**Educational Telecommunications Board Report**

**From the Friends of South Dakota Public Broadcasting**

Submitted by Ryan Howlett, May 28, 2020

It is hard to put into words how crazy the last three months have been, and it is really astonishing that we are already in week 11 of working from home and will be at week 13 by the time that board meeting is held. Here is a recap of that time and a bit of projection into the future.

**Friends of SDPB Strategic Plan**

Tim Schorn, Friends Board President, Vermillion, and Karen Mortimer, Friends Board Vice President, Rapid City, have been leading a subset of the Friends board that is focused on strategic planning for the Friends organization, with the goal of elevating the work of Friends to match the Sound Vision Strategic Plan that the SDPB Network completed in early 2019.

The group has focused on the following areas:

* Financial Viability & Growth
* Staff Support & Evaluation
* Membership Growth
* Facilities, Physical Space & Offices (on hold)
* Public Relations & Marketing (support for SDPB)
* Support from the Board

It has been a very healthy process and I will share the results of the plan at our next ETB meeting. The group will conclude its primary work at the June 12, Friends Board Meeting, although we are approaching this as an ongoing process.

**Financial Update**

With the unprecedented step of cancelling $250,000 in FY20 “standard” transfers from Friends to the SDPB Network, and the successful Payroll Protection Program application, Friends will end the year in a strong financial position, despite the Covid 19 disruption. The April 30 Friends financials show a strong cash position despite a difficult month on the fundraising front.

May has been better than April, and activities are beginning returning to normal. Membership is still strong; we have seen very little members drop due to the pandemic’s economic impact. We are fortunate to have transition to the new business model over the last 2 years, without the outsourcing, it would have been difficult to continue our operations as we had in Brookings.

We held a Radio Membership Drive that was largely built around offering matching dollars. Since staff that would have been on-air “pitching” during a radio drive were largely sidelined from using the studios, and we did not want to preempt news coverage, we pre-recorded the entire radio drive. Technically this was a challenge, and it didn’t allow us to adjust the messaging throughout the week. The drive ended at 99% of the goal for revenue. We will likely use a hybrid live/pre-recorded version of the drive in the future.

Major Giving officers were able to increase their time communicating (primarily through the telephone) with donors as other activities were no longer able to be done. As we continue to educate these donors on the Sound Vision Campaign, the cultivation process is moving forward even though making an ask has been hampered. The Major Donor team is starting to get together with donors for face-to-face visits, and pledges are beginning to resume. Each of the Major Gift Officers has made a gift request during May.

Unfortunately, we have seen substantial disruption in underwriting. Liz Larkin, on the fly, assembled a new team and worked tirelessly to blunt the losses. Liz took the lead on SDHSAA contracts, which are roughly 40% of the underwriting income for the year. Many clients either stayed the course, accepting a proposal for “make goods” on another property, or asked for credit for next years sports package. Some did ask for a cancellation of the contract, but overall Liz was able to limit losses to around $75,000.

We expect that Underwriting will be the most impacted portion of Friends by a wide margin. We don’t know where the final Underwriting number will shake out in relation to goal, but the “factors beyond our control” rationale is very applicable here.

Carol Johnson lent some of her time to focusing on West River Underwriting Clients in light of the open position. This has been highly successful. Julie also assigned Kim Martin from the SDPB Network to help with some of the backend work which helps Underwriting Salespersons to be able to keep in contact with clients and allows Kim to keep some hours at work. We are still in search for the West River Corporate Development Salesperson, and considering the financial stability we are maintaining, we are reigniting the search for that person.

Liz held an Underwriting Townhall in April, and here is a link to that recording, which is an informative and fairly quick watch. We are editing out the first few minutes for wider use. <https://netaonline.zoom.us/rec/share/4dFEILug_GNJfrPVtlnGApFmObTPX6a8hCgXrqZbyUbkrVJnshDM0Mc7mFkQWCpB?startTime=1588345185000>

For FY21, we are proposing full support to the SDPB Network at the FY20 level ($1.45M in direct transfers) as well as funding other projects on behalf of the SDPB Network.

**CUSTOMER SERVICE AND MEMBERSHIP**

Membership, led by Adam Davenport and Janet Gerjets for this project, has just completed the final portion of the Brookings transition, and it is a biggie that significantly enhances our online donation and customer service experiences for our donors. We left our previous call answering services and are now working with ACD, a technology solutions company, the service went live TODAY. Horizon (previous service) only passed us messages and could help donors to make a gift.

ACD integrates with Allegiance (our donor database software) and the ACD representatives will be able to process gifts, handle standard customer service questions, process credit card changes, and address updates. We anticipate ACD being able to handle 90% of our customer service questions on the first call from the donor, leaving only the more complicated questions for those of us at Friends. This will leave a lot more time for Adam and Janet as they don’t have to track the donor down to process their request. A huge step forward.   
  
Additionally, ACD offers services that improve the online look of our donation forms and helps with the backend of membership drives. You can check out the new forms here, but these donation pages are another huge step forward.

[www.sdpb.org/donate](http://www.sdpb.org/donate)

The premium (thank you gifts) management of a membership drive before ACD was incredibly labor intensive. The setup to get the gifts into the database and to the online giving pages would take two to three weeks for television and 3 plus days for a radio drive. ACD provides a service where they handle the majority of the backend work, so Adam will only have to do an import and ensure it is correct. A television drive will take only a day or two max, rather than 2-3 weeks. So with 7 drives a year, this means significantly more time for Adam, Wendy and Janet to focus on higher return activities.

The ACD transition is the final piece in the transition to our new business model, the only thing that remains of the Brookings office is PO Box 5000, which we kept for direct mail replies. Our last mailing left Brookings in June of 2019, so we will close PO Box 5000 on July 31, 2020, bringing an end to a two-year transition that began on August 8, 2018.

**CLOSING**

Lastly, but certainly not least, it continues to be a time of uncertainty, and we will get through this, because, first and foremost, we have amazing donors who believe in the work that SDPB is doing. That said, the Friends staff has rallied to the challenge. I really cannot say enough good things about each staff member and the efforts they are putting forth.

The staff and I continue to be available for any questions or concerns.

Ryan