

Maryland Public Broadcasting Commission
Meeting of September 27, 2022
Via Zoom

Present: *Mr. Richard Bodorff, vice chair; Dr. Debra Bright; Ms. Shelly Gardeniers; Ms. Rebecca Hanson; Ms. Beth Suarez; Mr. Bruce Wahl; Ms. Ellie Wang. Ms. Valerie Emrich was present to represent Mohammed Choudhury, Maryland State Superintendent of Schools.*

The following members of the MPT management staff also were in attendance. MPT President and CEO Larry Unger, Mr. George Beneman, Ms. Erin Chrest, Ms. Colette Colclough, Mr. Andrew Levine, Mrs. Fran Minakowski, Mr. Travis Mitchell, Ms. Betsy Peisach, Mr. Steven Schupak, Ms. Suzanne Schwertman, Ms. Linda Taggart, Ms. Vera Turner and Mr. Tom Williams. Ms. Dionne Neblett was present to record the minutes. Mr. Rob Jefferson was present for IT services.

Guest: Mr. Michal Heiplik, president of Contributor Development Partnership (CDP).

Filling in for Mr. Kaplan, Mr. Bodorff called the meeting to order at 10:32 a.m. and stated the session would be recorded. He requested approval of the minutes of the May 24, 2022, meeting. A motion was made and seconded and the minutes were approved unanimously. Mr. Bodorff observed that the work done to support and enhance the Tubman/Douglass documentaries has been extraordinary.

President's report

Station Manager Steven Schupak and Production Services' managing director, Harry Vaughn, were inducted into the Silver Circle of the National Academy of Television Arts & Sciences' National Capital Chesapeake Bay Chapter. A link to the video tributes saluting the honorees will be provided in an upcoming issue of *The (not quite) Daily*.

At its September 22 meeting, the foundation's board gave unanimous approval to the election of Richard Bodorff as chair and Rhea Feikin as vice chair. They take over the leadership from John Wolf and Kathryn Lindquist, respectively.

MPT ended FY22 well into the black partly due to a reduction of expenses due to not filling a number of open positions and delayed equipment purchases. The surplus will be used to increase reserves and to purchase equipment outright instead of utilizing a five-year master lease plan. Many open positions have not been filled; however, plans to attract talent to MPT include a recruitment referral bonus program and a hiring sign-on bonus for hard-to-recruit positions.

The national release of *Harriet Tubman: Visions of Freedom* and *Becoming Frederick Douglass* is scheduled for October 4 and October 11, respectively. (Commissioners viewed clips of the documentaries.) Screenings held around the state have been well-attended. Tomorrow's screening to be held in The Irene and Edward H. Kaplan Production Studio will be live-streamed to reach viewers across the country. A conversation about the impact of these two iconic figures will follow the screening.

MPT will host the gubernatorial debate on October 12. WBAL-TV in Baltimore, WRC-TV in Washington, D.C. and C-SPAN will air MPT's production.

Commissioners viewed clips from *MotorWeek* season 42, *Maryland Farm & Harvest* season 10, *Outdoors Maryland* season 34, and excerpts from HBCU Week and *U.S. and the Holocaust*. *Chesapeake Bay Week* will include three new bay-related documentaries in April 2023. Rhea Feikin will host a special on the history of Jewish delis in our region which will air in the spring. She will also host a live pledge event on October 13 featuring the Tubman/Douglass films. Maryland 5 Star, an equestrian event, will take place next month.

Budget & Compensation report

Mr. Bodorff, committee chair, reported the committee met on September 21 and commended MPT for the exceptional financial performance of FY22. Suzanne Schwertman, chief financial officer, presented reports on revenues and expenses. The fiscal year ended with a significant surplus. Funds will be used for much-needed equipment that was not procured before the end of the fiscal year and for reserves. State appropriation funding increased and the Maryland State Ad Agency was profitable. Funding from the MSDE education grant for virtual classes went down as there was a delay in being able to complete the education project. These funds were deferred to FY23. The mandated state appropriation funding increase for FY24 is targeted at \$537,000. Mr. Unger noted that real strides have been made with state appropriations due to the formula established in 2017. The current year saw the greatest year-to-year increase in MPT's history. There were no contracts that needed commission approval.

Colette Colclough, vice president, Human Resources, reported that the number of positive cases is currently down. There will be a clinic held at MPT on October 11 to administer the flu vaccine and the bivalent COVID-19 booster.

