Greater Public Digital Fundraising Scorecard

Research & analysis performed by NextAfter Institute
Commissioned by Greater Public
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We put ourselves in the shoes of a donor and made $20 donations to 69 public radio stations of different sizes across the country from February 25 - February 28, 2020.

Our goal was to:

1. Better understand the current state of the online donation pages for public radio stations and their unique attributes
2. See the online giving experience and subsequent email communications through a donor’s eyes
3. Provide ideas and insights for public radio stations to improve their online giving experience and donor email communications to raise more money online

We started each donation at the station’s homepage and as our “donor’s journey” progressed, we answered 38 questions about the giving process and another six about the thank-you page. We then scored each station, recording positive and negative points based on data available from larger experiments that show what helps or hurts online giving. This was also the same methodology used in The PBS Digital Fundraising Scorecard (56 PBS stations) and The State of Nonprofit Donation Pages with RaiseDonors (203 nonprofits) studies (completed in 2019).

After the donation was made, we monitored the emails we received for 45 days. We classified each of the 509 emails we received by type as a confirmation email, cultivation email, or solicitation email. We then looked at email send times, sender, the ratio of cultivation to solicitation emails, and how the three email types were trending over time. This was the same methodology used in The State of Nonprofit Email Cultivation study (199 nonprofits, completed in 2019).

It should be noted that while our donations were made just before COVID-19 really hit the United States, the emails we received (from February 25 to April 13) were sent after the coronavirus pandemic had begun to impact the lives of Americans all over the country. Public radio stations, their staff, news, and their work were also undergoing significant upheaval.

There were many interesting findings and stats. But when we compared our findings to past studies and our experience researching, optimizing, and improving the online giving experience, there were seven key findings:

1. **All stations, regardless of size, can improve their online giving experience and communications.**
   The average public radio station online giving score was 45% which was lower than PBS peers (50%) and quite a bit lower than other nonprofits (59%).

2. **Almost all stations can do better at communicating during the giving experience why a donation is needed and what impact it will have.**
   Just one out of 10 stations (12%) had a “strong” value proposition or reason to give on their donation page.
3. The mobile giving experience, while functional, has a lot of room to improve.
   While almost all stations had a mobile-friendly experience (94%), only 57% were fully mobile-
   responsive compared to 75% of PBS stations and 94% of other nonprofits.

4. Not many stations are using their thank-you or confirmation page after a donation in an
   intentional way.
   Just one in four public radio stations (28%) expanded on the impact and use of a donation on their
   thank-you page and almost half (45%) offered no additional action for the donor to take.

5. Other than a few stations, public radio stations aren’t sending a lot of post-donation email,
   even though their email volume has increased during COVID-19.
   The average public radio station sent us three emails in 45 days. This average includes a doubling
   of the average number of emails after March 12th, 2020.

6. Public radio stations had a higher ratio of cultivation email relative to solicitation email
   compared to other nonprofits. But not all stations were sending cultivation-specific emails.
   We received 2.5 cultivation emails for every one solicitation email, which is higher than other
   nonprofits (1.5) but almost half (42%) of stations sent us no cultivation-focused emails within 45
   days of our donation.

7. The majority of emails sent did not look or read like they were from a person.
   Nine out of 10 (89%) of the emails sent by public radio stations were sent from the organization
   only (as opposed to from a person at the station, or containing a person and the station in the
   sender line). This is much higher than other nonprofits (74%).

Based on the findings above, and throughout this report, you’ll find suggestions to improve the overall
online giving experience and subsequent communications like:

- Make a test donation to your own page and, as best as you can, put yourselves in the shoes
  of a donor once a quarter to look for things that are broken or could be improved.

- Use more copy on a donation page to share why a donation is needed today and how it
  will be put to use.

- Update giving pages to be better optimized for mobile (no radio buttons, better form
  spacing and padding, and fewer steps and decisions).

- Make sure the thank-you page reinforces the impact of the donation and provide a clear
  next step/action.

- Try sending more emails that talk about one thing as opposed to fewer emails that talk
  about multiple things.

- Deliver more cultivation-only content (news, stories, update on impact of gift) in emails
  where that’s the main goal and focus.

