

# Public Broadcasting & Paid Membership

## MPC MAJOR RESEARCH PAPER

### Public Broadcasting & Paid Membership: A Pilot Study to Assess the WNED Buffalo-Toronto Dilemma

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### Abstract

Using mutually-reinforcing components, this pilot study seeks to identify the barriers that are preventing viewers of WNED Buffalo-Toronto, a public broadcaster, from becoming paid members. A review of literature considers the changing nature of membership, the success of televangelism, and PBS's own experience with paid membership. Drawing on organizational commitment theory, and the notional categories of membership developed by Gruen, Summers & Acito (2000), this study analyzes both the external communications documents produced by WNED and feedback from Canadian viewers, both members and non-members. From these results, the study makes three preliminary recommendations. It suggests that WNED take steps to increase the amount of coproduction implied in membership, that it begin investing in Web 2.0 to better leverage its content and foster brand communities, and that it augment membership with crowdfunding initiatives. The study concludes with the suggestion that membership is changing and that more relational models may be more attractive to viewers.

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## Public Broadcasting & Paid Membership

### Public Broadcasting and Paid Membership:

#### A Pilot Study to Assess the WNED Buffalo-Toronto Dilemma

In 2010, according to Nielsen Audience Figures, WNED-TV Buffalo-Toronto was the most watched public television station in the United States during primetime. It averaged 1.3 million viewers every week. In an advertisement to members, which appeared in the July 2011 issue of the *WNED Magazine*, Vice-President for Broadcasting Ron Santora attributed this success to various factors: “We have a population that really cares about quality television, we have a program acquisition budget that deftly supplements our PBS offerings, and our promotion efforts are on par with the best.”

Despite this significant accomplishment, membership at WNED Buffalo-Toronto continues to lag drastically, with only 42,000 paid members in 2010. This situation is not new. In 2009, amidst another round of employee layoffs, WNED president and chief executive officer Donald K. Boswell, told the Buffalo News that despite then being the nation's second most- watched public TV station, per capita, in prime time, WNED "membership levels have remained relatively flat.”(*Revenue Loss Spurs*, 2009)

The challenge faced by WNED is considerable. It has to attract and retain members willing to contribute annually to a service that is otherwise free. And WNED has taken serious steps to address this problem. Since 1998 it has rebranded itself as WNED Buffalo-Toronto, increased the amount of Canadian content and decreased the frequency of its membership drives from four to two times a year. Yet none of these initiatives has been able to increase membership. This begs the question: what is it that prevents viewers from becoming members? Drawing on a survey of external

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communications documents and viewer interviews, this study seeks to better understand the membership experience at WNED. It will consider how WNED communicates with its viewing audience and how its viewers in turn perceive the organization. With this insight, this study will attempt to formulate a series of recommendations aimed at increasing membership.

Membership is of particular concern to WNED as it relies on the financial contributions of its members for over 50% of its income. To become a member in any given year, a viewer needs to make a minimum contribution of \$35 dollars. Membership is good for one year and is tax deductible for US citizens. In return for their contribution, members have the option to receive a thank-you gift and a subscription to the monthly programming guide, *WNED Magazine*. Thank-you gifts are tiered according to the size of the donation. Membership demands very little interaction and can be purchased on-line at [www.wned.org](http://www.wned.org), in person, over the phone, or through the mail at any time during the year. A particular emphasis is put on membership recruitment and renewal each spring and fall. During these drives, station employees who encourage viewers to renew their memberships frequently interrupt regular programming. The station highlights new programs and offers special benefits during this time to attract new members.

The oldest public television station in New York State, WNED Buffalo -Toronto, is a non-profit corporation based out of Buffalo, New York. WNED is available in over two million homes across Western New York, Southern Ontario and Northwestern Pennsylvania. Independently owned and operated, its mission is to “provide high quality programming and services that enlighten, inspire, entertain and educate the communities of Western New York and Southern Ontario.”

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As a member of the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS), WNED is entitled to some federal subsidies in exchange for granting PBS programming control during prime time. This control comes in the form of a national programming schedule that is widely adopted by member stations and provides some consistency among stations, ensuring to a degree that popular programs such as *Masterpiece Theatre* are regularly scheduled.

Unlike other commercial broadcast television stations in the United States, the licensees of public television stations do not form a national network. A members serving organization created by Congress in 1969, PBS is responsible for the acquisition, promotion and distribution of programming to public broadcasters. WNED is one of 356 PBS member stations located across all 50 states, Puerto Rico, U.S. Virgin Islands, Guam and American Samoa. The relationship between PBS and these local stations has been a tumultuous one (Witherspoon & Kovitz, 1987:34, Avery, 1996:134), characterized by a sustained tension over programming choices. Each independent station seeks to serve local needs and fulfill its educational mandates, while PBS itself pursues wider audiences with informational and entertainment programming. WNED is thus simultaneously a member of the public broadcasting corporation and an independent local broadcaster in search of members. This duality is significant, not only because the two bodies, PBS and WNED, are synonymous in many viewers' minds, but also because it suggests that WNED must not only serve the needs of its viewers, but also represent them at the national level.

Membership is a relatively new area of focus within communications. It melds insights from consumer and organizational behavior with more traditional forms of communication analysis.

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Public broadcasting has been an area of interest since the 1950s not only for communication historians but also for political scientists and cultural studies practitioners. Much of the attention to date has been given to audiences and civic engagement. Yet, there exists no major research on the unique paid membership formula invented and widely adopted by American public broadcasters. Evidence from public broadcasters in Europe suggests that membership may not be a cost effective or fair means of evaluating a broadcaster's relative success. And yet, American public broadcasters rely on membership, not only as a measure of their success, but also as the backbone of their fundraising efforts and, increasingly, as the major testament of their public-ness.

### Literature review

Following the death of the *Public Telecommunications Review* (Formerly the *Educational Broadcasting Review*) in 1980, a silence fell over public broadcasting research, as the field lost its main reflective and scholarly journal. Ivers and Clift refer to the 1980's as the "decade of quiet"(1989:7), with fewer than a hundred scholarly papers and no domestic monographs published on the subject throughout the decade.

Despite the paucity of literature dealing directly with public television and its paid members, it is possible to survey pertinent literature for answers to the following questions. Firstly, what motivates people to become members? Has the nature of membership itself somehow changed? Secondly, how does television affect membership behaviors? Does the medium's anonymity and distance inhibit our ability to forge relationships? And lastly, what has PBS's approach to membership been till now? Taken together, the answers to these questions should provide a useful baseline from which to consider the membership efforts of WNED Buffalo-Toronto.

### Membership Research

As one of the few measurable indicators of social capital, membership is often called upon to testify to the health of civil society or to the wealth of the individual. Yet its alchemy remains something of an enigma. Tocqueville famously called America a "nation of joiners" (1832), attributing much of its democratic integrity to the profusion of federated membership organizations. The Canadian sociologist John Seeley, in his study of the suburbs, attributed to membership a monetary value, claiming that for upwardly mobile suburbanites, memberships in clubs and associations "were like negotiable securities (no less real for being psychological) which at anytime they may cash, transfer

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or use as collateral” (Seeley et al., 1956). The economist Glenn Loury used low membership figures in the 1970s to highlight the persistent exclusion of African Americans from mainstream culture. Perhaps most explicitly, the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu defined it in the 80s as the “aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to the possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition – or in other words, to membership in a group”(1986:11).

But much less has been said about what motivates people to become members. Membership organizations persist in America, at rates equal to those in the past. However, the nature of those organizations and the role assigned to their members has changed significantly. In 2009 according to the American Society of Association Executives, there were 90,908 trade and professional associations, and 1,238,201 philanthropic or charitable organizations in the United States, but these numbers don’t reflect the increasing number and variety of paid memberships, and the decline of national voluntary memberships. Theda Skocpol, in her historic look at American civic participation, *Diminished Democracy: From Membership to Management in American Civic Life*, highlights the changing nature of membership, but remains at a loss to explain its motivation. Locating this dramatic shift, what she calls “ the great civic reorganization”, in the large social movements of the 1960s and 70s, Skocpol fears that individuals have been shut out of local and national organizations. She observes: “A new civic America has taken shape since the 1960s, as professionally managed advocacy groups and institutions move to the fore, while representatively governed, nation-spanning voluntary membership federations especially those with popular or cross-class

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memberships have lost clout in national public affairs and faded from the everyday lives of most Americans“(2003, p.174). The top down structure of these advocacy groups limits, she says, rather than expands the individual’s sphere of influence: “Professionally managed, top-down civic endeavors simultaneously limit the mobilization of most citizens into public life and encourage a fragmentation of social identities and trivial polarizations in public debates”(2003,p .232). What remains of the old America, Skocpol says, is “advocacy without membership.”

