

A Case for Digital Readiness: How Station Capacity, Culture, and Even a Little Nerdiness Can Spark Innovation

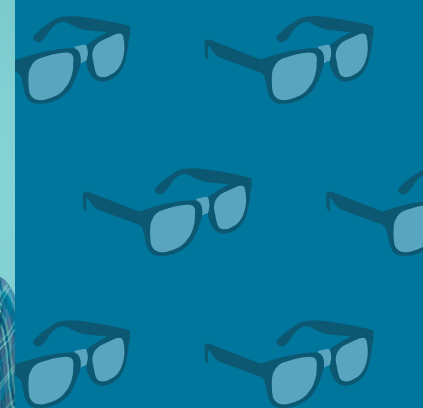
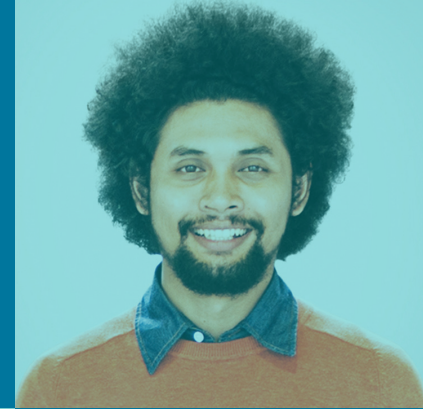


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Nerd

\'nərd\ noun, slang.

1. A person considered to be socially awkward, boring, unstylish, etc.

1.1. A single-minded expert in a particular technical field: a computer nerd.

**That's what they think.
We know Nerds are super.**



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The PBS system-wide effort to increase local financial support using digital technologies involves a growing number of strategies and platforms. Over the past few years, this effort has included digital fundraising campaigns and streamlined digital products and services such as Passport.

One digital fundraising strategy used effectively by a variety of non-profit organizations is peer-to-peer (P2P) fundraising. In 2016, the top 30 P2P fundraising programs in the United States generated \$1.53 billion in revenue. A widely popular example of P2P, specifically friends engaging their friends and family in a challenge before asking for



What is P2P fundraising?

Peer-to-peer fundraising is a multi-tiered approach to crowdfunding, where individuals can create personal fundraising pages for a cause's behalf. Individuals share his or her page with friends, family and community members for donations.

financial support, is the ALS Ice Bucket Challenge, which raised over \$100 million and was widely shared across social platforms.

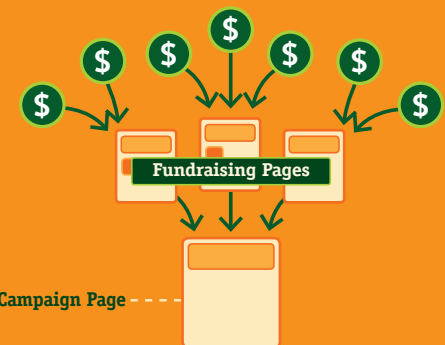
Because of the increasing impact of P2P, PBS Development Services invited member stations to apply for a six-month pilot. Fourteen stations were selected and the pilot kicked off in October 2016 and combined common P2P fundraising strategies and technologies alongside the PBS Nerd brand. At the conclusion of the pilot, 10 of the 14 stations were actively engaged in the campaign process, reached 2.7 million across social media platforms, and raised a combined \$33,271.

Executive Summary

Crowdfunding



Peer-to-Peer



Source: Classy

The lessons learned at the completion of the P2P product training, onboarding process, and campaign execution fall into three distinct buckets.

1. Station capacity matters.

While all stations brought enthusiasm to the P2P pilot, those with dedicated digital fundraising personnel reaped the most rewards, regardless of strategy or execution.

2. Station culture matters.

Because innovation is a highly iterative process requiring extensive testing and adjustment, developing new growth opportunities requires that stations embrace ongoing experimentation rather than focus on short-term payoff.