- Try sending emails from a person, not from the organization, and consider being more
  human and personal in tone and copy.
An Introductory Note from Greater Public

When we began planning for this report late in 2019, the world was a different place. The goals for this project were important then, but we couldn’t have known how much more important they would become by early March when the project launched.

The disruption in listening and giving habits during the pandemic have made online giving and engagement mission critical at your station. The goal of this project is to experience online giving, and the email communication that follows, through a donor’s eyes so we can better understand the current state of online donation pages, and get expert advice on what can be improved. We also want to see this online giving experience, and then the subsequent email communication, through the donor’s eyes. Too often we look at our own pages and our own emails through our own lens.

And finally, by looking at the experience from the outside and comparing it to other nonprofits we wanted to find ideas and opportunities for all stations to improve their online fundraising.

We know there are gems of information that will help you raise more revenue in The Public Radio Online Fundraising Scorecard Report. So dig in and please stay in touch about how we can help and what successes you are able to accomplish.

Take good care and thanks for all you do!

Joyce MacDonald
President and CEO Greater Public
An Introductory Note from the Author

I recently moved to Texas, just north of Dallas, and one of the first things I did was find the local NPR station on the radio and bookmarked it in my browser. Being able to get reliable news is always an important part of life and now, more than ever, trusted, independent journalism is needed. So, from a personal perspective, it was fun, a pleasure, and an honor to work on this project.

You get to know organizations and, in this case, a network when you make dozens of donations and look at hundreds of emails. There were some interesting things that stood out to me as we went about this study.

Seeing public media’s strong focus on sustainers was inspiring since it’s a bit of a personal passion of mine to help other nonprofits focus more on their recurring giving. This strength is quite unique to public radio.

Also unique to this study was seeing such a direct correlation between station size and email volume and online giving experience score. We’ll often see some correlation, but seeing it so direct in both areas was quite stark. On the online giving side, some of this was due to the tools being used. It appeared that the donation tool some of the medium-sized stations are using doesn’t enable a great online giving experience. In talking to a few stations during other experiments, I know this to be true as well. The technology gap for stations of different sizes may also exist when it comes to email marketing tools (CMS, CRM, ESP… so many acronyms…) The right tools can really make our strategies more doable as well as cost- and resource-efficient.

I expected to see email volume even higher than it was, since, compared to other nonprofits, public radio stations produce so much content and have so much valuable information they can share with donors and supporters. Many other verticals or organizations would love to have that much great content. To see many stations not deliver that content regularly or in more concise ways was a bit surprising. This also presents a huge opportunity.

You may see that this report skews to the negative but that is because my goal is to highlight the biggest areas for opportunity so more public radio stations can better engage their current donors and reach more new ones. No judgement. Just opportunity based on our research and experience with hundreds of organizations, thousands of experiments, and tens of thousands emails.
A huge thank you to Melanie and Dick from the Greater Public team for allowing us to partner with them on this project and a special thanks to Vidheesha from NextAfter for helping me make sense of all the data.

And finally, a big thank you to you for taking the time to dig into this report. I hope you find it useful as you go about optimizing and improving your online fundraising.

Good luck!

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The Online Giving Experience

Overall, the average public radio station’s online giving score was 45%, which was lower than PBS peers (50%) and quite a bit lower than other nonprofits (59%).

Size was correlated to overall online giving experience score

There was also a correlation between the size of the station and the online giving score. This can reflect limited access to technology tools and resources like developers. But all organizations, big and small, do have control over their message, which is a main contributor to an online giving score.

Almost all stations can do better at communicating during the giving experience why a donation is needed and the impact it will have.

Just one out of 10 (12%) stations had a “strong” value proposition or reason to give on their donation page.

The value proposition is how an organization answers this one question: Why should I give to you as opposed to another organization or not at all?

There are different ways organizations can answer this question to secure more donations but simply having an answer to this question is better than no answer. In this experiment, having a reason to give led to a 150% increase in giving. We found that 48% of public radio stations used less than one sentence on their donation page. It’s hard to communicate value when you don’t use words.
Imagine you’re a donor interested in making a donation.

You click “donate” and arrive at this page:

Compare that to this page and experience:

Do you know why you should give?
Why you should give today?
Or how your donation would be used and to what end?