Although Skocpol is rightfully concerned about the exclusion of individuals from civic affairs, there are those who argue that this situation merely attests to the collapse of the nation state and the shift towards a new globalized system of networks. Arjun Appadurai tells us that the nation state and its vertical hierarchies are being replaced by a social order that acknowledges flows, whose existence has co-emerged with digital technologies and information economies (Appadurai, 1996; Castells, 1996; Rossiter, 2006). Is it possible that the very structure of associational memberships is being changed in the face of these new horizontal flows? And is it possible that Skocpol’s feared advocacy could assume a similar horizontal flow? Must it be limiting?

Skocpol herself draws parallels between the structures of most traditional membership organizations and the federated and representational nature of American political life, claiming that what “historically made US associational membership distinctive was the linking of thousands of local, face-to-face groups into powerful, translocally organized networks – many of which closely parallel the local-state-national constitutional structure of the US federal government, including its representative aspects” (Skocpol, 2002;p.105).

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Like many other service organizations, since the 1970's, PBS and its affiliates have sought to incorporate more and more deliberative aspects of democracy into their organizations, in the form of citizens committees and representative focus groups. However, this deliberative democratic model does assume a vertical, hierarchical form, which runs contrary to the horizontal, distributive capacities of networks (Brabham, 2009:246). In the introduction to *Organized Networks: Media Theory, Creative Labour, New Institutions*, author Ned Rossiter argues that “it is time to abandon the illusion that the myths of representational democracy might somehow be transferred and realized within networked settings. That is not going to happen”(2006:95). In short, he says, communication within networks is about “relational processes not representational procedures” (Rossiter, 2006:13).

The possibility bears considering that Skocpol's “great civic reorganization” may have forever changed associational membership. But it does not follow that the shift from membership to advocacy has to be forever limiting. It is conceivable that the replacement of traditional representational, vertical models of membership by more relational, horizontal networks of advocates could constitute a new globalized form of civic engagement.

Various taxonomies for membership organizations have been proposed (Cross, 1992; Gruen & Ferguson, 1994; Levin 1993 ;Offe & Fuchs 2002;) yet little consensus exists around the subject of membership behavior. Unlike brand loyalty, a concept whose functional utility makes it easy to measure (Kahn & Meyer, 1987), membership lacks a comparable metric. As a result, two distinct but overlapping frames have



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emerged. Communication theorists tell us that paid membership can be understood either as an expression of organizational identification or of organizational commitment.

In Bhattacharya, Rao & Glynn's 1995 survey of art gallery members, membership is defined as a cumulative expression of identification with the organization. Arguing that customers, in their role as members, perceived "oneness with or belongingness to an organization", they developed a survey aimed at uncovering what variables correlate most strongly with member identification. They concluded that higher levels of certain behaviors, namely perceived organizational prestige, expectation confirmation, membership tenure, and visitation are positively associated with higher levels of identification. By contrast, the visibility of membership (as measured by membership category), donating frequency, and participation in other arts organizations all negatively correlated to member identification. Of the two control variables used, income and education, only education is significant, with those possessing a master's degree or higher expressing significantly lower identification rates. Unable to account for this negative correlation, the authors did suggest that more study needs to be done into variety seeking behaviors and identification.

Drawing from that original data, Bhattacharya conducted a follow up analysis in 1998, entitled *When Customers are Members: Customer Retention in Paid Membership Contexts*. Seeking to locate the variables related to lapsing membership behavior, he concluded that member retention is positively related to membership duration, financial contributions, and involvement in related interest groups. Bhattacharya concluded that in the context of the gallery, membership "is not only an acquisition which extends the self but is also a relationship that extends a person's identity by enabling him/her to belong to

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an organization”(1998:23). Organizational identification is thus conceived as neither a given nor a bilateral arrangement, something neither bought nor bestowed, but as a dialectic that exists in a dynamic arena of competing interests. In both studies it is interesting to note that while volunteering had no effect either on identification levels or on retention levels, participation in related interest groups is positively linked to both identification and retention.

While Bhattacharya does not rule out the possibility that members may identify only with certain aspects of an organization, the model he proposes does assume that the individual’s sense of belonging is to the organization at large (Dutton, et al, 1994; O’Reilly & Chatman, 1986).

By contrast, Gruen, Summers and Acito’s (2000) survey of members of the National Association of Life Underwriters argues for paid membership as a function of three desired relationship behaviors that can be manipulated through marketing activities. (Although lacking the kind of public service mandate held by WNED, both organizations are member serving and rely heavily on the contributions of their members to fund programming making them structurally similar if not comparable. It is vital to recognize that the services WNED offers are available without membership, where as the services that the Life Underwriters provide, being as it is a professional association, are exclusive to members.)

Commitment, understood as the extent of a member’s psychological attachment to the association, for Gruen et al., is positively correlated to increases in membership. It serves as a mediating factor between the three broadly defined membership behaviors: retention, participation and coproduction and various relational marketing activities.

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Hoping to identify which marketing activities inspire which membership behaviors, they surveyed members from over 150 chapters nationwide. Of the marketing activities considered, core service performance or the fulfillment of membership terms was found to have the biggest impact, affecting both retention and participation behaviors. Reliance on external membership requirements had no effect on retention, but it did show a positive influence on participation. Membership interdependence was positively linked to coproduction; recognition surprisingly had no direct effect on coproduction behaviours, and organizational knowledge had a very small positive impact on both coproduction and participation. Although this conclusion is consistent with previous research (Kelley, Skinner and Donnelly, 1992), Gruen et al. speculate that organizational knowledge may have more significance “in contexts in which members identify more strongly with the membership organization (e.g. Museum memberships) because in these situations members may have more intrinsic interest in the organization’s goals, values, culture and politics” (2000:46).

Gruen et al. conclude with the suggestion that delivering core services is fundamental to membership retention. However, because it does not increase coproduction behaviors or solely enhance the membership’s psychological attachment to the organization, managers must commit resources to managing other marketing activities.

Common then to both studies is the idea that paid membership is motivated by an expectation of return. In the case of the art gallery, the members get to align themselves publicly with the perceived prestige of the institution and, in the case of the insurance association, members receive services that help them professionally. However,

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there is an important difference in the nature of those exchanges. Bhattacharya's vision of membership suggests a dialectical exchange, a return through membership, whereas the model put forward by Gruen et al. suggests a more passive, one-sided connection, where membership is valued for its direct and immediate returns.

While this semantic difference may seem trifling, it is consistent with ongoing debates over the nature (both real and ideal) of the PBS audience, as scholars attempt to locate them as either passive consumers or as an active public.

## Television and Membership

What effect does the medium itself bring to bear on the issue of membership? Does television, with its sedentary and anonymous operations, itself present a kind of barrier to membership?

Robert Putnam's controversial book *Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital* is cited repeatedly in the literature on membership and civic engagement. In it, Putnam not only identifies a dramatic decrease in social engagement and cohesion within American society, but boldly puts the blame on television. Using various quantitative indicators, he finds a negative correlation between all television consumption and measures of social trust and civic engagement. This leads him to say that "each hour spent viewing television is associated with less social trust and less membership", creating a wedge "between our individual interests and our collective interests" (Putnam, 1996:75). For Putnam, trust is defined as the ability to inspire reciprocity and create voluntary associations, which in turn strengthen and produce more trust.

Fleming, Thorson & Zengjun's article from 2005, *Associational Membership as a Source of Social Capital: Its Links to Use of Local Newspaper, Interpersonal*

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*Communication, Entertainment Media, and Volunteering*, confirms Putnam's worst suspicions. In a study of both rural and urban Missouri students, they conclude that interpersonal communication and local newspaper use positively predict associational membership, whereas the effect of entertainment media use is strongly negative.

The results of European studies are somewhat more encouraging. In an essay published in the *European Journal of Communication* from 2010, Schmitt-Beck and Wolsing concluded that high market shares of public television do have a significant ameliorating effect. These findings are in line with those of Holtz-Bacha and Norris, who found that political engagement survived in Europe, even after the introduction of commercial television in the 1980s.

