

Maintaining Institutional Memory for Non-commercial College Radio Fundraising

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by

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### **Abstract**

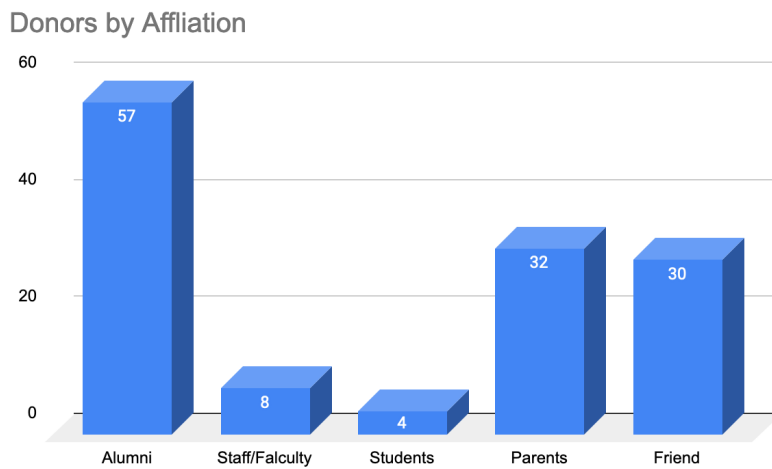
This paper outlines how to run a non-commercial, non-profit radio station fundraising program, commonly called a Pledge Drive. Cal Poly's radio station, KCPR 91.3, hosts an annual Pledge Drive in the spring. KCPR staff, specifically the fundraising manager and marketing director, lead the KCPR team in raising funds that support our operations for the upcoming year. This paper will detail the strengths of past fundraising drives and potential improvements to fundraising drives in the future while addressing the question of: How do college radio stations create continuity in non-commercial radio fundraising to ensure success amid changing economic conditions and the inevitable transfer of leadership?

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1



Figure 2



**TABLE OF CONTENTS:**

<b>Abstract</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Chapter 1: Introduction</b>	<b>5</b>
Statement of the Problem	5
Background of the Problem	6
Purpose of the Study	6
Setting of the Study	7
Research Questions	7
Definition of Terms:	8
<b>Chapter 2: Literature Review</b>	<b>8</b>
Past Obstacles in KCPR's Pledge Drive	8
The Importance of Pledge Drive Continuity	8
Donor Motivations	9
Best Practices	10
Best Practices: Scalefunder	10
Best Practices: Raffle	11
Best Practices: Donor Gifts	<b>12</b>
<b>Chapter 3: Methodology</b>	<b>12</b>
Creating the Pledge Drive Playbook	12
Factoring the literature into the Pledge Drive Playbook	13
Factoring Commentary from Advisors and Colleagues	13
Factoring in Comments from Successor	13
Limitations	<b>14</b>
<b>Chapter 4: The Pledge Drive Playbook</b>	<b>14</b>
Design Contest	15
Pledge Drive Themes and Art	15
Pledge Drive Weeks of Pledge and the Newsletter	15
Eat Your Pledge Tuesdays	16
Outside Lands Raffle	16
Bop and Shop	16
<b>Chapter 5: Discussions and Recommendations</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>Summary</b>	<b>16</b>
Discussion	17
Recommendations	19
Conclusion	19

## Chapter 1

### *Introduction*

#### **Statement of the Problem**

Non-commercial fundraising for radio is a complex process that must account for a variety of factors, including legality, economic stability, donor relations, and inconsistent leadership due to rotating hired staff. As a non-profit college radio station, KCPR relies on donations from a yearly pledge drive to maintain operations, so creating continuity in fundraising efforts is essential.

KCPR 91.3 is a “tastemaker and informational outlet... dedicated to sharing relevant, quality news and information, along with insight on emerging music, arts, and culture with the Central Coast” (KCPR 91.3 FM). Our website, [kcpr.org](http://kcpr.org), gains hundreds of thousands of page views every year, and our live broadcasts serve as a staple of the Central Coast community, delivering news, music, and podcasts on-air every week. KCPR embodies Cal Poly’s “learn-by-doing” motto, and alumni excel in the media and music industry post-graduation.