There’s no message here which means you have to infer, guess, and assume.

This page has a very strong impact-focused headline. It’s clear that this page is about an action, supporting, and how that support will help independent journalism. They mention, briefly, that a donation will support “content you care about” before highlighting the benefits of giving to the donor.

75% of public radio stations used incentives — premiums, giveaways, etc. — which is much higher compared to other nonprofits (35%). Incentives, however, aren’t the reason people give. Incentives serve to increase the amount people give, provide urgency to act now, and/or offer the feeling of impact. They are not substitutes for the overall value proposition or reason to give.
The lack of value proposition also applies to recurring or sustainer giving. Public radio stations place a lot more emphasis on becoming a sustainer than do other nonprofits — public media’s main donation pages are six times more likely to default to a monthly gift — but only 38% stations offered a specific reason to become a sustainer.

The KTOO example does offer a reason, but the messaging is brief. It focuses more on the transaction and the added perks sustainers receive. Providing a ‘dependable base of support’ is only meaningful to most donors because of what it enables, keeping journalism independent.

All stations, regardless of size, can improve the copy on their donation page that explains the main reason why someone should give today.

What can you do to improve your donation page value proposition?

- Try using copy (4 sentences or more) on your donation page to share why a donation is needed and how it will be used, not just what perks or premiums a donor gets.
- If you are encouraging sustainer gifts, try mentioning the impact the regular donation will have on the organization and on what the donor cares about.
- Ensure that the messaging is focused more on the donor and what their gift will do in the world and less on your organization and its financial needs.

The mobile giving experience, while functional, has a lot of room to be improved.

According to Blackbaud’s 2019 Charitable Giving Report, 26% of online donations were made using a mobile device. That’s up from just 14% five years ago.

In their latest benchmark report, M + R found that 33% of transactions were on a mobile device (up 17% compared to the year before). So, while desktop outpaces mobile for total transactions, average gift, and conversion rate, more and more people are giving on mobile. And their expectations of a mobile giving experience are greater as well.

We found that almost all public radio stations had a mobile-friendly experience (94%) in which you could complete a donation without pinching and zooming. But only 57% were fully mobile-responsive with a giving experience that was better optimized for the device. This compared unfavorably to PBS stations (75%) and other nonprofits (94%).
For example, look at these two mobile giving experiences:

1. In the first example, notice the small radio buttons, drop-down menu, and long, skinny form fields. While technically functional, these are all things that make giving on your mobile device harder and more frustrating.

2. Compare that to the second example with bigger buttons, selectable items, and wider form fields, as well as more spacing and padding that allows for mobile users to more easily complete their transaction.
Many radio stations’ websites were fully mobile-responsive with the singular exception of the online giving pages. The emails we received largely weren’t mobile-responsive either. The difference in mobile experiences between pages also creates friction in the giving experience.

In this experiment, you can see how small changes donation page optimization can lead to significant increases in giving: an 18% increase among desktop users, and a whopping 64.3% among mobile users.

Mobile responsiveness wasn’t the only friction factor we encountered. 60% of public radio stations had three or more full pages/steps to complete a donation. Two out of three stations required non-essential information to complete a donation (like phone number which 32% of stations required). Finally, 58% of stations had their donation page hosted on a third party domain (with a URL of donationplatform.com/station or station.donationplatform.com, for example, instead of with their own domain URL like station.org/donate or donate.station.org). Landing on what’s perceived to be a different website can confuse donors, seem less secure and trustworthy or add an additional step in the giving process which could all help lead them to abandon the giving process.

These added friction elements decrease the likelihood that someone will give on a desktop, and can compound the friction when giving on a mobile device.

The giving experience on mobile devices is increasingly important, so moving beyond functional and friendly into responsive and optimal is essential.

What can you do to improve your giving experience on mobile?

- Update giving pages to be better optimized for mobile (no radio buttons, better form spacing and padding, and fewer steps and decisions).
- Make sure your value proposition in copy/text remains on the page when people are on a mobile device.
- Consider adding a preselected amount with social proof — most popular, most people are giving, etc. — to improve conversions.

Few stations are using their thank-you or confirmation page after a donation in an intentional way.

Your thank-you or confirmation page that a donor lands on after a donation confirms to a donor that their gift was successful, but it’s also the very first strategic touch point that allows you to further engage with a donor.

