

UW-Madison: Wisconsin Public Media executive director hired

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MADISON — Heather L. Reese has been named executive director of Wisconsin Public Media, the division at the University of Wisconsin–Madison that oversees Wisconsin Public Radio and PBS Wisconsin. Reese has served as interim director since August following the death of Gene Purcell, who had served in the role since 2018.

The Wisconsin native is a graduate of the UW Law School and earned her bachelor's degree in hospitality and tourism management from the University of Wisconsin–Stout. Reese is a longtime supporter of the Wisconsin Idea — the belief that UW–Madison teaching, research, outreach and public service should provide benefits beyond the classroom.

“PBS Wisconsin and Wisconsin Public Radio are nationally recognized for their outstanding quality of programming,” says John Karl Scholz, UW–Madison interim chancellor. “We also understand they’re a jewel for the campus and our state. We are excited about the energy and experience that Heather will bring to this position as WPM colleagues navigate the rapidly changing media landscape.”

Reese brings more than 11 years of experience in the public media industry and has previously served as associate director of Wisconsin Public Media as well as director of strategic initiatives and compliance.

“I am delighted to be the next director of Wisconsin Public Media. Public media is an essential public service in the tradition of the Wisconsin Idea,” Reese says. “As media continues to evolve at a rapid pace, I look forward to building on our strong legacy to adapt and enhance our services to meet the needs of our audiences well into the future.”

The WPM executive director establishes and maintains relationships at the local, state and national level to advance and support public media through balancing the interests of multiple partners while focusing on meeting audience and stakeholder needs and preferences.

“I’ve had the pleasure of working with Heather throughout her tenure at WPM,” Educational Communications Board Executive Director Marta Bechtol says. “She’s been a great collaborator and I look forward to continuing our work together.” ECB distributes public broadcasting across the state in partnership with the University of Wisconsin System Board of Regents.

“Heather’s experience with both public radio and television, as well as her leadership skills, knowledge of media law and passionate belief in the value public media brings to the people of Wisconsin, are just some of the qualities that made her stand out in a field of applicants from around the country,” says search committee co-chair Kathy Bissen, chief operating officer of PBS Wisconsin.

As executive director, Reese will lead a unit of approximately 280 full-time and 60 part-time and student staff and oversees a budget of more than \$35 million from multiple and variable revenue sources including: university, state and federal government; audience memberships; major and planned giving; grants; business sponsorships; special events; and sales of goods and services.

“Heather’s appointment comes as very welcome news,” says committee co-chair Niles Berman, board chair of the Wisconsin Public Radio Association and member of the ECB. “She brings a collaborative leadership style, existing strong relationships with the stakeholders, and a commitment to our traditional broadcast services while we expand our use of other content delivery platforms with a dedication to editorial independence underlying all of that. Wisconsin Public Media should be well positioned for the future under Heather’s leadership.”