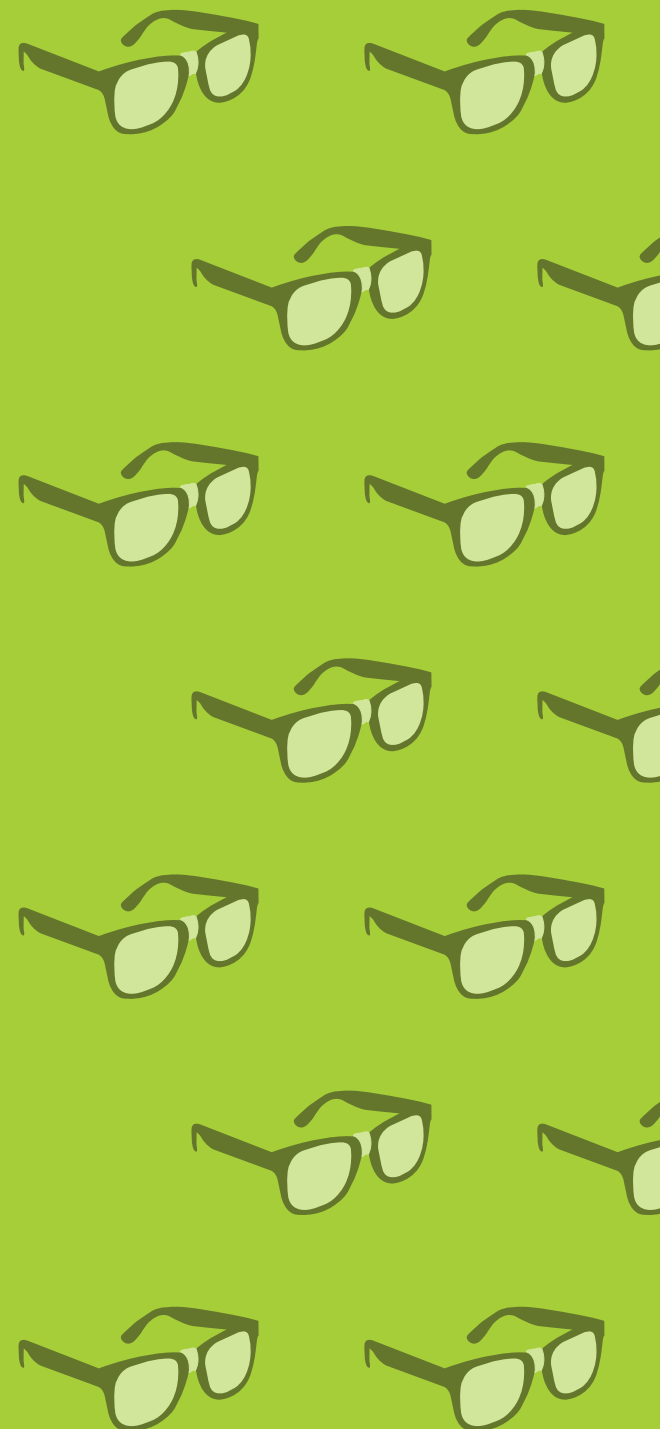
3. Nerds are here to stay.

Based on its popularity both externally and internally and its ability to engage younger viewers, PBS Nerd is proving to be a strong, unifying brand. However, its role in station fundraising, including P2P campaigns, is not yet clear.

The overall experience resulted in two emerging lessons:

- 1.** Readiness – staff and volunteer capacity, technology, and the time to do it right – is a requirement. You can't develop a sustained new revenue stream by winging it.
- 2.** The longer a station waits to experiment with digital strategies, the longer it will wait to see new revenue streams emerge.

This report further explores these lessons, the PBS Nerd P2P campaign, and how stations can benefit from implementing new technologies and fundraising strategies to introduce changes in donor behavior and station culture.



Connecting “fans” to a cause has emerged as an effective way to increase support among constituents. Music groups and sports teams have led the way. However, non-profit organizations with strong grassroots support have also begun to adopt similar strategies. One of those strategies is P2P fundraising, where non-profits recruit highly engaged fans, turn them into organizational ambassadors, and coach them to raise funds from their personal networks.

Much of P2P’s impact can be attributed to the growth of social media. By 2016, P2P donations directly acquired through social media represented 18 percent

personalizing their campaigns to reflect their community’s interest(s).

The choice of PBS Nerd was a natural one. A grassroots brand created by stations for local events and activities and later adopted by PBS, the brand targets a young, digitally savvy, and intellectually curious audience. PBS Development Services adopted the PBS Nerd brand as a reaction to stations’ desire for a unifying call to action.

The PBS Nerd brand allows people to express their individual passions, e.g. cooking, history, nature, local lore or any of the many interests served by PBS and local programs. Not only does the brand promote the wide variety of interests that PBS caters to through exceptional programming and resources – but it reflects the themes of diversity and inclusion – two hallmarks of public media – framed in a new, fun, and socially engaging way.