Every station we looked at had a thank you page (100%), and almost all of them said thanks (99%).
But just one in four public radio stations (28%) mentioned the impact the donation would have. Nearly half (45%) had no additional action for the donor to take.

Both of those figures are higher and lower, respectively, compared to other nonprofits.

54% of other organizations expanded on their value proposition and only 27% offered no next action on the thank-you page.

Again, imagine you are a donor. You’ve chosen to give some of your hard-earned money to support a cause you believe in and experience the joy of giving.

You complete the online giving process and then see this:

It’s not bad, necessarily, but it doesn’t make the donor feel any better about the donation they just made and it’s - perhaps unintentionally - saying this is the end of the journey (for today at least).
Not only are you thanked but you are told how your donation is helping and then shown how in a video. If you didn’t feel great about your donation already, then you should or would now.

But they don’t stop there. You can also get involved on social media (a next step offered by 28% of public radio stations), and see if your company will match your donation (28% of public radio stations also offered this). Getting others to join and seeing if your gift can go further are two reasonable actions that are related to what you just did. These thank-you pages also proactively provide contact information should you have a question about your donation. This demonstrates a commitment to the donor having a good giving experience.

When looking at the actions offered on the thank-you page, only two organizations had a “give again” or “upgrade to monthly” call-to-action. It may seem counterintuitive to ask someone who has just given to upgrade or give again, but it’s something we’ve seen work in our experiment: 5% of those asked upgraded and 28% gave a 2nd one-time gift. The donor is just coming off the giving “high.” If you’ve thanked them well, there may be an opportunity to position an upgrade gift as a logical next step. Check out this example from the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society:

What can you do to improve your thank-you or confirmation page?

- Ensure the thank-you page thanks the donor and reinforces the impact of the donation they just made.
- Provide a clear next step/action they can take from the page like subscribe to a podcast, get involved on social, or even make a second gift or upgrade to sustainer (if a one-time gift).
- Try being more specific, tangible, and clear in both your thank-you message and the desired next step for maximum engagement.
Online Giving Experience Summary

The online giving experience to public radio stations compared to PBS stations and other nonprofits shows there is a lot of room to improve. The main message or reason to give must be present and is critical to ensure possible donors know why they should give today. Ensuring there isn’t unnecessary friction through things like additional pages/steps, moving to different unrelated domains, and requiring non-essential information on form fields is important, and even more so for people giving on their mobile devices. And once the donation is complete, the thank you page can be a strategic first touch-point to further engage with new and current supporters.

With these things in mind, make a donation to yourself on desktop and then again on mobile, see how you compare to the stats and findings in this report, and see what you can do to improve.

And if you’re wanting to see some public radio station peers who scored high for their online giving experience, here are some of the highest performers:

- New York Public Radio
- Chicago Public Radio
- Southern California Public Radio
- Hawaii Public Radio
- Minnesota Public Radio
The Email Communication Experience

At first glance, the number of post-donation email communications from public radio stations seemed to be more than those from other nonprofits. It also seemed that stations were including asks in email at the same rate as other nonprofits, and that stations even sent more cultivation communications (containing non-ask content) within a donor’s first 45 days after making an online donation.

But when we looked a bit deeper, we found that a few stations (six of them, in fact) were the ones driving much of that volume, and there was a direct correlation between the station size and how many emails they sent.

So the median station sent only 3 emails of any kind in the 45 days

When we looked at stations closer to the median, we saw a slightly different picture.

Other than a few stations, public radio stations aren’t sending a lot of post-donation email even though their email volume has increased during COVID-19.

The median number of emails was three and 50% of stations sent fewer than three emails in the 45-day period following the donation, which is both good news and bad news. The good news is this is actually almost identical to what other nonprofits sent in the first 45 days after a donation. The bad news is that, for them, as it is for public radio stations, that’s probably not enough emails to support a thriving online fundraising program.
Email volume is low, in part, because stations are including a lot of content in each email they send. The following email example was the second one we received from the station after their confirmation/thank-you email. It was sent 47 days after our donation:

It kind of feels like 47 days’ worth of content in one email, right? Is one of these topics most important for the reader? Which of these items does the organization want to feature? It’s hard to tell. Instead of sending one email with no clear, single takeaway after 45 days, why not send a few emails more frequently with fewer things in them?