In 2022, KCPR hired the first official fundraising manager under the marketing director (Figure 1). In 2022, KCPR raised \$20,000 for the first time in KCPR history. As the first fundraising manager of KCPR, I created a Pledge Drive Playbook, which will serve as a training guide for all future fundraising managers. Within this guide, I, along with the KCPR general manager, faculty advisor, and marketing director, laid the framework necessary to maintain continuity in fundraising and avoid unnecessary legal and economic obstacles.

## **Background of the Problem**

In 1976, KCPR held its first Pledge Drive. The Pledge Drive has supported KCPR for decades, keeping our station on the air. In 1976, KCPR's first Pledge Drive was an 80-hour-long marathon featuring KCPR DJ Larry LaFollette (Gattuso, 2021). In 2023, Pledge Drive is a six-week-long event that raises nearly \$20,000, including on-air promotions, events, merchandise, social media promotions, and an ambassador program. KCPR's Pledge Drive has evolved. With the evolution of KCPR's fundraiser and the development of KCPR's fundraising manager, a proper playbook must be instated.

## **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of creating this playbook is to record institutional memory, making it accessible to all future KCPR classes. At the time of this study, the fundraising manager is not an official media board position. As such, this playbook will serve as the official training guide for future individuals in this position. Even in the face of changes to the structure of KCPR and the structure of fundraising at Cal Poly, this playbook will allow the continuity of a smooth Pledge Drive.

By the definition of student radio, employee turnover is inevitable and constant. Therefore, a playbook is necessary to ensure success beyond the tenure of the first fundraising manager. According to Faculty Advisor Patti Piburn, students occupying the position of fundraising manager may vary in experience levels, so Pledge Drive's success fluctuated frequently. According to Piburn, "In the past, it felt like we were reinventing the wheel every year. The students running the Pledge Drive did not have that institutional memory, so we need a resource that will carry institutional memory forward."

Before the creation of this role, KCPR had no infrastructure for Pledge Drive. The lack of structure led to inconsistent messaging to donors, a disconnect with the most prominent donors, and other issues. The funds raised from Pledge Drive nearly doubled in the year KCPR created this position. The success of Pledge Drive should not depend on the individual in the fundraising role but instead on the continuity of the infrastructure of this role.

### **Setting of the Study**

I completed this study in accompaniment with creating the Pledge Drive Playbook. My experience as the fundraising manager and input from Faculty Advisor Patti Piburn and General Manager Jon Schlitt informed the Pledge Drive Playbook. I began this project in the winter of 2023 and finished it during my term as fundraising manager in the spring of 2023.

### **Research Questions**

1. How does KCPR ensure that the KCPR Pledge Drive remains successful amid constantly changing leadership?
2. What legal and bureaucratic considerations must be examined while planning a Pledge Drive?
3. How can KCPR implement targeted marketing strategies to ensure donor retention?

### **Definition of Terms:**

Pledge Drive: KCPR's Pledge Drive is a six-week annual fundraising initiative necessary to raise operating funds for the station. Also referred to as a membership drive or donor drive.

Fundraising Manager: KCPR's fundraising manager plans and executes the Pledge Drive.

Institutional Memory: Facts and knowledge gained through the experience of working in an institution. Also referred to as institutional knowledge.

## Chapter 2

### *Literature Review*

#### **Past Obstacles in KCPR's Pledge Drive**

In 2014, KCPR 91.3 FM made national news for its Pledge Drive tactics; however, the press coverage was not positive. In July 2014, Poynter published an article titled "University may sell radio station after 'Sexy Snapchats' promotion somehow goes wrong" (Hare, 2014). The article details how KCPR DJs promised donors of its Pledge Drive "a week of sexy snap chats featuring the hosts of [talk show] Getting It In!" Following the issue, news website Cal Coast News acquired emails from the Dean of the College of Liberal Arts that alluded to the possibility of Cal Poly selling the station (Hare, 2014).

