

THE CHRONICLE OF PHILANTHROPY

ONLINE FUNDRAISING

Making Monthly Gifts the Norm

By *Nicole Wallace*

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SUSTAINABLE GIFTS: Minnesota Public Radio raised \$10-million last year from monthly donors it had courted by sending smartphone appeals, using social media, and offering giveaways like this car sticker.

Monthly giving has become such a critical part of Minnesota Public Radio's fundraising approach that the organization doesn't even mention the option of making a one-time gift during pledge drives anymore. Recurring gifts are also central to the broadcaster's online fundraising.

“We talk all in terms of monthly giving,” says Nicole Anderson Stern, director of member giving. “And when our donors call to contribute, they use that same language. They’ll say, ‘I want to give \$10 a month. I want to give \$20 a month.’”

The results of that single-minded focus are impressive.

In 2012 Minnesota Public Radio had 80,000 monthly donors—roughly 60 percent of all contributors—who together gave more than \$10-million. More than half of those gifts came in online. That puts Minnesota Public Radio well ahead of most large nonprofits. The 75 organizations that reported data about monthly giving in *The Chronicle’s* online fundraising survey raised a median total of \$62,035 from people who commit to giving regularly.

Recurring Gifts Are Default

Minnesota Public Radio’s Web site is a key reason for its success. Making a monthly gift is the default option on the site’s donation page, and prospective donors can get a concise description of how monthly giving works without leaving the page.

While not every nonprofit wants to make monthly giving the default option, more groups need to integrate recurring gifts into their donation pages, says Ms. Stern.

“Make it easy for people to become a sustainer on your Web site,” she says. “Don’t make people have to search to find the special sustainer form.”

As much as 40 percent of the traffic to Minnesota Public Radio’s Web site comes from people using mobile devices, so the organization introduced a mobile-friendly donation page in January.

After donors make a monthly contribution online, they see a page that asks them why they support Minnesota Public Radio. The site gives people the opportunity to share their responses on Twitter and Facebook.

75

Number of big groups that told *The Chronicle* they raise money from monthly or other regularly scheduled gifts from bank accounts or credit cards

“We’ll actually get people tweeting out and sharing the fact that they have contributed to support Minnesota Public Radio,” says Ms. Stern. “These are just great testimonials that then we retweet and share with the community.”

Testimonials on the Radio

The organization has turned some of the testimonials into radio spots that air during pledge drives.

\$128.8-million

Total amount raised from those gifts

As a middle-school band teacher in Minneapolis named Sarah gave her testimonial about listening to the station on her ride home from work, her band’s flute section played the “All Things Considered” theme in the background.

\$62,035

Median sum raised

226

Median number of donors who made regular gifts

In another spot, Suzanne, a listener in northern Minnesota, describes her early-morning routine: making coffee, letting out the chickens, and listening to Minnesota Public Radio. She calls the station “our window on the world” as the birds cluck and scratch in the background.

32.4 percent

Share of groups that had more than 1,000 such donors

Donors who give monthly tend to be loyal: Eighty percent of people who commit to giving monthly for a year continue to do so a second year, while just 42

percent of people who make a one-time gift donate again the following year. What’s more, 87 percent of all donors who give monthly continue donating from one year to the next.

Says Ms. Stern: “That right there is reason enough to really put some muscle and some energy behind growing your sustainer program.”

Getting Donors to Give Monthly: Advice From Minnesota Public Radio

- Make monthly payments the default option on the donations pages of your Web site.
- Encourage donors to share information about their gifts on Twitter and Facebook.
- Promote monthly giving through direct-mail appeals and other offline options.

We welcome your thoughts and questions about this article. Please [email the editors](#) or [submit a letter](#) for publication.

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INDIVIDUAL GIVING



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