The other challenge to the above “monthly newsletter” strategy is that a lot of time can go by between emails, time that’s early in a new donor’s engagement with your organization. And this can be a very critical time period.

According to Classy’s State of Modern Philanthropy study in 2019, the time when a one-time donor is most likely to make a second gift (outside of their giving anniversary window) is in the first few weeks after donating.

And the time when they’re most likely to become a recurring donor after a one-time gift? Also the same first few weeks time frame.
And it’s not just about additional giving. If you want to get more opens, feature your podcast, or get a new donor to subscribe to a daily news or programming newsletter, the first few emails you send to a new donor (or subscriber) are those that are most likely to be opened, read, and engaged with of any you’ll ever send.

**Impact on Engagement**

Welcome series offer conversion opportunities when **engagement metrics are at their highest**.
We did examine how COVID-19 may have had an impact on public radio stations’ email communications. Of the 45-day window when we were tracking emails, 30 of those days occurred after the WHO declared COVID-19 a global pandemic. During this pandemic time period, what we saw from public radio stations was very similar to what we saw from other nonprofits: more emails were sent.

In fact, public radio stations in this study essentially doubled the number of emails being sent on a per day basis which was higher than what we saw from other nonprofits and industries. The mix — the percentage of emails that were a solicitation (blue) compared to a cultivation (green) — stayed the same post-COVID-19, however, so stations weren’t necessarily asking more, just emailing more.

To see public radio stations increase their communications in response to COVID-19 at a much greater rate than other nonprofits during the course of our study, and still have comparable volume figures to other nonprofits compared to 2019, suggests that the email volume from public radio stations in a normal time period would actually be lower than other nonprofits. And other nonprofits are already not sending enough emails in the first 45 days (in our professional opinion).

**Almost all stations can - and should - afford to increase their email volume, particularly in the first 45 days after donation.**
Public radio stations had a higher ratio of cultivation for every solicitation compared to other nonprofits, but not all stations were sending cultivation-specific emails.

The number of stations that sent a focused fundraising email (43%) was roughly the same as other nonprofits (45%) and public radio stations were slightly more likely than other nonprofits to send at least one cultivation email (58% compared to 48%).

While there is no secret number or ratio (that we’ve found at least) of cultivation emails to send for every solicitation, we have seen evidence that the simple act of sending more cultivation emails can increase giving and email engagement.

In this experiment, the organization sent one additional cultivation email a week for six months and found that those who got the extra cultivation email were 13.1% more likely to give and 25.2% more generous for a total increase in revenue of 41.5% (full experiment here).

You may be asking “at what cost?” Did they get more unsubscribes and disengaged subscribers? The answer is no. They actually saw the complete opposite with an increase in clicks and opens of 43% across all key segments (donors, non-donors, and lapsed donors).

One station we observed sending a lot of cultivation content was Chicago Public Radio (WBEZ). They had a monthly newsletter similar to the example we showed earlier but they also had a more frequent, news-focused rundown email, a members-focused update, and included specific calls to action to subscribe to their podcast and give.
All stations, regardless of size, can benefit from sending more value-oriented, cultivation-focused content to their donors via email.

The majority of emails sent did not look or read like they were from a person. In addition to looking at what types of email were sent when, we also wanted to see who they came from. Who an email comes from, the sender, is the #1 thing people use to “triage” their inbox to determine which emails to read, delete, star, etc. An email’s sender is even more of a determinant than the subject line or preview text.

We’ve seen this prove true in many experiments in which sending an email from a person, as opposed to from an organization, improves the open rate (by 38.2% in this experiment).

For public radio stations, we found that 89% of the emails sent were sent from an organization which is higher than in other nonprofits (74%).
When we opened and read through the cultivation and solicitation emails, we saw that the vast majority of them were heavily branded and designed. If you remember the WBEZ emails you’ll see that they’re full of design elements.

But heavily designed emails don’t necessarily increase reader engagement or cause a reader to take action.

That’s something we’ve seen time and time again in our research library where a less designed email led to a 112.5% increase in donations and a newsletter without design saw an increase in clicks by 68.5%.