#### **The Importance of Pledge Drive Continuity**

This situation exemplifies the importance of establishing standards and processes for KCPR's Pledge Drive. Without proper professional standards and well-planned fundraising initiatives, students have historically put the station in jeopardy. Additionally, with the inevitable employee turnover inherent to college radio, KCPR will lack continuity in fundraising without a playbook.

According to the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), non-commercial radio stations rely on fundraising because they cannot advertise the same way as commercial radio stations (Commission policy). Therefore, Pledge Drives are necessary for non-commercial radio stations to fund operations. Pledge Drives solicit donations from different donor groups. National public radio stations, such as NPR or PBS, often solicit donations from donors, mainly on-air. Bentley found that in non-commercial radio, appeals to self-interest are more common than



appeals to altruism (Bentley, 2022). However, college radio stations operate somewhat differently. Instead, non-commercial college radio stations target alums and supporters of the students that volunteer and work for the station, in addition to on-air pushes targeted toward listeners. Due to the nature of college radio and the camaraderie inherent to the station's culture, we must also work to appeal to altruism.

### **Donor Motivations**

In Joshua Bentley's analysis of the best practices for fundraising for non-commercial radio, he identifies three motivators for donors: altruism, self-interest, and mixed motives. Altruism is "the desire to help others without expecting any award" (Bentley, 2014). Self-interest motivates a donor on a transactional level, while mixed motivation combines altruistic and self-serving incentives.

To examine how the best practices for KCPR's Pledge Drive, one must consider the targeted donor groups and their motivations. For example, alums generally have mixed motivations. Alumni donate to KCPR out of a desire to help the students; however, many alums also donate with high levels of interest in attaining the KCPR donor gifts. Parents, however, generally have more altruistic motivations, as they desire to help their child's educational aspirations without a high level of interest in receiving anything in return. An avid listener of KCPR may donate out of self-interest; the avid listener donates so that their favorite radio station remains on-air for their pleasure. Figure 2 demonstrates the number of different donor groups in this past Pledge Drive.

KCPR must cater to these different donor groups with specific initiatives. For example, in 2023, KCPR introduced a specialized alum tee shirt to the donor gifts to cater to the donor group's mixed motivation. In contrast, this year, the fundraising manager included a video

highlighting KCPR students' support systems to encourage their families and friends to donate out of a desire to help their loved ones.

### **Best Practices**

The fundraising manager should consider a few best practices within KCPR's Pledge Drive in the execution of Pledge Drive while keeping donor motivations in mind. I consulted the general manager, faculty advisor, and current marketing director about the best practices I should highlight in creating this project. I chose a few of the best practices from the past few years of Pledge Drive to further research and include in this literature review. In the next few sections, I will examine research on the crowdfunding platform, Scalefunder, raffles as a fundraising method, and donor gifts.

#### **Best Practices: Scalefunder**

In the early 2010s, annual fund giving decreased; alumni giving rates fell 3.3% in 2011. Younger alumni were not engaging in university fundraising as they had in the past. To accommodate the interests of this new, younger group of potential donors, universities utilized crowdfunding sites (Jarrell, 2013). Scalefunder "connect[s] donors to a school's existing gift processing system and donor database" so fundraisers can track donations and promote projects among targeted groups (Jarrell, 2013). Additionally, alumni can utilize their own social groups, specifically by sharing crowdfunding fundraisers through social media. KCPR, in connection with Cal Poly Annual Giving, hosts Pledge Drive on Scalefunder. Through Scalefunder, KCPR students can be ambassadors and share the fundraiser through a personalized link with friends and family. On the back end, the fundraising manager can track donations, specifically the donations that come through ambassador links. In the past, KCPR held a competition throughout the station, enlisting data from the ambassador links on Scalefunder.

**Best Practices: Raffle**

When considering KCPR's donor motivations, we must consider an underrepresented group of donors: non-affiliated students and non-affiliated community members. Non-affiliated individuals' main motivation for participating in a KCPR Pledge Drive is self-interest, so the fundraising manager must consider this motivation and adapt appropriately.