Peer-to-Peer Fundraising & PBS

of all P2P giving. Greater incorporation of social media in P2P campaigns also typically generates a greater percentage of new donors, and is popular among younger generations.

Public television has passionate fans, which is a requirement for any P2P campaign. Needing a distinct, yet relatable a message to activate these fans, the campaign theme for the pilot was selected: PBS Nerd. The PBS Nerd theme was chosen because of its potential for national rollout and support while simultaneously providing stations leeway in



In August 2016, PBS Development Services developed a P2P fundraising strategy to harness the PBS Nerd brand. The goal was to give all PBS Nerds the opportunity to create their own fundraising campaigns that have defined timelines to complete personal or group challenges.

As part of the pilot, PBS provided to the participating stations the following:

- **Cohesive campaign strategy and P2P best practices.**
- **Locally branded website utilizing P2P fundraising tools.**

and deep social integration was at the core of the platform to drive participant engagement. PBS Development Services also facilitated the addition of Stripe payment processing, exposing stations to a modern payment gateway.

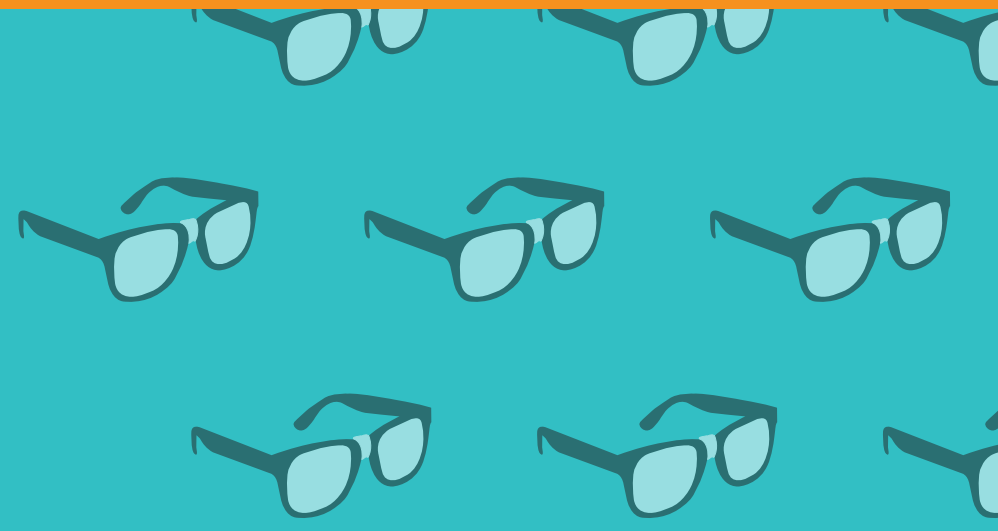
"Our e-news didn't seem to have as much impact as social media which generated most of our 44 participant campaign sign-ups. We also had interest among our radio audience for Nerd items, so we may try to build on that. We definitely got a lot out of the pilot, including the great new payment gateway. PBS set us up for success in every way."



- **Technical training and product support.**
- **PBS Nerd t-shirts and glasses for recruitment.**
- **Messaging copy, campaign creative, launch and promotion guide, participant recruitment and coaching emails.**

PBS Development Services partnered with Great Feats, a social engagement platform, to provide the participating stations P2P fundraising tools. The tools included the ability for stations and participants to create challenges, personal pages, national events, and personal events. In addition, gift totaling, leaderboards,

Strategy, Training & Launch



The recruitment and selection of 14 stations* was completed by September 2016. The product training and campaign development kicked off in October and went through December. In January 2017, stations launched the participant recruitment phase by hosting events and inviting individuals to “Be a PBS Nerd”. The introductory website and messaging that was provided to stations is shown right:

*WXXI, CET, Valley PBS, KETC-Nine Network, Smoky Hills PTV, WQED, Milwaukee PTV, Blue Ridge PBS, GPB, KCPT, PBS39, Prairie PTV, UNC-TV, and WCTE

Be a PBS Nerd for ValleyPBS



BE A PBS NERD FOR VALLEYPBS SUPPORTS



20 People have joined

0 Teams have joined

2.7 million Social Media Reach

Make a Donation

Be a PBS Nerd

What Are You a Nerd For?

Everyone's a nerd for something, but at PBS we're Nerds for everything!