Marketers and fundraisers are often surprised by this and assume it won’t work for them. But KUOW in Seattle ran a test. For a fundraising campaign they were in, they used a normal email with logos, a hero image, and a big button as the control. They removed all those special design elements in the experimental version of the email, but kept the copy the same. They split the audience in half randomly and sent the email.
Here was the end result:

The control or designed email actually got more clicks (28% more) but the plain email actually led to an increase in donations of 29%.

That means that for those who clicked in each email, those from the plain email were 79% more likely to complete their donation.

This is a great experiment and reminder that the strategies that get you clicks don’t always get you donations. The goal of a fundraising email isn’t to just get clicks, it’s to get motivated clicks and, often, a more stripped down, plain email allows the reader to better engage with the reason to give, thus making them more likely to click and complete their donation.

All stations should experiment with being more human in their emails, including a personal sender and personalized look, copy, and even tone. This is especially true for fundraising emails.
Besides a few public radio stations, almost every organization in our study could increase the volume of their emails in the first 45 days after donation with an emphasis on cultivation (content that doesn’t have an ask in it). Even with increased volume during COVID-19, public radio stations were hoping their supporters would read and engage with longer emails with more time in between communications. This is a risky strategy and stations should consider more frequent emails with fewer actions or items in them.

In our research library we’ve seen that personal senders, less design, and even more personal copy and tone can significantly increase engagement and giving, but the majority of emails being sent by public radio stations were from the organization and had a lot of brand and visual elements. KUOW in Seattle tested a stripped-down email design and saw an increase in donations so this more human, personal approach is worth testing and exploring further.

What can you do to improve your email fundraising strategy?

• Try sending more emails that talk about one thing as opposed to fewer emails that talk about multiple things.

• Try front-loading your emails so you send a few more emails earlier on in a new donor’s engagement as opposed to evenly over time (since early on is when they are more engaged).

• Deliver more cultivation-only content (news, stories, update on impact of gift) in emails where that’s the main goal and focus.

• Try sending emails from a person, not the organization.

• Consider being more human and personal in your tone and copy as well as design (ie. remove it).
All Stats and Findings

We wanted to keep the report as simple and focused as we could but there were a lot of other bits of information captured in this process. In case you are interested or want to benchmark your own online giving experience and communications to others. here are all the findings from the study:

### Online Giving Experience

- The average public radio station score was 45%.
- Just one out of 10 (12%) stations had a “strong” value proposition or reason to give on their donation page.

### Incentives

- 61% had a physical premium offer.
- 21% had no additional incentive.
- 7% had a giveaway/contest
- 1% had a matching offer
- 26% of public radio stations had buttons, menu, or navigation distractions.
- 54% of public radio stations used small, hard-to-click or ‘radio’ style buttons.
- 58% of public radio stations had their donation page on a third party platform or different domain.
- 35% of public radio stations had additional calls to action on their donation page.
- 84% of public radio stations use “donate” language as their call to action on the homepage.
- 88% of public radio stations make it so you can find the donate page in less than 5 seconds.
- 7% of public radio stations were using a pop-up or lightbox.
- 96% of stations collected gift amount first.

### Recurring

- 38% of public radio stations have a specific value proposition for recurring or monthly giving.
- **Recurring gift arrays:**
  - 39% of public radio stations pre-selected a recurring gift amount.
  - Of those that did, 33% pre-selected $10 and 33% pre-selected $15.
  - 7% of public radio stations used a reverse gift array for recurring gifts.
  - 47% of public radio stations started their recurring gift array with $5.
  - 94% of public radio stations had at least 3 suggested gift amounts before an “other”, 28% had 7 or more
  - 6% of public radio stations had a prompt or pop-up to become a monthly donor
• **One-time gift arrays:**
  - 38% of public radio stations pre-selected a one-time gift amount
  - Of those that did, 35% pre-selected $120 and 31% pre-selected $180
  - 7% of public radio stations used a reverse gift array for one-time gifts
  - 46% of public radio stations started their one-time gift array with $60
  - 94% of public radio stations had at least 3 suggested one-time gift amounts before an “other”, 28% had 7 or more

**Thank You Page**

- Every organization had a thank-you page (100%). Almost all said thanks (99%) and the vast majority noted the gift amount (91%).
- One in four (28%) public radio stations had copy on their thank-you page that expanded the value proposition.
- Almost half (45%) of public radio stations had no additional action for people to take on the thank-you page.
  - 28% asked you to do something on social media.
  - 28% asked you to do something around an employee match.
  - 7% asked you to provide feedback/take a survey.
  - 6% asked you to subscribe to something.
  - 3% asked you to read something.