To engage non-affiliated individuals, KCPR held a raffle in 2023. An alumn donated two three-day passes to the Outside Lands Music Festival in San Francisco and a one-night stay at Hotel San Luis Obispo. Raffles appeal to donors' self-interest because people respond to the opportunity to win a prize, causing people to contribute more than just a donation (Bhati & Hansen, 2020). In 2023, each raffle ticket was \$5; KCPR sold approximately 300 raffle tickets totaling about \$1,500 in revenue, considering the prizes were all donated.

However, according to a field experiment regarding fundraising for a local poverty relief fund, raffles performed better when discounts were offered on bulk tickets (Bhati & Hansen, 2020). For example, one ticket would sell at \$5, but 3 tickets would sell for \$10. Going forward, the fundraising manager may want to consider this approach.

Overall, raffles are one avenue to raise money, attracting an underrepresented donor group in KCPR, non-affiliated individuals. The opportunity to win a prize appeals to the non-affiliated individuals' self-interest. While raffles should be considered a proven best practice for accessing underutilized donor groups, there is an opportunity for improvement in expanding our donor network.

**Best Practices: Donor Gifts**

Acknowledging and thanking donors are vital aspects of the relationship between an organization and its donors (Merchant et al., 2010). A 2010 study found that donor gifts increase

a donor's positive emotions, stabilizing a donor relationship. However, donors that did not receive thank you's were more likely to have negative emotions, which affected donor intentions. The study also found that donor gifts help build relationships with new donors; therefore, newer donors will be more likely to donate again.

This study correlates with KCPR's donor thank-you gifts. In 2022 and 2023, KCPR sent donor gifts to all donors. Every donor received a thank you postcard signed by a KCPR member, apparel based on the donation amount,

## **Chapter 3**

### *Methodology*

#### **Creating the Pledge Drive Playbook**

In this chapter, I will detail the methods I utilized to create the Pledge Drive Playbook. To create this playbook, I consulted the appropriate literature, sought advice and consultation from my colleagues and advisors, and analyzed the outcomes of the fundraiser. I created this playbook in conjunction with executing my position as a fundraiser, so it directly reflects my actions within the role. In the process of creating this playbook, I detailed different initiatives I led, how to execute these initiatives, and what did and did not work from my previous two years in the role of fundraising manager.

#### **Factoring the literature into the Pledge Drive Playbook**

I factored the literature on fundraising into the Pledge Drive Playbook by considering donor motivations and adapting fundraising initiatives to reflect the motivations of different donor groups. I outlined this strategy in various sections of the Pledge Drive Playbook, including the newsletter section, the weeks of Pledge Drive section, and the donor gifts section. Additionally, I considered the best practices I researched and outlined in the previous section of this article and applied this knowledge to the execution of Pledge Drive and then recorded the outcomes of these practices in the Pledge Drive Playbook.

#### **Factoring Commentary from Advisors and Colleagues**

I consulted Jon Schlitt, General Manager of MMG, David Aronson, KCPR Marketing Director, and Patti Piburn, Faculty Advisor to KCPR, for creating the Pledge Drive Playbook. Jon Schlitt suggested that I highlight the improvements that we have made to the external and

internal communication surrounding Pledge Drive, especially on social media, which I included in the social media and art segment of this project. After my conversation with Jon Schlitt, I decided to add a section to the project with general advice for future fundraising managers from all of the consultants on this project.

### **Factoring in Comments from my Successor**

I consulted my successor on any questions she had about the Pledge Drive Playbook to ensure its clarity and ability to transfer institutional knowledge after my graduation. My successor in 2023 was Claire Anderson. I incorporated Claire Anderson's comments and suggestions into the final draft of this playbook.

### **Limitations**

In creating this playbook, I encountered limitations that may restrict the continuity of this role in the following years. The main limitation encountered was external communication issues with the Office of Annual Giving. In the past, we worked with members of the Office of Annual Giving that implemented processes that aided KCPR's Pledge Drive. However, the processes in place changed due to a change in leadership in this office. For example, in the past two years, the fundraising manager was in charge of setting up the content of the Scalefunder website; however, in future years, this may not be possible due to the policies enforced by the Office of Annual Giving. Furthermore, I predict how KCPR, in conjunction with the Office of Annual Giving, handles premiums will change next year. Employee turnover in various roles in Cal Poly Corporation may inevitably change the way KCPR plans and executes its Pledge Drive and may hinder some of the information provided in this guide irrelevant.