First, sign up to Be a PBS Nerd to share your inner nerd. Then, create or join a PBS Nerd Challenge or PBS Nerd Event that speaks to who you are, and what makes you passionate—whatever that may be!

Whether it's cycling a century, hosting a Hamilton karaoke party, or binge-watching the Cosmos, the nerd world is your oyster.

Sign up now to [Be a PBS Nerd](#) and create your own PBS Nerd Challenge or host your own PBS Nerd Event!



Photo by Darby Simon

Teams Raise More

Fundraising teams are successful due to a mix of peer pressure, competition, and camaraderie. P2P teams raise 17% more than individuals and are 33% more likely to personalize their fundraising messages. Team captains, on the other hand, raise 54% more and are 300% more likely to use Facebook.

Source DonorDrive ([click here](#))

for an event but participants failed to create or join a team. Participating stations had on average 3.7 teams with approximately 70 participants.

Beyond the giving and participation activity recorded by the P2P platform, stations reported other significant findings:

- 80 percent of pilot stations conducted a campaign event and uniformly reported that a large majority of attendees were both new to the station and younger than usual attendees.
- Three stations reported plans to refine and repeat PBS Nerd/P2P campaign either at fiscal year-end or during the fall. Ideas included a Nerdathon Walk and a campaign to support a popular local program.
- Ending its P2P campaign in early March, one station tested its PBS Nerd inventory during NewsHour pledge in March. The result was very encouraging, and the station expects to test Nerd items elsewhere to build awareness of the brand.
- The cohort approach and the use of PBS Basecamp were very effective and allowed for quick adoption and replication of ideas.

Results & Lesson Learned

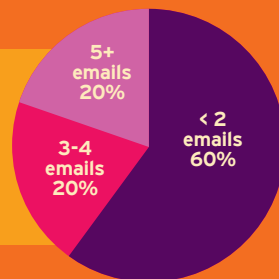
The goal for each station was to recruit 20 participants with 10 actively fundraising on behalf of the station. The fundraising goal for each fundraiser was \$250 for a station goal of \$2,500. By March 3, the official end of the fundraising pilot, 10 of the 14 stations were actively engaged in the process, reached 2.7 million across social media platforms, and raised a combined \$33,271 (\$61 average gift).

Stations collectively recruited 982 participants, nearly five-times the pilot goal. However, with the number of teams often an indicator to overall P2P success, stations successfully recruited individuals to register

The pilot fundraising results varied widely by station affected by the level of promotion and ability to identify existing program fans:

- Social media and especially Facebook played a key role in success, particularly at events. The participating stations had a collective social media reach of 2.7 million.
- Email was not heavily used. However, 20 percent of stations sent more than five emails promoting the pilot, 20 percent sent three to four, and the remaining 60 percent sent an average of less than two emails.

Number of Emails Sent to Fundraisers by Stations



- 50 percent kicked off the campaign without “seed donations,” contrary to P2P best practices.

In addition to the fundraising goals, the pilot had three broad objectives with extended implications for the system.



UNC-TV's PBS Nerd Campaign

One station with an active grassroots fan club was UNC-TV's *EastEnders*. UNC-TV had encouraging results by first identifying a special interest group and then utilizing digital marketing and fundraising tools to convert those fans to donors.

The East Enders fan club raised \$14,000 on the PBS Nerd platform, plus more in matches. UNC-TV used social media, gave out 'Nerds have more fun' buttons around the station, and gave staff a briefing, aka pep rally. The ability to set up a quick donation page with links also aided the stations success by adapting to the needs of their audience.

1. Assess station readiness to adopt new digital fundraising activities.

Leading up to the February campaign, it became immediately clear that stations with a dedicated digital fundraising staff were at a clear advantage—these stations were more able to readily incorporate P2P best practices into their existing digital fundraising infrastructure. For example, they were able to seed the campaign with challenge ideas, sustain campaign promotion, add Google search tests, and integrate with social media activities.

- **Old habits die hard – especially when station structure and budget are built around them.**

Stations' success was dependent on the degree to which they were able to address two competing demands—those of the pilot and of March pledge drives. Many of those tasked with launching a PBS Nerd campaign were also responsible for core duties with pledge. The campaign was, in all cases, an add-on fundraising activity for stations. While this is a natural starting point for an experiment, the realities of P2P fundraising highlighted the need to restructure staff responsibilities around new digital fundraising practices—whether or not this reorientation includes P2P to develop grassroots fan activity into a new revenue stream.

