



**Educational  
Communications  
Board**

**2017 – 2019 Biennial Report**

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

The Educational Communications Board (ECB) is an independent state agency overseen by an appointed 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, and public safety communications for the people of Wisconsin. ECB also provides support for public media's K-12 initiatives.

In partnership with the University of Wisconsin-Madison, ECB operates the Wisconsin Public Radio (WPR) and Wisconsin Public Television (WPT) networks, ensuring the delivery of public media and education services to a statewide audience. While there have been many changes in technology since the founding of the agency in the early 1970's, the agency's essential mission of using technological platforms to deliver non-commercial public media remains unchanged. In fact, the history of public media in Wisconsin dates all the way back to 1917 with our first radio broadcasts, marking this biennium as the centennial of the oldest public broadcasting station in the nation.

Along with providing the technical infrastructure necessary to distribute WPR and WPT throughout Wisconsin, ECB also provides essential public safety services. The agency operates and maintains the statewide National Weather Service network and serves as the state relay for the Emergency Alert System (EAS) and Amber Alert.

### **2017 – 2019 Budget Performance and Operation**

ECB's budget details for the 2017-2019 biennium can be found here:

<https://doa.wi.gov/budget/SBO/2017-19%20225%20ECB%20Executive%20Budget.pdf>

During the 2017-2019 biennial cycle, WPR and WPT were utilized by nearly one-million people in Wisconsin as well as by thousands of educators on any given week during the years 2017-2019. ECB continues to experience success in our concerted efforts to broaden the base of financial support for both public radio and public television, and takes pride in the measurement of our performance over the 2017 – 2019 biennium.

- Wisconsin Public Television (<https://wpt.org/>) stretched to achieve nearly 120% of its membership goal, and reached 98.3% of its underwriting target.

- Wisconsin Public Radio (<https://www.wpr.org/>) met 98.8% of its membership goal for the biennium, and firmly hit its fundraising target at 102.5%.
- K-12 instructional media use (<https://wpteducation.org/>) reached 99.54% of its target goal.
- Network reliability continued to meet industry standards for 24/7 broadcast operation.

During 2017-2019 biennial cycle, ECB provided its broadcast, public safety and education services with 55.18 FTE, unchanged from the 2015-2017 budget. The agency saw its GPR reduced by another 1.9% on the heels of a 20% reduction experienced during the 2015-2017 biennial cycle which included the loss of state support for K-12 media for Wisconsin students and teachers.

### **Public Broadcasting**

ECB's specific functions related to public broadcasting are focused on guaranteeing efficient and reliable transmission to state residents via the Broadcast Interconnect system and transmitters located throughout Wisconsin. During this biennium, the agency was challenged by the Federal Communications Commission's first-ever forward auction and nation-wide repack of television broadcast spectrum. This unique and complicated process began with many unknowns that had the potential to cost the state upward of \$14M. Through pro-active planning, ECB ended up with two FCC-mandated channel relocations in Green Bay and La Crosse that were successfully accomplished ahead of the national repack schedule. Additionally, ECB managed the project without requiring any state capital funds, and was also able to take advantage of both revenue and signal expansion opportunities in the process.

In terms of content, WPR and WPT continue to deliver Wisconsin content to the people of the state in ways that no other media can. They also bring the outside world to Wisconsin through affiliations with NPR ([www.npr.org](http://www.npr.org)) and PBS ([www.pbs.org](http://www.pbs.org)).

Whether it's the daily talk show coverage produced on the "Ideas" network of WPR, place-based insight and information online at Wiscontext.org; discussion of current events and issues on "Here and Now" with Frederica Freyberg on WPT; the "Wisconsin Life" series on WPR and WPT; or a unique glimpse of our state with "Portraits From Rural Wisconsin", WPR and WPT strive to bring high quality educational programming with a "Wisconsin" sense of place to the state's citizens.

In addition, by partnering with our public broadcasting colleagues at Milwaukee PBS and WDSE-TV in Duluth Minnesota, ECB is able to ensure broadcast delivery of its Wisconsin-based programming to the entire state.