Additionally, the dates and schedule detailed in this Playbook line up with the dates and schedule of Cal Poly's quarter system. In the academic year of 2026-2027, Cal Poly intends to

switch students' academic schedules from a quarter system to a semester system. Subsequently, KCPR's Pledge Drive dates will also have to shift to accommodate this change.

## Chapter 4

### *The Pledge Drive Playbook*

In this chapter, I will summarize the sections of the Pledge Drive Playbook. As it is an internal document with potentially confidential information, it cannot be shared publicly.

Through my explanation of the different sections and their aspects, other college radio stations could create a similar playbook for their fundraising drive.

#### **Design Contest**

In the Fall/Winter quarter, KCPR holds a design contest open to the public. Individuals submit art designs for Pledge Drive merchandise. The KCPR management team chooses the winners with input from KCPR staff and students. The winners receive a free line of Pledge Drive merchandise.

In the “Design Contest: Rules and Regulations” section of the Pledge Drive Playbook, I outline the guidelines, an example copy for the website, an example collection form, the requirements for the collection form, and how to contact participants. In the “Design Contest Marketing and Promotions” section of the Pledge Drive Playbook, I outline details for promotional art and social media campaigns, as well as an email template for contacting winners. In the “Design Contest: Past Contests,” I examine the details of past contests and what worked and did not work in past contests.

#### **Pledge Drive Themes and Art**

In the section of the Pledge Drive Playbook titled “Pledge Drive Themes and Art,” I provide examples of past themes and art for Pledge Drive. I also added a section detailing what worked and what did not work regarding this section.



## **Pledge Drive Weeks of Pledge and the Newsletter**

In this section of the Pledge Drive Playbook, I lay out the themed weeks of Pledge Drive in 2023. I provide an example copy for both the newsletter and the website. I also analyze the metrics of the newsletter. The last portion of this section details what worked and what didn't.

## **Eat Your Pledge Tuesdays**

In the "Eat Your Pledge Tuesdays" section of the Pledge Drive Playbook, I detail how this initiative functions, examples from past years, and the results of this initiative. I also include important notes, such as KCPR's mailing address and Tax ID.

## **Outside Lands Raffle**

In the section of the Pledge Drive Playbook titled "Outside Lands Raffle," I included an overview of the raffle. I detailed how to apply for a raffle and how to finalize a raffle. I also included a section dedicated to need-to-know questions and answers collected from an individual from Cal Poly Corporation and a section detailing what worked and didn't work.

## **Phone Bank**

In this section, I describe the Phone Bank we held in 2022 and 2023 to cold call donors directly. I give an overview and provide a document with tips and tricks. I also included a section about what did and did not work.

## **Bop and Shop**

In the section of the Pledge Drive Playbook dedicated to "Bop and Shop," I include an overview section; moreover, I detail how to collect donations and how to set up for Bop and Shop, and I analyze the results of this event.

## Chapter 5

### *Discussions and Recommendations*

#### **Summary**

As the first official fundraising manager, I created the Pledge Drive Playbook to ensure that institutional knowledge persists well beyond the conclusion of my tenure. Under the leadership of KCPR's management team in 2022, our pledge drive raised \$20,000 for our organization. In 2023, we raised another record-breaking \$25,000.

Initiatives such as Bop and Shop, the Outside Lands ticket raffle, and Eat Your Pledge Tuesdays raised approximately \$2,000 in donations. Additionally, the ambassador links encouraged members of KCPR to get involved in Pledge Drive, raising additional thousands of dollars. Future fundraising managers can reference this playbook to replicate the success of the pledge drives from 2022 and 2023.

This playbook carefully details how to run all fundraising events and initiatives related to KCPR's Pledge Drive. This playbook can be regarded as a record of institutional memory and a training guide for all future KCPR classes. Within this playbook, I have included important resources, contacts, information, and recommendations for the role of KCPR's fundraising manager.