What Does Digital Readiness Look Like?

UNC-TV's P2P success was not random, it was deliberate—the result of a station committed to building a strong digital fundraising infrastructure and a culture of innovation. For UNC-TV, this means directly investing in digital fundraising with appropriate staff and resources, and encouraging the deployment of new technologies and digital-first strategies. This digital readiness put UNC-TV in a unique position to quickly build upon the PBS-provided campaign strategy and P2P platform, and craft a robust, customized campaign that activated key constituencies and raised more than \$21,800.

However, not all stations are as ready. In fact, in a survey taken at DevDay during PBS Annual Meeting, 59% of stations in attendance said they do not have dedicated digital fundraising resources, with nearly half saying their digital fundraising strategy was either “non-existent” or “nearly non-existent”—only 2% said it was “awesome.” This underscores an increasingly stark polarity between digital “haves” and “have nots” across the system—those stations with and without the organizational capacity and infrastructure required for digital fundraising readiness.



- **Learning a new technology is easier than learning a new strategy.**

PBS Development Services made sure to provide stations with a strategy, including best practices and training alongside the P2P platform. Expertise and comfort with the platform varied among stations, and many stations played a major role in providing crucial insight to improve platform functionality. But overall, the pressure of a signature event for participant recruitment and overall comfort with membership thank-you gifts tempted some stations to incorporate traditional fundraising activities that were directly in conflict with P2P best practices.

Driven by the attraction of the PBS Nerd brand, there was a tendency to use the PBS Nerd swag provided to stations as promotional tools for conventional fundraising (e.g. on-air pledge or community events) rather than as P2P incentives to fundraise. Though

this produced encouraging readings of the popularity of the Nerd brand, it drew already scarce station resources away from tackling the viral, grassroots activities needed for P2P success.

- **If you're short-handed, it doesn't pay to "wing it."**

Some stations had vacancies in key membership positions, resulting in distribution of shared campaign activities leading to a disjointed campaign. It is unwise to take an innovative leap without an appropriately staffed team dedicated to the project.

Limited capacity stifles the ability of a team to innovate. Later in this report, the "Moving Forward" section identifies station and PBS self-assessment questions for addressing digital readiness for innovation.

"Giving people so many ways to be a Nerd seemed overwhelming and may have been a deterrent. We may try a fall Nerd event and campaign but limit the focus."



"Our senior management has been asking us to look at P2P. We will definitely do Nerd P2P again but may tie it to local or British programs."



“We partnered with a local brewery for a Nerd Coloring Night and relied mostly on social media. We could only give a week’s notice, but got 60 people and only knew 5 of them. An on-air promo wasn’t as productive as Facebook in this case. We learned a lot and are very appreciative that PBS set this up.”



2. Identify the benefits and obstacles of audience-centric, P2P campaigns.

- **P2P works when you understand it takes time.**

Most stations believe P2P can be developed into an additional revenue stream with more testing, better preparation, and ongoing cultivation. The next section indicates a wide variety of station-generated ideas on next steps for P2P in the system.

- **The paradox of choice: too many choices can be too much of a good thing.**

In P2P fashion, individual participants were invited to create personal challenges on station fundraising sites.

However, the open-ended nature of DIY and “be a nerd for anything” may have overwhelmed supporters, and diluted the power of a centralized brand and clear ask. Pilot stations widely believe that a clearer challenge under the PBS Nerd umbrella might have yielded better results. While PBS Nerd may be an overarching identifier for PBS fans, a P2P fundraising effort would probably benefit from “guard rails” to prevent grassroots activities from wandering away from a station’s mission. Pilot stations are considering focusing future PBS Nerd campaigns around nature, cooking, British drama, local history or other examples of stations’ programming.

A few individuals in the pilot were skeptical of P2P’s fit for stations. But even this group admitted that they might not have found the right entry point into social fundraising alone. The success of P2P fundraising also rests on clarity of what fundraisers call the “case for giving.” Perhaps this case would be stronger if a specific program area became the focus of a P2P campaign in a future iteration.

3. Test the viability of the PBS Nerd brand as a vehicle for engaging new, younger supporters.

The PBS Nerd brand was uniformly successful in attracting support from younger supporters.

As station comments show, new supporters represented 50-90 percent of participants at Nerd events, whether free or ticketed, demonstrating an exciting opportunity for stations to engage this coveted demographic of young public media supporters.