Yet despite Putnam's conviction that television is an alienating and isolating vehicle, capable of discouraging our most social impulses, the success of televangelism does offer a unique counter argument.

According to an exposé in *Playboy Magazine* from 1980, the eight main stream televangelists in America at the time (Robert Schuller, Pat Robertson and Jim Baker, among others) were reaching an average of four million viewers a week and posting annual gross revenues ranging from 13 to 60 million dollars a year. Although televangelism is neither new nor strictly evangelical – the Presbyterian television show “This is the Life” began in 1950 – the sociologist Robert Liebert maintains that a “special interaction exists between the broadcast medium and the fundamentalist message”(Libert, 1980:3). The medium and the message work in tandem he says to create spiritual leaders “whose principal characteristic must be their personality and showmanship”(1980:4). What most scholars do agree on is that whatever the secret ingredient, American

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television audiences, especially women and older adults, are predisposed towards theology. A 1978 Gallup survey of the unchurched found that of the 61 million Americans who do not attend religious services, three quarters of them still pray.

Evaluating the differences between what he calls the mainstream and electronic churches, Robert V. Miller highlights the way that televangelists “violate the traditional mass communication paradigm in two important aspects”(1980:3). Not only do the ‘electronics,’ as he refers to them, receive feedback from a significant portion of their viewers but most importantly, “they are developing the feedback into meaningful interpersonal encounters which are personal, require revelation and trust, and are ongoing”(1980:3). Using Pat Robertson’s campaigns as an example, Miller describes how the continuous presence night after night, coupled with 24 hour phone councilors and a sophisticated database system conspire to maintain the illusion of personal contact between the viewer and Pat Robertson himself. This behavior, what Horton and Wohl have called “para-social interaction,” is “particularly favorable to the formation of compensatory attachments by the socially isolated, the socially inept, the aged and invalid, the timid and rejected”(1980:4). Miller summarizes it best, when he describes televangelists as providing a “functional religious opportunity” for television viewers, that speaks in a language better than the mainstreams, to a constant human need (1980:4).

So what need is public television speaking to? What is the service that it provides? If both PBS and televangelists are using the same medium to communicate with audiences that are theoretically predisposed to be sympathetic, why is one so much more effective than the other?

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In their classic article *Mass Communication, Popular Taste and Organized Social Action*, Lazarsfeld and Merton argue that “the social effects of the media will vary as the system of ownership and control varies”(1948:106). They also accuse the US media of inhibiting the development of a critical perspective on society: “our commercially sponsored mass media promote a largely unthinking allegiance to our social structure” (Lazarsfeld & Merton, 1948, p.108).

Holtz-Bacha and Norris’s survey of television across 15 EU member states, alluded to earlier, discovered that commercialization does matter, with public television viewers being the most informed of all European groups. “Still there remain reasons to believe that despite heightened competition, commercial and public television do continue to differ systemically in the content of their programming, particularly public sector news, and therefore may gradually have a more diffuse influence on the public’s knowledge of politics and awareness of international affairs”(2001:126).

Commercialization matters, Holtz-Bacha and Norris argue, because there is a cumulative relation between habitual media use and political knowledge, to the effect that “where TV-watching habits are relatively fixed, and people habitually prefer either commercial or public television, repeated exposure to each sector will have a long term cumulative effect on the audience”(2001:135). This virtuous circle, as Norris (2000) calls it, stands in optimistic relief to Robert Putnam’s zero sum time displacement conclusion. Fearing that the pace of modern life puts a premium on leisure time, Putnam (1995) believed that any increase in commercial television would be at the expense of public television.

In an empirical examination of Putnam’s time displacement hypothesis, Moy, Scheufele & Holbert (1999), concluded that “time spent watching television was unrelated to

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perceptions of time pressures”(1999:234). Although they did locate a negative correlation between amount of television watched and levels of civic engagement, “exposure and attention to hard news content, in both newspapers and television, does work in favor of civic engagement”(1999:245).

### **PBS and its members**

It is revealing that the *1978 Task Force Report on Public Participation in Public Broadcasting* published by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting does not associate public participation with membership. Preoccupied with audience and programming concerns, the bulk of its 53 recommendations urge the creation of audience feedback mechanisms, increases to program promotion and “procedures to encourage members of the general public to participate in all appropriate levels of station activities”(1978:16). A survey of task force members compiled at the end of the report indicated a deep seated dissatisfaction with the quality of those very recommendations. Most significantly, task force members complained that the absence of rigid guidelines, funding allocations and the lack of diversity amongst board members and volunteers prohibited any real changes from being made.

Willard D. Rowland Jr., a former director of research for the Public Broadcasting Service and communications professor at the University of Colorado at Boulder, has written extensively on the subject of PBS since the 1960s. He highlights the inherent tensions between station managers and volunteers, even going so far as to call “public participation a myth” in the 1973 issue of *Public Telecommunications Review*. “There appears to be no development of a significant sense of community among viewers or listeners, no mutual self-recognition as non-commercial publics...” Rowland wrote in



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1973. The solution he believed was to be found in the “opening of programming policy-making to broader, more effective public input”. A solution that could only be arrived at, he said, once PBS recognized that the “motivating force” behind everything had from the beginning, “stemmed from the efforts of a relatively small handful of farsighted educators, professionals, legislators and regulators. The motivating force did not come from any strong, broadly based groundswell of general public concern” (1973:9). Sadly, these criticisms and the subsequent recommendations made by the 1979 report of the Carnegie Commission on the future of public broadcasting were met with what Rowland has described as “a deafening silence” (1986:34).

Summarizing the state of American public television two decades later, Rowland considers how in the wake of so many ignored calls for increased public participation, came the false hope of turning viewers into paid members.

The idea of paid membership had been circulating within public broadcasting spheres since WWII. It was the Ford Foundation, then the biggest advocate for public broadcasting in America, who sought to prove the value of paid membership. In 1958 they commissioned Lewis Hill, then director of KPFA in San Francisco, to write a report on listener-sponsored radio. Under Hill’s direction, in 1952, KPFA had launched the first practical experiment with subscriber supported broadcasting in America. Hill was determined to prove “that the entire operation of an educational or cultural radio station can be supported by its audience, removing altogether any reliance upon advertising or parent-institution subsidy” (Hill, 1958:4). Hill believed that if 2% of the set listening audience could be persuaded to donate a fixed subscription rate of \$10 dollars annually, through a proscribed procedure, and given a certain projected rate of growth, the station

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should be able to cover its operating costs. And while the subscription fee entitled listeners to various privileges and the occasional benefit, it did not give listeners any control or input over its policies. Hill was convinced that listeners would subscribe, and renew their subscriptions to KPFA annually, because of the station's unique niche programming.

The experiment ran for three years from 1952-1955 and, despite continuous growth, ultimately failed, largely due to the nationwide collapse of the FM radio industry during the early 1950s. Nonetheless, Hill's report does articulate some important truths about subscription marketing. Firstly, it acknowledged that budgeting demands predictability, making renewal and retention a broadcaster's biggest priority. Significant dips in renewals in both 1953 and 1954 further illustrated how sensitive subscribers are to controversial programming and administrative changes.

Secondly, because the medium is both the beneficiary and the chief instrument used to generate funds, Hill emphasized the struggle to distinguish subscription drives from the spot advertising techniques of commercial broadcasting. KPFA benefited greatly from the novelty of its experiment, garnering headlines in the mainstream national press but had very little success with traditional marketing methods such as direct mail and paid advertising. The experiment ultimately lead Hill to surmise that when marketing a public good "content is everything and 'the package' secondary"(Hill, 1958:24).

Nonetheless, paid membership became a widely adopted fundraising strategy by public broadcasting stations through the 60's and 70's. Rowland argues that the shift to membership subscriptions "reflected a certain expectation, first articulated in Hill's report, and again in Carnegie II," that public radio and television "could inhabit a similar

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space alongside more conventional patron supported arts organizations”(Rowland, 1988:24). And despite the real fiscal success stations experienced during the 80’s when memberships provided up to 20% of total income, Rowland could not help but mourn the considerable cost. Membership subscriptions forced stations, in a climate of scarcity, to invest heavily in fundraising efforts and in building large development staffs at the expense of their local programming abilities. “In many of the television stations, the local program staffs were eliminated or folded into the development office, so that the sole or major local production activities became the annual auctions or fundraising appeals”(1988:25). The effects of this Rowland says, not only raise questions about fairness, given that only about 10% of viewers were subscribing, but it also estranged public broadcasting from local affairs, making it increasingly “an outlet for a national service, not a forum for local voices and issues”(1988:26). Rowland further doubts the long-term viability of membership revenue, a doubt realized in 1989-1990, with the marked leveling-off of donations nation-wide.

