



State of Wisconsin
2023 - 2024 LEGISLATURE

LRB-4115/1
ARG:cjs

2023 BILL

1 **AN ACT** *to create* 15.915 (3), 20.290 and 36.70 of the statutes; **relating to:**
2 creating a Civic Information Consortium Board and a grant program
3 administered by a nonprofit corporation to support local journalism and media
4 projects and making an appropriation.

Analysis by the Legislative Reference Bureau

This bill creates a Civic Information Consortium Board attached to the University of Wisconsin System consisting of the following members: 1) two members appointed by the governor, with one from each major political party; 2) two senators and two representatives to the assembly, with one of each from the majority party and the largest minority party; 3) four representatives of the UW System, each with experience or expertise in journalism, media, technology, or American civic culture, appointed by the president of the UW System; and 4) a representative from local media, a representative from the technology sector, and two public members, appointed by a majority of the members described in 1 to 3.

The bill requires the board to form a nonprofit corporation, called the Wisconsin Civic Information Consortium, Inc., for the purpose of administering the grant program described below. The corporation's members are the board members identified in 3), above, and the board manages the affairs of the corporation, including selecting a director to manage the day-to-day operation of the corporation. The board also provides funding to the corporation, through a new general fund appropriation to the board.

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The bill requires the corporation to award grants to support local journalism and media projects. A grant application must include an explanation of how the proposed project benefits the state's civic information needs and provides media literacy skills or local journalism access to currently underserved residents of this state. A grant recipient must agree to remain independent and the corporation must ensure that at least 30 percent of the total amount of all grants awarded are distributed to off-campus partners in rural communities. The corporation must also collect data on populations and communities in this state that are underserved by local news and prioritize directing its funding toward these populations and communities. A board member who is a legislator may not vote on any matter related to a grant award. The board may not take any action or make any funding decision based on the reporting of a grant recipient.

The bill requires the board to annually submit a report to the governor and the legislature detailing how the corporation's funding was spent and how it advanced the mission of fostering a more informed and engaged public. The report must also include a summary of the collected data on underserved populations or communities.

For further information see the state fiscal estimate, which will be printed as an appendix to this bill.

The people of the state of Wisconsin, represented in senate and assembly, do enact as follows:

1 **SECTION 1.** 15.915 (3) of the statutes is created to read:

2 **15.915 (3) CIVIC INFORMATION CONSORTIUM BOARD.** (a) There is created a civic
3 information consortium board that is attached to the University of Wisconsin System
4 under s. 15.03.

5 (b) The civic information consortium board shall consist of the following
6 members:

7 1. Two public members, one from each of the 2 major political parties, appointed
8 by the governor.

9 2. Two senators and 2 representatives to the assembly, one of each from the
10 majority party and the largest minority party, appointed as are members of standing
11 committees.

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1 3. Four representatives of the University of Wisconsin System, with experience
2 or expertise in journalism, media, technology, or American civic culture, appointed
3 by the president of the University of Wisconsin System.

4 4. A representative from local media, appointed by a majority of the members
5 specified in subds. 1. to 3.

6 5. A representative from the technology sector, appointed by a majority of the
7 members specified in subds. 1. to 3.

8 6. Two public members appointed by a majority of the members specified in
9 subds. 1. to 3.

10 (c) Members of the civic information consortium board shall be appointed for
11 4-year terms. No member may serve more than 2 terms on the civic information
12 consortium board.

13 **SECTION 2.** 20.005 (3) (schedule) of the statutes: at the appropriate place, insert
14 the following amounts for the purposes indicated:

2023-24 2024-25

15 **20.290 Civic information consortium board**

16 (1) WISCONSIN CIVIC INFORMATION CONSORTIUM, INC.

17 (a) Grants and operations GPR C 20,000,000 1,000,000

18 **SECTION 3.** 20.290 of the statutes is created to read:

19 **20.290 Civic information consortium board.** There is appropriated to the
20 civic information consortium board for the following program:

21 **(1) WISCONSIN CIVIC INFORMATION CONSORTIUM, INC.** (a) *Grants and operations.*

22 As a continuing appropriation, the amounts in the schedule for the purposes
23 specified in s. 36.70 (2) (b).

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1 **SECTION 4.** 36.70 of the statutes is created to read:

2 **36.70 Wisconsin civic information consortium. (1) DEFINITIONS.** In this
3 section:

4 (a) “Board” means the civic information consortium board.