There are 127 filled posts out of the 145 authorized positions. Staff is working diligently to fill the open positions. Ms. Colclough encouraged committee members to steer qualified candidates to the MPT career website. EEO percentages continue to be above the national average.

Development Division update

Linda Taggart, vice president, Development Division shared that the group is using inventive efforts to engage donors including DigiPass, a paid search advertising program that helps stations reach more donors and prospects via diversified acquisition sources. Donors are now able to upgrade their accounts via the new MPT Donor Portal and will soon be able to access MPT Passport, the video-on-demand streaming service, with the click of a button. Canvassing will begin in FY24 if the vendor contract is approved by the Maryland State Board of Public Works. The percentage of members using streaming services has increased year-over-year. Members in past years were traditionally acquired from on-air pledge campaigns; however, in FY22, the majority of new members were acquired through digital platforms.

Audience engagement exceeded its FY22 goals, conducting 54 events with more than 7,400 attendees. An additional 8,000 viewers streamed events after they occurred. The MPT annual

raffle was sold out. The Travel Club was revitalized in FY22 with five trips that included barn tours and train trips.

The Focus on 70 multi-year initiative to increase the number of members from 60,000 to 70,000 is in Phase 2 of its focus—Focus on 80. A goal of the initiative is to attract new and younger members. Approximately \$1 million - \$1.5 million is raised for every 10,000 members acquired. Development will continue to invest in major and planned giving initiatives. The goal to reduce the number of pledge days from 114 in FY16 to 85 in FY22 was accomplished.

Ms. Hanson asked what the correlation is between reducing pledge days and pledge dollars. Ms. Taggart explained that philanthropic dollars are preferred to transactional dollars. Pledge days were cut to avoid program schedule disruptions, but the on-air fundraising goal was still exceeded. Live pledge events allow MPT to tell people in the community what is being done locally. MPT has always pledged local programs, as there is a struggle to get new, engaging pledge programming. In addition to traditional thank-you gifts, unique experiences are being offered such as the duck decoy carving classes that have sold out.

Canvassing

Mr. Schupak stated that although MPT has never canvassed door-to-door to acquire members, the canvassing method has proven successful throughout the public television system and delivers younger members, sustaining members, and families. Mail and on-air campaigns have been on the decline. He introduced Michal Heiplik, president of Contributor Development Partnership.

Mr. Heiplik stated the Member Service Bureau has had a great partnership with MPT. The partnership frees up MPT's resources for relationship building. His organization has collaborated with roughly 40 other stations. MPT has been growing members over the years, and that growth needs to be sustained. Canvassing is opening doors and gaining donations in large numbers as many find personal interactions rewarding. Out of 10 conversations, canvassers receive one "yes", a 10% response rate. Door-acquired donors are mission-based and bring a great deal of value. More than 70% of canvass-acquired donors are sustainers and are usually a decade younger than donors from other campaigns. Younger donors place very high value on relationship-based giving. Public television stations currently canvassing include those in Chicago, Boston, St. Paul, and New Hampshire.

Ms. Hanson asked how it was decided what neighborhood to canvas. Mr. Heiplik said that research has been done and the canvassers penetrate in areas of likely donor support. The distance between houses is also a factor. Canvassers will be housed at MPT and will be dedicated to MPT goals, making adjustments as needed. Ms. Wang inquired if senior communities will be approached. Mr. Heiplik stated the canvassers abide by the local laws and regulations of the community and many senior communities do not allow soliciting. Ms. Suarez asked who recruits and trains canvassers. CDP recruits the canvassers who tend to be younger employees, due to the amount of walking involved. There are generally 8 – 12 canvassers in each region in addition to performance managers who monitor results.

Diversity, Equity, Inclusion & Justice

Dr. Debra Bright, committee co-chair, stated the MPT external DEI&J Advisory Council met on August 18. The committee discussed how members could help in the recruitment of a diverse pool of applicants. A community event was held at MPT on September 15 in honor of Hispanic Heritage Month in partnership with the Maryland Hispanic Chamber of Commerce. The kickoff of HBCU Week will be on September 5. The week will feature 22 hours of content, expanding into history, arts, civil rights, and sports. The next council meeting is scheduled for October 20. Mr. Wahl mentioned that he recently toured the Harriet Tubman Underground National Park and it opened his eyes to her story. He suggested this tour as a future member event. Ms. Wang stated she attended the Hispanic heritage event and found it very informative and well-planned.

Old/new business

In the absence of no old or new business, the chair asked for a motion for adjournment. All were in favor, and Mr. Bodorff adjourned the meeting at 11:54 a.m.