

## Minutes of Meeting #476

Nebraska Educational Telecommunications Commission  
Nebraska Educational Telecommunications Center  
1800 N 33<sup>rd</sup> St.  
Lincoln, NE  
December 7, 2023

Present: Commissioner Dorothy Anderson  
Commissioner Nick Baxter (Chair)  
Commissioner Darrin Good  
Commissioner Marilyn Hadley  
Commissioner Patricia Kircher  
Commissioner Brian Maher  
Commissioner Dan O'Neill  
Commissioner Paul Turman  
Commissioner Courtney Wittstruck

Absent: Commissioner Clay Smith

Advance notice of the public meeting was sent to Nebraska news media by means of a news release forwarded from the Commission office with Agenda posted on the state and Nebraska Public Media websites.

Chair Nick Baxter called the meeting #476 to order at 10:33 a.m.

Following the call of the roll, it was determined that a duly constituted quorum of Commissioners were present.

The Chair called for public comment. There were none.

### **CONSENT AGENDA**

- The Chair requested approval of the minutes of meeting #475 as held on August 24, 2023. It was moved by Commissioner Baxter and seconded by Commissioner Turman to approve the minutes from meeting #475. Roll call was recorded as follows: Voting aye: Commissioner Anderson, Baxter, Good, Hadley, Kircher, O'Neill, Wittstruck. Opposed: None.

## **COMMISSION ADMINISTRATIVE AGENDA**

- **Action Item #1 – FORVIS Audited Financial Report for Fiscal Year ended June 30, 2023.** It was moved by Director Good and seconded by Director Hadley to recommend that the NETC accept and place on file the FORVIS audited financial report for the fiscal year ended June 30, 2023, for the Nebraska Educational Telecommunication Commission. Roll call was recorded as follows: Voting aye: Commissioner Anderson, Baxter, Good, Hadley, Kircher, O’Neill, Wittstruck. Opposed: None. The Finance Committee met prior to the full Foundation meeting to review the report in greater detail.

## **COMMISSION INFORMATION AGENDA**

### **General Manager’s Report**

General Manager, Mark Leonard presented the report:

- Nominations for Vice Chair, Executive Committee and Finance committee will be announced and voted on March 28, 2024. Nikki Sinclair will reach out to all Commissioners in January 2024 to garner nominations.
- Chief Operating Officer Peter Clowney joined on October 23, 2023.
- State and Federal funding have no update at this time.
  - APTS annual summit will be held in Washington, D.C. in February 2024. It is time to meet with Nebraska Senate and Congress members.
- Vision Maker Media will be leaving the Nebraska Public Media building and branching out on their own. Will be leaving the umbrella of the University of Nebraska. Effective April 30, 2024.
- Equity study has been completed. Have received approval from UNL to implement staff increases. Over 60 employees are included in the increases. State employees were taken care of during union contracts. Nebraska Public Media is funding the increases.
- UNL operating at a deficit. Need to reduce spending by \$12 million this fiscal year. EVC’s office, which Nebraska Public Media is a part of, is assigned \$2.8 million to be reduced. In the coming years a \$56 million deficit will need to be tackled.
- Mark Leonard has set his retirement date for June 30, 2024. Statements and press releases will be forthcoming for the public facing side of the CEO role regarding the process of selecting a new CEO.

### **Education Update**

Chief Strategic Officer, Molly Delaney presented the report:

- Our Learning Neighborhood proposal (phase II of Ready to Learn grant) was awarded. We are working with Fremont partners: Washington Elementary Dual Language Program, Keene Memorial Library, and Fremont Family Coalition. The grant period began October 1, 2023, is ongoing for the next two years. We received training on the first RTL content to be used in multilingual (English/Spanish/K’iche’) events at Washington Elementary for preK-2<sup>nd</sup> grade on January 11<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup>. Training continues for the education staff and partners in December for Spring 2024 events.
- Education staff finalized the RTL Statewide grant proposal (an extension of earlier grant funding offered to CPB by USDOE) and submitted in mid-November. This proposal would extend our work in Fremont across the state to provide family engagement opportunities bridging the

school to home connection and professional development to help strengthen the quality of the early childhood workforce. We will work with additional statewide partners including the Early Learning Child Connect Coordinators serving all regions of the state. If awarded the statewide RTL extension will begin on April 1, 2023.