In a study of the Dutch Public Broadcasting system from 2004, *Looking for transparent and measurable performance criteria as an alternative for membership requirement: The BNN case*, authors Van Summeren & D’Haenens concluded that membership requirements were an ineffective and costly means of measuring performance. Rather they had become an increasingly prohibitive benchmark for stations seeking younger audiences. Discovering a negative correlation between the age of viewers and membership rates, the researchers recommended a shift towards more objective measurement criteria such as ratings and audience share.

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While Rowland disagreed that ratings and audience share are an appropriate measure, he does believe the effort needed to generate subscriber revenue diverts public broadcasters and interested political partners from the larger task of “framing a wider vision for the service”(1988:26).

A vision that to date remains unclear caught between the opposing values of socially relevant and mainstream programming. In a survey of 113 public broadcasting stations across the United States, Smallwood & Moon set out to identify what the variables were that distinguish stations with more local programming from those with less. By comparing local stations’ prime-time schedules against that of the PBS national prime-time schedule, the authors were able to achieve a quantitative measure of localism. Acknowledging that audience demographics and program scheduling are inter-related (Napoli, 2003), the authors factored into their analysis six demographic variables, including total population, median household income, education, ethnic diversity and geography. Using a three group discriminate analysis to evaluate between group-membership and features, the authors concluded that “PBS member stations located in communities with higher incomes, higher percentages of bachelor degrees and more diverse ethnic composition exhibited higher localization of their prime time schedules”(2011:p.145) However, it was those member stations with moderately localized schedules that had the most contributors, most state funding, higher overall revenue and larger populations. Member stations with the least localized programming exhibited the lowest levels across the board.

The importance of state funding in this equation cannot be underestimated. In a study on the relationship between corporate underwriting and station programming,

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Crawford & Godfrey compared two very different PBS member stations, KAET-TV Phoenix and Iowa Public Television near Des Moines. The authors concluded that enhanced corporate underwriting and the entrepreneurial approach it implies do not result in an increase in local programming. Perceived as unstable and risky, enhanced corporate underwriting, as evidenced by the KAET-TV example, offers only short-term benefits that only decrease a station's willingness to take risks. Iowa Public Television, on the other hand, with its larger and relatively stable source of state funding, had little desire to chase after enhanced corporate underwriting and was free to pursue riskier and more locally relevant programming decisions.

Localism is of course only one possible measure of a station's success, and while the connection between local programming and member contributions is telling, many would still argue that a centralized programming strategy may be public broadcasting's best option for survival (Day, 1995; Price, 1998). Localism, Napoli (2003) cautions, is not an end in and of itself but derives its value from the larger political and cultural context.

Still, localism has long been, and remains for many, the *raison d'être* for public broadcasting and the basis for its claims to being a public service (Engelmann, 1996; Witherspoon et al., 2000). In a multi-channel environment where user generated content has become the norm, others suggest (Avery: 1996, Brody, Weiser & Burns: 2003) that localized programming may be the most viable strategy for PBS affiliates like WNED.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Various communication models (social exchange theory, uncertainty reduction theory) have been proposed to better understand voluntary membership (Jablin, 1987; Kramer, 2011; Scott & Myers, 2011). They share a common approach, defining membership as an ongoing series of negotiations or interactions, the boundaries of which are ambiguous, permeable and flexible (Putnam & Stohl, 1996). In the instance of paid membership programs however, there is often little room for negotiation and even less expectation that membership will significantly influence organizational structure. Although some information is exchanged between members and the organization, the degree of participation is often pre-determined by the organization. The benefits to the member are similarly defined in advance, regardless of whether or not the member chooses to remain at arm's length.

These caveats have led researchers in the area of paid membership to look beyond the traditional models. They have opted instead to align their work with either organizational identification theory or organizational commitment theory. Knippenberg and Sleafos (2006) have made efforts to distinguish the two concepts from each other by emphasizing the self-definitional nature of identification. Most organizational identification models, despite using a plethora of strategies to engage members, stem from the Burkean rhetoric of identification that emphasizes consubstantiality (Burke, 1969). Organizational identification, according to Mael & Ashforth (1989), is an extension of social identity theory. It assumes individuals' "perception of oneness or belonging to an organization, where the individual defines him or herself in terms of the organization"(Mael & Ashforth, 1992). Understood as a perceptual/cognitive construct,

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it's not "associated with any specific behaviors or affective states" (Gould, 1975; Turner, 1982) but is "relational and comparative" by nature (Tajfel & Turner, 1985).

But while Mael & Ashforth make a convincing argument for the role of identification in motivating alumni donations (1989) their argument is contingent on the organization being holographic (Albert & Whetten, 1985). Their results prove merely the role that "symbolic management" plays in increasing the salience of the organization to the individual. Similarly, Bhattacharya et al. (1995) survey of art gallery members suggests only a positive correlation between identification and retention (1995:54).

By contrast, organizational commitment, says Knippenberg and Sleebos, implies a relationship in which both individual and organization are separate entities. Inspired by Porter et al's *Organizational Commitment Questionnaire* from 1974, Meyer & Allen (1991) developed a three-component model of organizational commitment. Determined to capture the dynamism they saw in commitment, they conceive of commitment as a collection of "types" rather than a singular composition. According to their model, commitment is simultaneously motivated by an emotional attachment (affective commitment), a feeling of obligation to the organization (normative commitment) and perceptions that the cost of leaving the organization, either social or economic, is prohibitively high (continuance commitment). The presence of any one of these motives is thought to decrease the likelihood that an individual will abandon the organization. However there are notable differences between them. Individuals, Meyer & Allen assert "with strong affective commitment remain because they want to, those with strong continuance commitment because they need to, and those with strong normative commitment because they feel they ought to do so" (1990:16). Key to their model is the

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idea that individuals can experience varying degrees of different types of commitment simultaneously. Meyer and Allen (1991) later also proposed that affective, normative and continuance commitment should develop from different causes, and should result in different attitudinal and behavioral consequences.

Knippenberg & Sleebos conclude that identification “is uniquely aligned (i.e., controlling for affective commitment) with the self-referential aspect of organizational membership, whereas commitment is uniquely related (i.e., controlling for identification) to perceived organizational support, job satisfaction, and turnover intentions” (2006:56).

It would be ideal to be able to consider paid membership simultaneously as a function of both organizational commitment and organizational identification. However, this study will limit itself to using organizational commitment as its conceptual framework. Given the limited data and scope of this study, organizational commitment offers a practical lens through which to see how communicative actions by an organization affect individual behaviors.



### Methods

This study uses a multi-method approach, characterized by what van Summeren and d’Haenens call “mutually-reinforcing components”(2004:29). The first component was the literature review, surveying membership, media affects and the past efforts of PBS. Next, a secondary analysis of external communication documents produced by WNED considers what behaviors are being communicated when the word membership is used. Lastly, this study considers the responses gathered from interviews with seven Canadian viewers of WNED, two members and five non-members. From this data, the study will attempt to assemble a series of initial recommendations that can be used to help mitigate membership barriers in the future.

The first data set comes from an analysis of how membership is presented by WNED through its external communications. The documents considered include five pages taken from the WNED website [www.wned.org](http://www.wned.org) (*Member Memos, About WNED, Volunteering, News release July 2010, Major Donor Clubs*), a WNED direct mail promotional flyer dated March 2011, and two issues of the monthly members’ publication *WNED Magazine* (March and July 2011 respectively). The direct mail flyer was delivered unsolicited to a residence in Southern Ontario. The member’s magazines were provided by WNED as promised in exchange for the minimum membership contribution of thirty-five dollars.

