of our ongoing mission to protect, educate and connect the people of our state.

ECB delivered 6,269 regionalized emergency weather alerts, AMBER alerts and other emergency messages in FY25 and 8,330 in FY24. For example, alerts from ECB warned Grant County residents about the destructive tornado in July 2024.

The services of the ECB connect Wisconsin residents to the story of our state. PBS Wisconsin celebrated its 70th anniversary in 2024 and WPR – the oldest public radio entity in the United States – marked 108 years in service in 2025.

In 2024, we launched our newest radio station, WEPP in Rice Lake, as part of the *WPR Music* network. The call letters represent the initials of a former executive director of ECB, Gene Purcell (EPP for Eugene Patrick Purcell), who died in 2021.

Awards for original content are a testament to the outstanding work the staff at PBS Wisconsin and WPR have done in this biennium. WPR was recognized by the [Milwaukee Press Club Awards](#), [Wisconsin Broadcasters Association](#), and the [Regional Edward R. Murrow Awards](#). PBS Wisconsin earned awards from the [Milwaukee Press Club](#), [National Educational Telecommunications Association Public Media](#), [National Academy of Television Arts & Sciences, Chicago/ Midwest Chapter Emmy Awards](#) and a [National Edward R. Murrow Award](#).

ECB is honored to be an integral part of the ever-changing technology and culture of the State of Wisconsin. The high-quality services we provide play an essential and vital role in the lives of the residents of our state, and we are privileged to serve in this capacity.

I encourage you to spend a few minutes exploring the resources in this report to learn more about the important work of the Educational Communications Board.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Marta S. Bechtol". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Marta" being more prominent and the last name "Bechtol" written in a continuous script.

Marta S. Bechtol
Executive Director