- **PBS Nerd generated high enthusiasm within communities and within stations.**

The light-hearted approach which encouraged people to celebrate their interests was enthusiastically picked up by viewers. It proved so popular, in fact, that stations saw a demand for PBS Nerd products entirely apart from the P2P campaign but during the same timeframe. Inside stations, the PBS Nerd focus was widely acknowledged to be a fresh and welcome addition to station messaging.

- **PBS Nerds are fans, and fans like to get together.**

Like fans of music groups and sports teams, PBS Nerds want to celebrate and have fun together. The pilot experience suggests that Nerd-themed events are probably inescapable, but they do not need to become a primary focus requiring major station investment. Although they were not intended to overshadow essential components of the P2P campaign, they often became a centerpiece of the pilot.

If events are indeed part of donor expectations, they then have value; however, they should be used



How to Kick Start Your P2P Campaign

A live event is a great way to generate excitement and get a core group of participants engaged early on. Events do not need to be big or break the bank. Some ideas include “PBS Nerd add-ons” to existing events such as, local trivia nights or happy hours, station programming events, and local meetups on related content and programming.

strategically. In the case of P2P, this means a campaign “wrap-around” event such as fundraiser recruitment. The event should supplement, not compete with, a broader set of fundraising activities.

- **Radio listeners are Nerds too.**

Unsurprisingly, NPR listeners are passionate public media fans and were eager participants at joint licensees in the pilot.

Pilot stations were uniform in their desire to test entirely new fundraising approaches with the full understanding that it would stretch their organizational capacity and generate small immediate revenue. Many stations acknowledged they would have liked to invest more resources in the P2P campaign. They often cited limited staff and budget, yet they proceeded. Their experiences highlighted two questions underlying all fundraising innovations:

If success is not assured nor is a program likely to generate meaningful short-term returns, what

opportunities and challenges for digital fundraising:

- **What do donors want, and which of our competitors are good at giving it to them?**

What are the major trends in consumer digital behavior we should pay attention to? How are other successful non-profits outside of public media testing and adopting digital fundraising strategies?

- **What would it take to not just to test a new strategy but to achieve great financial success?**

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Moving Forward by Asking the Right Questions.

is the appropriate level of commitment to the experiment?

How can we create a station structure and budget to allow – and actively foster – experiments which might take months or years to become productive?

It's fair to say that pilot stations, especially those who pride themselves on resourcefulness, will revisit staffing and budgets as further efforts are considered. The questions these stations brought forward are ones that every station should ask when weighing

Who is best equipped at a station to shape and manage digital fundraising testing? What digital assets are needed to succeed even if they reside in other departments? What does a team need in terms of a budget for digital fundraising experiments and tests? What station-wide support does that team need?

- **If innovation takes time to pay off, what's our roadmap?**

If some experiments may take multiple years to mature into steady revenue streams, then what benchmarks should we set to make sure we are on target in the

"Our Nerd kick-off trivia night had about 100 attendees, almost all new to us and young. Our bake-off cake tasting at the station drew 75 people, virtually all new. Our Reading Rainbow book review activity drew a lot of shares but didn't raise money. We also tested Nerd t-shirts via Facebook ads and had a very good ROI. We might do a quarterly Nerd event, but only selectively employ P2P."



early stages? Can we partner with another station or PBS to set and track progress?

- **Is our money where the money is?**

Do we have a thorough, candid ROI for all fundraising activities? What digital fundraising activities have a better ROI based on the non-profit sector and system-wide data? Should we convene a cost-benefit "summit" to review current activities, identify a poor performer, and replace it with digital tests, budgeting for annual activity and targeted testing?

- **Can we find a friend in high places equally committed to innovation?**

Is there a board advocate willing to work with finance and station management to find donors or business supporters to seed high-profile digital activities?

- **How can we get more "social" beyond the staff?**

Given the growing role of social media in digital success, should we have a job description for a social media volunteer group? How do other successful groups handle grassroots social media? What social media messages should originate inside the station (e.g., program content), and which messages should originate among supporters (e.g., connecting and rallying like-minded fans)?

Whether a station is a model of advanced digital fundraising or a relative beginner, there will always be new strategies and technologies to test. The best way to decide how to tackle the future of digital fundraising may be simply to look at the recent past. Online giving has grown at varying rates among stations, in general rewarding stations who made early commitments to the unfamiliar new channel.



PBS Nerd™

For more information:

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