Each document will be scanned for instances of the word membership. As it appears, each instance of the word will be classified in accordance with one of the three notional categories devised by Gruen, Summers, & Acito (2000) to capture the core behaviors associated with membership marketing. These three categories are retention,

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participation and coproduction. They work together and individually to promote membership, and are influenced in varying degrees by specific kinds of marketing activities and the three components of commitment. Once the instances have been categorized, Gruen et al.'s model should enable a better understanding how membership is being communicated. It will also imply the kinds of marketing behaviors that might be used to improve it.

Gruen et al. characterize retention behaviors as those that either assume or suggest renewal. According to their findings, retention behaviors are almost exclusively influenced by core services performance. Participation behaviors are those that “highlight the benefits received by the member at the expense of the organization” (2000,p.36), like gifts or discounts. Participation is inspired by core services, by recognition, and by the presence of external membership requirements. Continuance commitment and affective commitment both directly affect participation.

The last behavior, analogous in many ways to traditional voluntary membership, is what Sheth and Parvatiyar (1995) call ‘coproduction’. It represents “the extent to which the membership is involved in the production of the association's products, services, and/or marketing” above and beyond the minimum requirements for membership. According to Gruen et al., coproduction is directly inspired by the enhancement of member interdependence. It is indirectly influenced by the dissemination of organizational knowledge, recognition and affective commitment.

Although it is likely that overlap will occur when coding for these behaviors, the goal is to identify trends. None of the documents in the sample are intended to stand alone, but collectively reflect how membership is being defined by WNED. Such

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overlapping is consistent with the model of organizational commitment proposed by Allen & Meyer, wherein the constitutive parts of commitment (affective, continuance and normative commitment) are understood “not as types but as components”(1990:3), which can be inspired in varying degrees by various actions.

The five actions or marketing activities identified by Gruen et al. in 2000, are general enough to apply beyond the context of professional membership associations. They are recognition, core service performance, enhancement of member interdependence, dissemination of organizational knowledge, and reliance on external membership requirements. Recognition is defined as the “extent to which the association demonstrates to its coproducing members that it values their contributions”(2000:38), and core services is defined as the “ quantity and quality of the planning and delivery of the association’s primary services” (2000:38). Aimed at measuring how successful an organization is at encouraging members to create relationships amongst themselves, the enhancement of member interdependence is most pronounced in situations where networking among members is possible. What Gruen et al. call the dissemination of organizational knowledge is a measure of how well informed members are about the organization’s “goals and values, culture, politics, processes, and personnel” (2000:39). Although strictly speaking, external membership requirements measure how much energy organizations spend encouraging intermediaries to recruit members on their behalf, it also reflects “contact efficiency”(2000:39) or the degree to which an organization can rely on intermediary bodies to work on its behalf.

The second set of data comes from interviews conducted among seven Canadian viewers of WNED. These interviews were carried out both in person and over the phone

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over a two-month period in the summer of 2011. Interview subjects were recruited using the snowball method. Defining, for the purpose of this study, a viewer as anyone who watches a minimum of an hour a week of WNED, the data set includes responses from both members and non-members. They range in age from 26 to 65 and all currently reside in Southern Ontario. Typical of respondent type interviews, the questionnaire was designed to be as open-ended as possible, with the general goal of gathering as much information as possible from participants about why they have or have not chosen to become members of WNED. Respondents were encouraged to include any comments they felt were pertinent and to contribute any ideas they may have had about public broadcasting. Although very small, this sample of viewers, when combined with the results from the literature, is sufficient to suggest certain preliminary conclusions. A larger sample is needed before any conclusive findings can be made, and the work here is best understood as a pilot project.

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### Results

Survey of WNED external communication documents

Sample Documents	# Instances of Membership	#Retention	#Participation	#Coproduction
<i>Member Memos</i>	5	3	4	0
<i>About WNED</i>	0	0	0	0
<i>Volunteer at WNED</i>	1	0	0	1
<i>News release</i> 06-07-11	0	0	0	0
<i>Major Donor Clubs</i>	1	1	0	0
Direct Mail Flyer 03/11	7	0	7	0
<i>WNED Magazine</i> 03-11	10	5	6	2
<i>WNED Magazine</i> 07/11	9	5	6	1
Totals	33	14	23	4

The analysis of WNED's external communications is summarized in Table 1. Participation and retention are the dominant notional categories. Coproduction is hardly visible. It is clear from these results that membership, as expressed in the sample, is

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capable of inhabiting more than one notional category. Participation and retention owe their dominance to their ability to cohabitate. Coproduction, however, overlaps less frequently.

The word membership appears nine times on the first page of every issue of the *WNED Magazine*. Six of those instances stress both participatory (in the sense of benefits provided) and retention behaviours (in the sense of an ongoing action designed to promote membership). The term membership, as written in the magazine, is frequently seen as an adjective to the following terms: office, member, department, and dues. These adjectives give to membership a physical presence and administrative capacity. Coproduction finds expression in the phrase ‘membership contributions’. This phrase appears once on the first page of every issue of the magazine, and again in a print ad at the back of the March 2011 publication. This ad was designed to thank volunteers for their efforts during the last membership campaign.

The most regular outreach vehicle, used by the station, is the *WNED Magazine*. It is mailed every month to all members. The bulk of its contents are devoted to program listings for WNED-TV and its partners WNED-AM 970, Classical 97.4, ThinkBright and Well TV. The first page of every issue is given over to contact information and publication details, including their mailing list exchange policy, magazine staff and funding information. Several pages of each issue are given over to the Albright Knox Museum and are dedicated to providing membership information, programming highlights and event listings for museum members. The inclusion of Albright-Knox material is advertised on the front of every issue, with a banner ad across the bottom announcing “Also: Albright-Knox Art Gallery Member Information!” This arrangement

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was instigated by WNED in 2009 and, according to the Albright Knox Membership Department, it has been beneficial in raising both the circulation and advertising rates of the WNED magazine. Other written features appearing regularly include *WNED News*, *Must See TV* and *Our Town*. Each issue includes a feature article highlighting one new program coming that month and is advertised in colour on the front cover. The back of the magazine is used to advertise an upcoming WNED program and the WNED website. The inside cover is given over to advertising. A few small advertisements appear throughout. The magazine is printed on newsprint, in a 5.5” by 10.5” format.

In an effort to attract more members, a direct mail flyer was sent to some Canadian homes in March of 2011. The flyer described both the tangible and intangible benefits of membership, including the monthly magazine, continued programming and gifts. Written in the style of a personal appeal, and signed by the Senior VP Development and Corp. Comm., Sylvia Bennett, the flyer defined membership exclusively in terms of participation. Nowhere in the text is any reference to either Buffalo, Toronto or to WNED’s community services.

The remainder of the documents analyzed come from the WNED website, [www.wned.org](http://www.wned.org). They are best described as informational. They are accessible via the navigation bar on the left hand side of the home page. The home page uses a flash player to show highlights and previews of upcoming programs, alongside featured sponsors and links. A header, featuring the WNED logo and tag line, “Member Supported Public Broadcasting”, visually dominates the home page. The site offers links to [www.PBS.org](http://www.PBS.org), [www.PBSKids.org](http://www.PBSKids.org) and [www.PBSKids.org/go](http://www.PBSKids.org/go).

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Of the five web documents considered, it is interesting that the two most formal, *About WNED*, and *press release from July 6<sup>th</sup>*, avoid the word membership altogether. Rather the station refers to itself in both instances as “Member-supported WNED”. Both documents position WNED as a successful and dynamic organization. They highlight both its recent awards and its goal of becoming a “bi-national resource” that “provides high quality programming and services that enlighten, inspire, entertain and educate.”

The tone of the *Volunteering* page is considerably lighter and more personable. It encourages readers to “Volunteer for WNED: Your Public broadcaster.” Membership is not mentioned until the end of document, when WNED acknowledges the organizations that provided support during the last “TV Membership campaign”. This instance of coproduction mirrors the one seen in the March issue of the 2011 *WNED Magazine*. It is notable that each of these instances is in the past tense.

The word membership appears only once in the course of the web document *Major Donor Clubs*. It strongly implies retention behaviors in its phrasing, “although membership costs as little as \$35 dollars a year.” The document then goes on to describe the special benefits (events, invitations) that are available to individuals willing to contribute more than \$300 a year.