5 (b) “Corporation” means the corporation formed by the board under sub. (2) (a).

6 **(2) FORMATION OF CORPORATION.** (a) The board shall organize and maintain a
7 nonstock, nonprofit corporation under ch. 181 for the purpose of administering the
8 grant program under sub. (3). Notwithstanding s. 181.0401 (2), the name of the
9 corporation shall be the Wisconsin Civic Information Consortium, Inc. The board
10 shall organize the corporation so that the board members appointed under s. 15.915
11 (3) (b) 3. shall be the members of the corporation. The board shall manage the affairs
12 of the corporation, including selecting a president who shall be known as the director.
13 The director shall manage the day-to-day operation of the corporation.
14 Notwithstanding s. 181.0840 (1), the corporation is not required to have a secretary
15 or treasurer.

16 (b) From the appropriation under s. 20.290 (1) (a), the board shall provide
17 funding to the corporation to make grants under sub. (3) and for the corporation’s
18 operations. The board may not take any action or make any funding decision based
19 on the reporting of a recipient of a grant under sub. (3).

20 **(3) AWARD OF GRANTS.** (a) The corporation shall award grants to support local
21 journalism and media projects for the purpose of addressing communities’
22 information needs, bolstering media literacy and civic engagement across the state,
23 and supporting state residents’ access to high quality, consistent local journalism,
24 resulting in a more informed and engaged public.

25 (b) A grant application shall include all of the following:

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1 1. An explanation of how the proposed project benefits the state's civic
2 information needs and provides media literacy skills or local journalism access to
3 currently underserved residents of this state.

4 2. Any other information that the corporation requires.

5 (c) The corporation may not award a grant unless the grant recipient enters
6 into a written agreement specifying that the grant recipient is and shall remain
7 independent from the influence of the state, any institution, and any other provider
8 of funds related to the grant.

9 (d) The corporation shall ensure that at least 30 percent of the total amount of
10 all grants awarded are distributed to off-campus partners in rural communities.

11 (e) The corporation shall collect data on populations and communities in this
12 state that are underserved by local news and shall prioritize directing its funding
13 toward these populations and communities.

14 (f) No board member appointed under s. 15.915 (3) (b) 2. may vote on any matter
15 related to a grant award under this subsection.

16 **(4) REPORT.** Annually, the board shall submit a report to the governor, and to
17 the appropriate standing committees of the legislature under s. 13.172 (3), detailing
18 how the funding provided to the corporation under sub. (2) (b) was spent and how it
19 advanced the mission of fostering a more informed and engaged public. The report
20 shall also include a summary of the data collected under sub. (3) (e).

21 **SECTION 5. Nonstatutory provisions.**

22 (1) **STATEMENT OF LEGISLATIVE INTENT.** The legislature finds that an informed
23 and engaged electorate is essential to the healthy functioning of democratic
24 government. Further, the legislature finds that recent cuts to local news media and
25 community organizations have reduced Wisconsinites' access to coverage of

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1 important local and state matters. The legislature reaffirms the importance of
2 freedom of speech under the First Amendment and the independence of the media.
3 It is not the intent of the legislature and this act to influence the reporting of any
4 grant recipient. Rather, it is the intent of the legislature and this act to address the
5 civic information needs of all Wisconsinites, especially underserved communities, by
6 fostering media literacy and civic participation across the state through access to
7 high quality local journalism.

8 (2) CIVIC INFORMATION CONSORTIUM BOARD; STAGGERED TERMS. Notwithstanding
9 the length of terms specified for the members of the civic information consortium
10 board under s. 15.915 (3) (c), the following members shall be appointed for an initial
11 6-year term:

12 (a) One of the members appointed under s. 15.915 (3) (b) 1.

13 (b) Two of the members appointed under s. 15.915 (3) (b) 2., one from the
14 majority party and one from the minority party.

15 (c) Two of the members appointed under s. 15.915 (3) (b) 3.

16 (d) The member appointed under s. 15.915 (3) (b) 4.

17 (e) One of the members appointed under s. 15.915 (3) (b) 6.

18 (END)