**Email Communications**

- Public radio stations sent an average of 7.4 emails over 45 days.
- 50% of public radio stations sent 3 emails or less over 45 days.
- The median number of emails sent by public radio stations was 3.
- Public radio stations sent 2.5 cultivation emails for every solicitation (compared to 1.5 from other nonprofits).
- 96% of public radio stations acknowledged the donation in the first two days.
- 58% of the emails we received were focused on cultivation.
- 42% of public radio stations sent us no cultivation emails in 45 days.
- 24% of the emails we received were focused on solicitation.
- 57% of public radio stations did not send us an ask email in 45 days.
- The median public radio station sent their first solicitation on day 19 compared to day 13 for other nonprofits.
- 46.2% of all emails are sent between 6:00 a.m. and noon (Central time).
- 9.0% of all emails were sent on the weekend (Saturday and Sunday).
- 89% of emails were sent from the organization only.
- 6% of emails were sent from a person, organization.
- 6% of emails were sent from just a person.
Additional Resources

If you want to learn more about online fundraising, here are some resources to go deeper.

NextAfter Research

Get the Latest Online Fundraising Research & Real Nonprofit Experiments. What does the online giving experience to higher ed organizations look like? How many nonprofits are sending mail to their online donors and vice versa? How are nonprofits trying to keep monthly donors whose credit cards have expired? Those are just a few of the questions asked and answered through first-hand, original research performed by the NextAfter Institute.

You can get them all, for free, at nextafter.com/resources.

NextAfter Institute Courses

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About

About Greater Public

Greater Public supports public media organizations and empowers them to reach new heights. For more than 35 years, Minnesota-based Greater Public has helped public media organizations across the country raise tens of millions of dollars, which has resulted in stronger local service and has enriched communities and lives. Through its strong relationships across the public media ecosystem, Greater Public serves leaders and practitioners at 250 member organizations across the country and is working to take on new, big challenges and provide the resources and support to spark innovation.

For more information, visit GreaterPublic.org.

About NextAfter

The NextAfter Institute exists to equip nonprofit fundraisers and digital marketers with original research, evidence-backed resources, and data-driven training to better understand their donors and why they give to raise more money online and fund their life-changing work.

For more information, visit NextAfter.com/Institute
Methodology

For the online giving experience...
We made $20 donations to 69 public radio stations between February 25 and February 28 by starting from the station home page and putting ourselves in the shoes of a motivated online donor. We collected 38 pieces of data while making the donation and another six on the confirmation/thank-you page. We assigned positive and negative points to our experience based on what our donation page testing has proven is positive or negative. This is the same scoring we used with The State of Nonprofit Donation Pages study in 2019.

For the email communication experience...
We collected emails for 45 days — a critical time to engage new subscribers and new donors, and longer than a month in order to capture monthly communication cycles — and then exported them to be classified by three independent researchers as either:

- **Confirmation:** A usually automated email that confirms and, ideally, thanks you for your donation. For donations, it can often look like a receipt and contains transaction information.

- **Solicitation:** The main purpose of this email is to get you to do something tied to money like give or donate, buy something, or fundraise. Often, this will contain a call to action like “Give Today” or “Donate Now.”

- **Cultivation:** Anything else where the main purpose of the email is not a confirmation or solicitation. This could be a thank you, story, newsletter, update, video, report, article, etc. or asks you to do something like volunteer, sign a petition, or advocate for the organization in some way. If it has a call to action at all, it is often “Read More” or “Learn More.”

We then analyzed the emails by type, sender, frequency, time, etc. and looked at the first cultivation email specifically to see for what the action/ask was (if any).

Who is in the study?
Stations included in the study spanned 41 different states as well as Washington, D.C. and included stations of different sizes from Small (less than $1M) to Mega (> $10M).