Composed in a series of bullet points, the *Members Memos* document exhibits both retention and participation behaviors. The “WNED Membership Department” is the subject of the first bullet point. The paragraph describes recent changes to the shipping and gift-inventory that will improve service. The second bullet point tells viewers where they can find their tax receipt. A third bullet point urges members to honor their pledges as soon as possible. The last bullet explains WNED’s membership list exchange policy. It



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reminds members that if they do not want their names shared with other organizations, they should contact “WNED’s membership department toll-free”. The reminder to fulfill your pledge, in a timely fashion, is conspicuous for not offering a tangible benefit.

Despite the amount of information available on the website, less than a third of the respondents to the questionnaire has ever visited it. Far more popular is the PBS website [www.PBS.org](http://www.PBS.org). Many respondents describe positively, the extra features and detailed information found there. A comparison of website traffic for each is telling. According to [www.siteanalytics.compete.com](http://www.siteanalytics.compete.com), [www.PBS.org](http://www.PBS.org), received a total 3.6 million unique visitors in June of 2011. By comparison, [www.wned.org](http://www.wned.org) received only 2,390 unique visitors that same month.

The viewers participating in the questionnaire overall voted WNED their favorite public broadcaster, beating out Ontario’s own TVO. CBC is much admired, but is perceived to inhabit a distinct category unto itself. Despite the outpouring of affection and support, none of the non-members interviewed expressed any interest in becoming a member of WNED. Consequently, there is wide appreciation but little desire or urgency to support WNED in the form of membership.

The respondents to the survey can be divided into three different categories:

1. The first and smallest group comprises viewers under 30, who have never been members and who have no interest in becoming so. They think WNED is valuable, especially for parents with small children, and believe that most of its funding comes from corporate donations. They watch irregularly, preferring the documentaries and reality-style programming. They have been to Buffalo recently, and believe programming needs to be reoriented towards younger people

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- and that WNED should be more aggressive in its online advertising. They define membership as a type of exchange, wherein you receive a gift and are entitled to make decisions.
2. The middle group contains both members. They are women over the age of 60 who plan to continue making annual contributions. They no longer receive gifts, and object to it as being a waste of their donation. They believe that funding for WNED comes from members and from corporate underwriters. They look forward to receiving the monthly *WNED Magazine* and make a point of going through it on arrival to identify the programs they would like to watch. They have never volunteered for WNED and do not visit Buffalo with any frequency. They pay for television, either in the form of cable or satellite, but do not support any other public broadcaster. They enjoy the mysteries and *Masterpiece Theatre* most. They define membership as a congregation of like-minded people with a common interest.
  3. The third and by far the largest group, comprises viewers over 30, who have never been members, despite occasionally considering it. They value the prime time documentaries and Saturday afternoon cooking shows most. However, they are haphazard and opportunistic about their viewing. They learn about upcoming programs through commercials and teasers aired on WNED. They watch several public broadcasters, but financially support none of them. They are aware of WNED's precarious financial situation but are unsure who is at fault. When

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programming is interrupted for a pledge drive announcement, they almost universally change the channel. They agree that the age of the WNED staff during pledge drives is alienating to younger audiences. They define membership as an investment that should repay with a reward and with an enhanced experience.

There is consensus on three points, however. Firstly, it is universally agreed that corporate underwriting is a necessary source of funding. In its current form, it does not pose a serious threat to the integrity of WNED as a public broadcaster or to its programming. Secondly, none of the interview subjects have ever volunteered for WNED. The one member who did express some interest, did sign up to volunteer at a pledge drive in Toronto, but the event was cancelled. She says volunteering for WNED is something she might wish to pursue again later, once she is retired. Lastly, and perhaps most vitally, is the decided lack of identification by all interviewees with WNED as an organization. Indeed most viewers confuse PBS with WNED, and almost all express their approval with certain programs, but never with the organization. There is no mention by any respondent of the valuable or distinctive role public broadcasting plays, or of the unique educational programs that WNED offers.

In short, the majority of the respondents speak very positively about WNED programming, but very few are members and none have any plans to become so. The differences in the respondents' definitions of membership, when age is considered, correspond with Skopcal's assertion that membership, since 1970, has become much less attractive.

### **Discussion & Recommendations**

What is clear from these results is that to the limited extent that viewers are committed to WNED, it is to their programming, and not to the broader goals of the organization.

According to Gruen et al.'s model the predominance of participation and retention behaviors suggests that WNED is defining membership as an ongoing, regularized and beneficial arrangement. The highlights of this arrangement are the monthly magazine, the gift with purchase and the continuation of their favorite programs. However, the lack of coproduction behaviours indicate that membership is not an activity through which members might become more involved in the organization or with each other. There is no suggestion that membership might be expressed in a form other than monetary support. Gruen et al. link coproduction behaviours with the effective dissemination of knowledge about the organization. It's clear, from the interviews with viewers, that many are either unaware or misinformed about where WNED gets the majority of its funding from.

The first recommendation is for a renewed effort at disseminating knowledge about the organization. The lack of coproduction behaviors evidenced suggests that the mechanics of membership, the pledge drives, the department, the gifts and the tax receipts, have sidelined the message and meaning of membership. As a result, viewers are seeing membership in purely financial terms, and the interior life of WNED is being obfuscated. Although an assertion of local identity runs contrary to WNED's claims to be "bi-national", an increased focus on the dissemination of organizational knowledge, might help reinvigorate interest in WNED's goals and objectives. WNED must find ways to differentiate itself from PBS in the eyes of its viewers. The two interview subjects who had contacted WNED, expressed shock and delight at being able to speak

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directly to the on-air personalities they are so familiar with. Televangelists have proved that it is possible to create a meaningful relationship through television. The key, which WNED needs to consider when disseminating organizational knowledge, is how to turn that viewer feedback into meaningful interpersonal encounters.

Furthermore, there seems a general sentiment that while good and valuable, WNED membership, like WNED itself, is not a necessity. Evidence of this comes from the majority's viewing habits, self-described by one respondent as "opportunistic and haphazard", and by another as "not all the time, but some time they have really good stuff on." The depiction of membership as well, through both the website and the WNED magazine, does not do justice to the urgency and seriousness of the funding situation. Subtle reminders for members to fulfill their pledges in a timely fashion does not put into real terms the direness of the situation, nor does it put a face to the cause. And while there are members who can describe in detail their delight in reading the monthly magazine; their interest is limited to the programming listings. Describing her week, one respondent talked at length about how "Thursday was a mystery at 9pm" and how *Masterpiece Theatre*, even when it's in repeats, is "what I do on Sunday nights." Never once did she mention any daytime local programming, a WNED employee or WNED itself by name.

This kind of dedication to certain programs leads to a second recommendation. WNED should leverage the attachments formed between viewers and their favourite programs by creating and nurturing online 'brand communities'. Defined by Muniz and O'Guinn "as any specialized, non-geographically bound group, based on a structured set of social relations among admirers of a brand, brand communities are no less real for

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being online”(2001:134). Not only would this type of activity increase website traffic to [www.wned.org](http://www.wned.org), and help viewers associate their favorite programs with the organization, but it would offer viewers a forum for coproduction. The web’s interactive identity enables disparate fans to come together asynchronously in a meaningful way. The enhancement of member interdependence, according to Gruen et al., has a proven positive effect on coproduction behaviors overall. By hosting the brand communities, WNED would also benefit from “contact efficiency” by bringing together, and making accessible, a large number of engaged viewers. The benefits of vibrant brand communities, according to Muniz and O’Guinn, include a positive encouragement of consumer agency. They constitute a trusted information resource, and create a source for the wider social benefits associated with communal interaction (Muniz & O’Guinn, 2001:426).

Finally, it is clear that for many viewers, especially ones between the ages of 30 and 65, membership is simply not an attractive proposition. Were it possible to raise awareness about WNED’s contributions to the community and generate interest in the fate of public broadcasting, it may not be possible to convince people to pay for a service that they identify as being free. WNED may need to redefine the service that they are perceived to be offering. The final and most drastic recommendation of this study is that WNED consider supplementing its membership campaigns with crowdfunding initiatives. Not only is WNED optimately situated to embrace this new form of philanthropy, but also crowdfunding has proven itself to be most successful with not for profit organizations that are able to mobilize local donors (Belleflamme et al., 2011:12).