#### **Discussion**

KCPR's fundraising manager position is vital to the success of Pledge Drive, and as of the beginning of 2023, there was no established training process for this position. This dilemma led to the creation of the Pledge Drive Playbook. In the following section, I will discuss the research question I outlined in a prior section of this paper.

**1. How does KCPR ensure that the KCPR Pledge Drive remains successful amid constantly changing leadership?**

As I neared graduation, I had to consider how my successors could replicate and build upon the success of Pledge Drive in the last two years. The success can be quantified in the record-breaking numbers over the last two years. In 2022, KCPR raised \$20,000, and in 2023, KCPR raised \$25,000. This success in Pledge Drive is unprecedented. To ensure the success of KCPR's annual fundraiser, I created a guide to maintain institutional knowledge in this role. This guide includes all the resources necessary to make future Pledge Drives successful, including documents utilized in years past.

**2. What legal and bureaucratic considerations must be examined while planning a Pledge Drive?**

Many legal and bureaucratic factors must be considered in this role. KCPR's raffle requires legal considerations, as raffles are considered gambling under California's penal code. To hold a KCPR raffle, the fundraising manager must apply for a raffle permit and track the income of the raffle every individual day of the raffle. Additionally, certain laws and regulations must be followed for the legitimacy of the raffle.

As Cal Poly is a corporation with many entities, the fundraising manager must be comfortable interacting with many departments. One department that the fundraising manager must be in constant connection with to avoid any delays in KCPR's Pledge Drive is the Office of Annual Giving. The fundraising manager must also work with the business and finance division of Cal Poly Corporation regarding the raffle and the use of the Clover.

**3. How can KCPR implement targeted marketing strategies to ensure donor retention?**

As future fundraising managers build upon the strategies I have outlined in the Pledge Drive Playbook, they should take extra caution to ensure that all marketing strategies are targeted and appropriate to the donor group. In this paper, I have analyzed donor motivations and provided examples of how KCPR's fundraising manager can implement strategies with the consideration of different donor groups' motivations.

Future fundraising managers should focus on improving this area of our fundraising initiatives. Particularly, the future fundraising manager should consider how to engage untapped donor groups, such as Cal Poly students and unaffiliated community members. This year, KCPR targeted these groups with the Outside Lands Raffle; however, there is an opportunity for growth in this area of the position.

### **Recommendations**

I recommend that all future fundraising managers continue adding and improving this playbook. Each individual will gain different institutional knowledge. Provided the fundraising managers utilize this guide, their institutional knowledge can be passed down to the next generation of KCPR. Primarily, I would focus on improving the weeks of Pledge, amending the Eat Your Pledge Tuesdays initiatives, expanding the Bop and Shop events, and continuing the raffle.

My two biggest recommendations for changing the fundraising manager position in the future are specializing roles for the fundraising team and creating a monthly newsletter. The monthly newsletter would be opt-in only, so our alumni and supporters can keep up to date with what's going on at KCPR, like Mustang News' newsletter. I would suggest creating specialized roles on the fundraising team. One for alumni relations, one for event planning, and one for promotions/social media.

I would also encourage the fundraising managers to plan well in advance, as this job can be hectic with all its moving parts. I would advise that future fundraising managers maintain relationships with all the key players involved in Pledge Drive, including top donors and engaged alumni, Cal Poly Corp, KCPR managers, and the Office of Annual Giving. It is essential that the fundraising manager adapt this guide to ensure the success of future Pledge Drives.

### **Conclusion**

This guide establishes a process for fundraising at KCPR 91.3 FM, Cal Poly's radio station. The Pledge Drive Playbook should be regarded as a record for institutional knowledge and a training guide for successors of the fundraising manager position. The creation of such a guide is essential to ensure the repeated success of Pledge Drives in the future.

With considerations from the general manager, faculty advisor, marketing director, and incoming fundraising manager, I revised, edited, and produced this guide to tailor to training incoming managers. In this guide, I have included my experiences and recommendations, as well as key resources and information. The Pledge Drive Playbook will maintain institutional knowledge well beyond my term and ensure the infrastructure established for Pledge Drive does not deteriorate upon my resignation from this position.

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