- We continue to share free print resources to children and adults to support literacy in our own neighborhood. In just over 5 months in operation we have added over 600 items to our library, the majority supporting print literacy for children in early childhood, elementary, and middle grades.
- We held a series of engagement events ahead of the Oct. 26 premiere of *Working Fires: Volunteer Fire Departments in Crisis*. We previewed the film on Oct. 20 at the Nebraska State Volunteer Firefighters Conference in South Sioux City for an audience of 75 volunteer firefighters from around the state. The response was very enthusiastic. Audience members express that they felt the documentary did good job highlighting the challenges that they face. They also said they would share information about the documentary with their communities and legislators.
- This fall we launched something new—a book club kit inspired by *The American Buffalo*. The kit explores the themes of conservation, stewardship and restoration of natural resources by pairing the book *Great Plains Bison* by Dan O’Brien (published by University of Nebraska Press) with the short film “Seed Warriors,” directed by Rebekka Schlichting. O’Brien owns Wild Idea Buffalo, a ranch in South Dakota, and is a featured interviewee in the Burns film. Schlichting’s film documents how members of the Pawnee Nation united with Nebraska farmers to preserve the tribe’s ancestral corn. The film stemmed from the station’s participation in Firelight Media’s *HomeGrown: Future Visions* series; it also aired on *Nebraska Stories*.
- After a busy fall for engagement, planning for the June edition of “On the Road” is moving into full swing. We will be in central Nebraska, visiting Grand Island, Kearney, and surrounding communities in that central I-80 corridor from approximately June 6 through 11. *Backyard Farmer* will be doing a remote as part of *On the Road*, and additional engagement and education events will be planned in early 2024.

## Engineering Report

Chief Technology Officer, Ling Ling Sun submitted the report:

- The National EAS Test for this year is set to take place on Wednesday, October 4, at 2:18 pm EDT. All EAS Participants are required to file in the FCC’s EAS Test Reporting System (ETRS) by the specific deadlines. Our plan includes submitting an amended ETRS no later than September 15, 2023. Additionally, file Form Two by October 5, and Form Three by November 20, 2023.
  - New Update: 2023 National EAS Test was held Oct. 4th at 2:20 pm Eastern time. All forms were filed accordingly.
- The FCC implemented new EAS regulations in November 2022, stipulating that all EAS Participants must transmit EAS messages in an IP-based format, wherever feasible, from 2 December 12, 2023, onwards. Moreover, the current technical terminology employed for the national alert originator code, national test code, and national emergency code must be replaced with plain language versions. To comply with these updated regulations and FCC rulemaking on EAS cybersecurity, our SAGE ENDEC devices will necessitate a firmware update, and we are presently collaborating with the manufacturer to ensure the update is executed before the deadline.

- New update: SAGE Alerting Systems has notified the FCC that they will not meet the December 12th deadline. As SAGE ENDEC users, we can operate with the out of compliance software for up to 60 days beyond the deadline. If the update is still not available after that, we will have to notify the FCC.
- In partnership with PBS and Intelsat, we have concluded the peaking and tuning process for the DDMS uplink on Galaxy 16 Transponder 22. We've achieved this by removing 3 dB of padding from transponder 22, allowing us to operate at an optimized lower power level.
  - New Update: Work continues with PBS on fine tuning Galaxy16 Transmission as needed. We have installed a Spectrum Analyzer in the DDMS for PBS to use for comparison. So far, after adding the Automatic Level Control to the transponder, things appear to be working better.
- CPB announced on Monday, August 7, 2023 “that FEMA’s Next Generation Warning System (NGWS) competitive grant program is ready for applications. This grant program will enable public television and public radio stations to replace and upgrade infrastructure that enhances critical alerting and warning capabilities in your communities.” The total amount of NGWS grant funds available is \$34 million for Fiscal Year 2023. In the coming weeks, CPB will host a series of informational webinars for prospective applicants, and training from FEMA will be available as well. We will be applying for this grant.
  - New Update: Submitted grant application on Nov. 8, 2023.

### Content-Television and Radio

Chief Content Officer, Nancy Finken presented the report:

- Due to changes in formats and locations for the NSAA High School Baseball and Softball Championships, Nebraska Public Media has added baseball in the spring and softball in the fall. The events are now “television friendly” and will be part of our annual coverage of high school championship events.
- November 20 and 21, it’s all hands-on deck to produce two days of football championships live from Memorial Stadium and an episode of “Big Red Wrap-Up” November 22 in the Ron Hull Studio after which our producers and crew will get a much-deserved break to enjoy the Thanksgiving holiday.
- Just in time for the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Memorial Stadium, Nebraska Public Media Content and Labs teams released a virtual tour of the stadium that allows visitors to experience a 2-D tour travel back in time to see Memorial Stadium as it was when it was first built, along with one of the venue’s first expansions as part of our multi-media project “In the Deed The Glory: Memorial Stadium.”
- In October, the local news series “Speaking of Nebraska” returned for a 4-episode run on television, repeating on radio and available online on demand. The show had been on hiatus due to staff vacancies, so it was good to dip back into that program giving News Director Jay Omar an opportunity to host and produce the series which will come back for additional episodes in 2024.
- From cooking advice to musical celebrations, the Thanksgiving holiday specials on radio will focus on food and gratitude. “Every Good Thing” gives classical music fans time to take stock in one of life’s most meaningful gifts: music. “The Splendid Table’s Turkey Confidential” is a annual favorite providing sage advice to cooks on undoubtedly one of the biggest cooking days of the year.

- The World television series “Stories from the Stage” recorded two episodes before an audience in our Ron Hull Studio in the spring and those programs were released this fall. We were pleased to partner with World and Vision Maker Media on the production which centered around Indigenous storytellers and the themes of sacred ground and sacred circle.
- Work has begun to renovate the Ron Hull television studio...new lighting, rigging, scenic design (sets,) etc... Contractors got a jump start on the project by tracing electrical circuits before the project starts in earnest on December 1. We have a tight timeline to complete the work before the start of the 2024 season of Backyard Farmer which returns in April. Special thanks to Doug Carlson who retired but agreed to come back to help me manage this project and to another retiree Foster Collins who lends his lighting expertise and studio history to round out our core team which includes leadership from Chad Mayer and Gavin Felix. We are excited and inspired by the project and look forward to creating new content in this modern studio.

### Labs

Chief Innovation Officer, Chad Davis presented the report:

Projects Currently in R&D include:

- Untitled Environmental-Themed Game
  - Potential release: 2025

Projects in Production include:

- Civics Scribble (w.t.)
  - Prototype Submitted in response to a Library of Congress call for entries last month.
  - Potential further development and wide release: 2024
- Menominee Homecoming (w.t.)
  - A general audience game that presents a Native American tribe in a modern light, while exploring traditions and culture
  - Designed for web browser and mobile app
  - This is a co-production with PBS Wisconsin
  - Potential release: 2025
- The American Homestead Experience – a game focused on the homestead experience in America from the 1870s to the 1940s
  - Anticipated launch of web browser experience in summer 2025
- Virtual Capitol upgrade
  - Evolving the Virtual Capitol experience from a virtual tour to a first-person explorer experience
  - Potential release: 2025
- Expedition Nebraska – collaboration with the University of Nebraska State Museum to launch virtual exhibits that can be viewed via the web, mobile devices and VR headsets as first-person explorer experiences.
  - Phase II in development now for 2024 production kickoff for 2026 release

### Administrative

Chief Administrative Officer, Julie Thomsen presented the report:

- **Equity Study** - An All Staff Meeting was held on September 27, 2023. The agenda included sharing an overview of the Wilson Group Equity Study results with staff. The initial goal of this study was to address positions that were below market and in the lower range. Nebraska Public Media received approval from UNL on October 31 to implement the majority of requested University staff equity adjustments. State of Nebraska staff received increases ranging from 5% - 20% this past July 1, 2023. Eligible State of Nebraska staff are projected to receive a 5% increase July 1, 2024. These annual increases addressed many of the equity concerns identified in the study for State employees.
- **Statement of Commitment to Diversity**- As required by the Corporation of Public Broadcasting for Community Service Grant (CSG) recipients, grantees are to address the following four topics in their annually updated diversity statement posted to the station website:
  - elements of diversity the grantee finds important to its public media work.
  - extent to which the grantee's staff and governance reflect such diversity.
  - the progress the grantee has made to increase its diversity in the last two to three years.
  - the grantee's diversity plans for the coming year.
- Nebraska Public Media will conduct research on diversity training for supervisors and employees to participate in that will build upon and enhance our organization's DEI efforts.
- In order to strengthen our diverse applicant pool, Human Resources will conduct an employee survey to potentially identify additional touchpoints of diverse applicant networks.
- We will continue to work with students at the University of Nebraska and participate in scholarship programs designed to assist students interested in pursuing a career in broadcasting.
- Nebraska Public Media will complete longer-term recruitment initiatives as required by FCC-EEO including participation in career fairs, internship programs and other educational institutions programs relating to broadcasting career opportunities. These efforts are reported in the FCC EEO Annual Report.

### **ADDITIONAL BUSINESS**

The next Commission meeting is March 28, 2024.

There being no further business, Meeting #476 was adjourned at 11:48 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,



Mark Leonard