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Crowdfunding, put simply, uses Web 2.0 to collect money for investment. Entrepreneurs use crowdfunding to raise enough funds to cover the upfront fixed costs of production. In accordance to the “threshold pledge approach”, all pledges are voided unless a minimal amount is reached before some deadline (2011,p.12). Central to this idea is the development of Web 2.0 technology that has enabled entrepreneurs to easily reach networks of consumers or investors and vice-versa. Roughly speaking, “Web 2.0 is any web-as-participation-platform that facilitates interaction between users” (Brabham, 2008:45). The most popular form of Web 2.0 being websites, community blogs, Facebook and Twitter. Unlike open-source practices, crowdfunding asserts the exclusive corporate use and ownership of the end product.

Although still in its infancy, crowdfunding has been defined by Belleflamme, Lambert, and Schwienbacher, in the spirit of Kleeman (2008), as “an open call, essentially through the internet, for the provision of financial resources either in the form of donation or in exchange for some form of reward and/or voting rights” (2011:7).

From a survey of fifty-one crowdfunding initiatives, Belleflamme et al. were able to draw three conclusions about its nature. First, they concluded that because of legal limitations, offering equity in exchange for funding is not popular. Twenty-two percent of the initiatives surveyed were donation based and offered no compensation at all. The majority was based on so called ‘passive investments’, investments made in exchange for the promise of specific compensation, most often in the form of the product. These so-called ‘passive investors’ have no direct involvement in the decision-making process nor are they obligated to purchase or use the product (2011:10). The authors believe that this passive approach motivates philanthropic instincts in investors. Research by Glaser and

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Schliefer (2001) and Ghatak and Mueuller (2009) confirms the author's suspicions. It is the social reputation and/or the private benefits accruing from participating in the success of the initiative that motivates people.

Secondly, they conclude that crowdfunding is not just about funding, it's also about information gathering (2011:9). A top motive of many entrepreneurs is crowdfundings' ability to generate feedback about the product/producer.

Lastly and most vitally, say the authors, they discovered that crowdfunding is only superior to traditional financing "if the investing crowd enjoys additional private benefit from participating in the crowdfunding process"(2011:11). As a result, the authors contend, the success or failure of any crowdfunding venture lies in the ability of the "entrepreneur to identify the right community"(2011:11).

What makes WNED viewers 'the right community' is the fact that they are a discerning television audience who value niche programming. Despite opportunistic and haphazard viewing habits, all of the viewers agreed that WNED programming contributes positively to their lives. What makes crowdfunding right for WNED is the fact that it already successfully pursues the kind of short-term fixed cost initiatives that crowdfunding does best.

Set to air nationally in October of 2011, *The War of 1812* is a two-hour HD documentary co-produced by WNED. It is one of seven productions currently being overseen by WNED that is slated to air nationally in the future. Committed to the production of high quality programming, WNED reaps financial rewards from the syndication and merchandising of productions like these. However, securing funding for research and production can be difficult, and often involves, as in the case of *The War of*



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*1812*, a myriad of corporate and private underwriters. If WNED draws up a list of potential future productions, and approaches viewers using the threshold pledge formula, they could begin to offset some of their financial burden. As well it would gauge interest and generate advance publicity for their projects. By inviting viewers to identify and invest in the future programs that matter to them, WNED could offer viewers the chance to become co-producers in the most literal sense. By offering membership as a reward for investment, WNED escapes the traditional top down structure of associational memberships. No longer are members confined to supporting the aims of the organization. In its place comes a newer, more relational dynamic, with members contributing directly to the creation of WNED content.

Crowdfunding is not of course without its issues. The most significant concern is the issue of credibility, and the necessity of a “commitment device” (Belleflamme et al., 2011:16) to ensure that investors’ funds are spent on the stated goal and that the final product does appear. Trust building is essential, and there is little room left for cost overruns or production problems.

### Conclusion

Individual definitions of what membership means are being reformulated, and associational membership organizations are being radically reorganized as a result. This is something that WNED, and other PBS affiliates must begin to confront, if they are to continue relying on the contributions of their members.

It is the conclusion of this study that in order to overcome the barriers to membership that currently exist, WNED must recognize that membership is not a singular behaviour but the collusion of three forms of commitment that can be encouraged through various marketing activities. An analysis of WNED's external communications suggests that currently only two of three membership behaviors are being activated, and that work needs to be done to cultivate coproduction behaviors. Interviews conducted with Canadian viewers suggest that although WNED is valued, few express any desire to become a member. On the whole their television habits are opportunistic and haphazard. To help counter some of these barriers, this study recommends that coproduction behaviors be encouraged through a considerable investment into and commitment to Web 2.0 technology. Web 2.0 technology will aid in the dissemination of organizational knowledge, in the creation of brand communities, and would enable crowdfunding initiatives to be launched around forthcoming productions.

This has been a small pilot study. It would benefit all paid membership organizations to consider looking more closely at the changing nature of membership. The long term effects of a shift from membership to advocacy needs to be discussed. Crowdfunding offers a host of opportunities for not for profits, and more research into the experiences of investors is needed. Does, for instance, the success of so many small

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initiatives inspire or dissuade individual investors from committing to long-term goals? Is the shift from a vertical to a more relational model sufficiently attractive to viewers? Can crowdfunding really turn investors into members? What effect will so much short-term commitment have on our understanding of commitment? These and many more questions remain to be answered.



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## Appendix A

### *Viewer Questionnaire Protocol*

To aid in the accuracy of my note taking, I would like to record our conversation today. The tapes will be used only for the duration of this project, will be heard only by me and will be destroyed once they have been transcribed. In addition, I will require you to sign a form (see attached) devised to meet Ryerson's ethics review requirements. In brief, this document states that: (1) all information will be held confidential, (2) your participation is voluntary and you may stop at any time if you feel uncomfortable, and (3) we do not intend to inflict any harm. Thank you for agreeing to participate.

I have planned this interview to last no longer than 30 minutes. During this time, I have several questions that I would like to cover. If time runs short, it may be necessary to interrupt you in order to push ahead and complete my line of questioning.

### **Introduction**

I have invited you to speak with me today because you have identified yourself as someone who watches the public broadcasting television station WNED Buffalo. My research project is aimed at better understanding why WNED, despite having a large number of viewers, suffers from such a low membership penetration rate. My questions are not intended to judge your television habits, but to learn more about what triggers viewers to become members of WNED-TV.

### **Questions:**

How long have you been a viewer of WNED-Buffalo?

What is your age?

Do you live in Southern Ontario, Western New York or Pennsylvania?

Do you pay for television, either in the form of a cable or satellite package?

Do you financially support any public radio or television stations?

How do you find out about upcoming WNED programming?

Have you ever visited the WNED website? If yes, how often? Did you find it helpful?

Have you ever been asked to volunteer for WNED?

Have you ever contacted WNED about anything? If yes, what was the experience like?

## Public Broadcasting & Paid Membership

Where do you think WNED gets most of its funding from?

WNED has recently decreased the frequency with which it hosts on air pledge drives. Do you think this is a good idea? Why or Why not?

Have you made a financial contribution to WNED Buffalo in the past 12 months?

If you answered yes, what prompted you to become a member?

If you answered no, how likely are you to become a member in the next twelve's months? Why or Why not?

In your own words, can you tell me what you think it means to be a member of something?

If you are a member, are there any changes you would make to the *WNED magazine*?

What changes, if any, would you make to WNED?

Of the public broadcasters available to you where do you rank WNED?

Any final comments or thoughts?

## Appendix B

WNED Magazine, March 2011

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**WNED NEWS**

### WNED-TV: Most Watched U.S. Public Television Station in 2010



Thank you Western New York for helping to make WNED-TV the most-watched public television station in the nation in primetime. According to Nielsen audience figures\*, the station tied with Nashville, Tenn. for the number one spot in 2010. More significantly, WNED-TV occupied the number one spot with a 10 percent lead during the last half of 2010.

Vice President for Broadcasting Ron Santora attributes WNED's success to various factors. "We have a population that really cares about quality television, we have a program acquisition budget that deftly supplements our PBS offerings, and our promotion efforts are on par with the best," he said.

(\*These figures do not reflect WNED-TV's large Canadian viewership.)



#### Investing in Public Broadcasting: Mutually Beneficial

WNED awarded the Buffalo Niagara Convention & Visitors Bureau the **2010 Kevin Keane Award** for significant investment in public broadcasting. This annual award, named after a WNED board chair emeritus, recognizes a company that enhances the community through mutually beneficial partnerships with WNED.