You can learn more about the work of those broadcast partners here: Milwaukee PBS (<https://www.milwaukeekeepbs.org/>) and WDSE-TV (<http://www.wdse.org/>)

**Public Safety**

ECB engineering staff is responsible for the efficient and reliable distribution of the statewide network of 28 National Weather Service transmitters (NOAA,) as well as providing for the technical “backbone” for the Emergency Alert System (EAS) and Amber Alert. In total, the ECB is the steward of 64 Federal Communications Commission licenses for public radio, public television, satellite uplink and downlink, All-Hazards Radio, Educational Broadband Service and other telecommunications facilities which serve Wisconsin.

This link provides you with more information about ECB’s public safety responsibilities:

<https://ecb.org/services.html>

**K-12 Education**

A key focus for the agency during this biennium was to reconfigure and reconstitute K-12 education services in cooperation with our partners at Wisconsin Public Television. Taking advantage of workflow efficiencies and resource sharing enabled through the agency’s partnership agreement with UW, the organization was able to revitalize its efforts for K-12 education. A multi-party collaboration within this new operational framework led to the production of *Jo Wilder and the Capitol Case*. This free online video game is set in and around the Wisconsin State Capitol. It recently received a Silver Medal from the 2019 International Serious Play Awards, the most prestigious learning games award program. *Jo Wilder* assists educators in teaching Social Studies, while giving students the chance to be “history detectives.” This project is a great example of essential state-focused instructional media that is not available through commercial media producers.

The new home of *WPT Education* and classroom content can be found here: <https://wpt.org/education>

**2019 – 2021 Agency Programs, Goals, Objectives and Activities**

ECB’s budget details for the 2019-2021 biennium can be found here:

<https://doa.wi.gov/budget/SBO/2019-21%20225%20ECB%20Executive%20Budget.pdf>

**Program 1: Instructional Technology**

**Goal:** Realize the Wisconsin Idea by producing, acquiring and delivering high-quality Wisconsin Public Radio programming statewide serving 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; and provide cultural enrichment through music and arts formats not served by commercial media.

**Goal:** Realize the Wisconsin Idea by producing, acquiring and delivering high-quality Wisconsin Public Television 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; and provide cultural enrichment through history, music and arts programs not served by commercial media.

**Goal:** Improve and enhance the learning experience for Wisconsin's K-12 teachers and students 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 students and teacher using current classroom technologies; provide user support and outreach services to Wisconsin educators.

**Goal:** Provide access to Wisconsin Public Radio and Wisconsin Public Television to all citizens of the state. Utilize the reach of the state network for public safety purposes.

**Objective/Activity:** Build, maintain and operate the broadcast interconnect which delivers signals throughout Wisconsin. Build, maintain and operate the transmission facilities necessary to operate WPR, WPT, and National Weather Service transmitters. Utilize ECB facilities for Emergency Alert System/Amber Alert needs as outlined in the Wisconsin EAS plan. Where excess capacity exists, make facilities available to federal agencies such as the Department of Homeland Security and the Coast Guard; and state agencies such as the Department of Transportation, Department of Natural Resources, State Patrol and local law enforcement agencies. Assure all ECB facilities function at a high level of reliability necessary for broadcast and public safety purposes.

### **Agency Success in Creating Flexible Work Schedules and Alternative Work Patterns**

The ECB has had effective methods for accommodating personnel flexible work patterns in place since the early 1980s. ECB has also implemented policies for telecommuting and work-at-home procedures. ECB continues to offer its employees permanent part-time positions, job sharing, flexible-time work schedules and other essential alternative employment opportunities which have been found helpful in preparing the agency for its emergency COOP responsibilities.

**Employing Veterans**

The ECB is committed to identifying talent for our workforce among those who have proudly served our state and our nation in the military forces. At the close of FY19, military veterans comprised 15.21% of the agency's classified workforce.

The ECB staff feels extremely fortunate and honored to be an integral part of the ever changing culture of the State of Wisconsin. Our staff fully appreciate and understand the fact that the high quality services we provide play an essential and vital role in the lives of the citizens of Wisconsin, and we feel 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,



Marta S. Bechtol  
Executive Director