Ed Healy, Buffalo Niagara CVB VP marketing;  
Dottie Gallagher-Cohen, Buffalo Niagara CVB president and CEO;  
and William G. Gisel, Jr., WNED Board Chair.

### Thank You, Volunteers!!

WNED appreciates the support of all those who helped with our December 2010 **membership drive**, especially:

representatives of *Coproduction* and dinner donor:



Hilbert College  
Criminal Justice Group



TEMPLETON  
LANDING

35


## Appendix C

WNED Magazine, July 2011

Pg. 1

### CoverStory

Fascinating collections ... pioneering research ... amazing stories. Go behind the scenes at Britain's Natural History Museum with this new, six-part series. (See pg. 14.)



### WNEDBoard

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**Membership Department:**  
Buffalo: (716) 845-7038  
Canada: 1-800-678-1873  
e-mail: [membership@wned.org](mailto:membership@wned.org)

**WNED-TV & ThinkBright and Well Viewer Services:**  
U.S. and Canada: (716) 845-7000, option 7  
e-mail: [viewerservices@wned.org](mailto:viewerservices@wned.org)

**Classical 94.5 questions:**  
(716) 845-7000, ext. 208; e-mail: [classical@wned.org](mailto:classical@wned.org)

**WNED-AM 970 questions:**  
(716) 845-7000; e-mail: [news@wned.org](mailto:news@wned.org)

**To Volunteer:**  
U.S. and Canada: (716) 845-7025  
e-mail: [volunteers@wned.org](mailto:volunteers@wned.org)

**PLEASE NOTE:** WNED's radio and television stations regularly shut down for scheduled maintenance. Generally, this happens around midnight, often on a Sunday, and the station is off the air for only a few hours. We will let you know about such occasions with announcements on the air.

However, from time to time, a station will experience an unexpected technical problem or power outage with little or no warning. In these cases, it is usually impossible to give advance warning of the interruption of service.

### WNED Magazine

JULY 2011 Vol. 33 • No. 7

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Buffalo-Toronto  
[wned.org](http://wned.org)

**OUR FUNDERS...**In addition to membership contributions from individuals, corporations and foundations, a portion of the operating expenses of WNED-TV, ThinkBright and Well TV, WNED-AM, Classical 94.5/ WNED is supplied by grants from the New York State Department of Education and the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. The Western New York Public Broadcasting Association is a non-profit corporation chartered by the Board of Regents of New York State.

**OUR LIST EXCHANGE POLICY...**WNED does not sell, rent or trade its membership lists with political organizations. WNED does, on occasion, exchange its membership list with like-minded not-for-profit organizations in order to reach new audiences and potential members. If you wish to be excluded from such exchanges, please notify WNED's membership department at 1-800-678-1873 (toll free), (716) 845-7038, or e-mail [membership@wned.org](mailto:membership@wned.org).

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**PRINTED IN CANADA**

## Appendix D

### *Major Donor Clubs*

<http://www.wned.org/founders/default.asp>



## WNED's PRESIDENT'S COUNCIL, LEADERSHIP CIRCLE AND FOUNDER'S SOCIETY

WNED operates with the support of our members, who are truly the backbone of the organization. They provide many of the resources needed to cover basic expenses -- everything from our electric bill to our PBS dues.

Although a membership costs as little as \$35, some members have the capability and interest to do more for public broadcasting in Western New York and Southern Ontario. Donors who make an annual contribution of at least \$300 provide the support WNED needs to go beyond day-to-day operations and plan for the future. These members are enrolled in one of the following Major Giving Clubs:

<b>Founder's Society</b>	\$300 - \$999
<b>Leadership Circle</b>	\$1,000 - \$4,999
<b>President's Council</b>	\$5,000 and up

Members who give at these levels also receive special benefits. They are often invited to events that offer an insider's view of upcoming programs, opportunities to meet public broadcasting personalities and much more!

For a contribution of \$300 or more, you can join a growing list of leaders who make a significant difference. Your gift will help WNED produce, acquire and broadcast programs that enrich you personally as well as our entire community.

For more information about becoming a member of a WNED Major Giving Club, contact:

Colleen Miller  
Director, WNED President's Council, Leadership Circle, Founder's Society  
& Legacy Society

at 716-845-7031 or [cmiller@wned.org](mailto:cmiller@wned.org).

# Public Broadcasting & Paid Membership

## Appendix E

News Release – July 6<sup>th</sup>, 2011

<http://www.wned.org/pressroom/releases/bvosAward.asp>

Western New York Public Broadcasting Association

http://www.wned.org/pressroom/releases/bvosAward.asp

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For Immediate Release  
July 6, 2011

### MEDIA NEWS

**Contact:**  
**Gwen Mysiak**  
Manager of Media Relations for TV Productions  
716.845.2202 • gmysiak@wned.org

#### WNED'S "BUFFALO'S VOICES OF STEEL" WINS AWARD

BUFFALO, N.Y. – WNED's "Buffalo's Voices of Steel" was recently honored with the Best Documentary Program award by the New York State Broadcasters Association at a reception in Bolton Landing, N.Y.

"Buffalo's Voices of Steel" is another fine example of WNED-TV having the privilege to capture defining aspects of local history," said Donald K. Boswell, WNED president and CEO. "I am proud of our team for creating a top-notch production that ensures this important era and the people who made it possible in Western New York will not be soon forgotten."

Former steelworkers from Western New York were key players in a dynamic era of a booming blue-collar community. The program reveals how important this industry was to the region and how it helped to forge "The American Dream." Well-paying jobs offered middle-class prosperity and opportunity for steelworkers and their families — a house and a car, summer vacations and college educations for the next generation.

"Working on "Buffalo's Voices of Steel" was a rewarding experience and to have it recognized is truly an honor," said Producer Andy Grant. This program tells the stories of real people whose hard work forged an industry and in the process built a community. This award further extends the applause to these individuals for their significant contributions."

"Buffalo's Voices of Steel," which aired in September 2010, was produced by Driftwood Productions and WNED Buffalo/Toronto, with support from Western Regional Off Track Betting.

For information about other WNED-related events, initiatives and news, please contact: **Megan M. Wagner**  
Director of Corporate Communications  
716.845.7155 • mwagner@wned.org

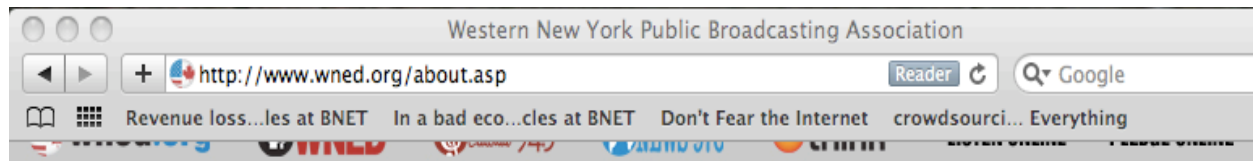
*Through WNED-TV, ThinkBright and Well TV, Classical 94.5/WNED-FM and WNED-AM 970 The Information Station, the member-supported WNED Buffalo/Toronto provides high quality programming and services that enlighten, inspire, entertain and educate Western New York and Southern Ontario communities. Additional information about WNED can be found at wned.org.*



### Appendix F

#### *About WNED*

<http://www.wned.org/about.asp>



Member-supported WNED serves a bi-national region of 3.1 million households across Western New York and Southern Ontario with high-quality programming and services that enlighten, inspire, entertain, and educate our communities. WNED's goal is to be a bi-national resource, "the place to go" to facilitate community-wide solutions, a public media portal. With our community partners, we provide a forum that brings ideas to life and enhances public discourse. We are a catalyst for change through community collaborations. Our programs and outreach explore and address issues and interests relevant to the region. We have a responsibility to honor the public's trust in this community asset. We will harness the power of new media in ways that improve the quality of life and learning for all within our broadcast reach.

**TV & Radio:** WNED's stations attract a monthly cumulative audience of about two million viewers and listeners in Western New York, Southern Ontario, and Northwestern Pennsylvania. For the best television on television, watch WNED-TV, Channel 17, Cable Channel 3, which has been serving people in the region for nearly 50 years. WNED is also multicasting three channels on digital channel 17. WNED-HD, a 24-hour high-definition broadcast service, can be seen on digital channel 17.1 or Time Warner channel 703. WNED-SD, the WNED-TV signal simulcast in digital television, is on digital channel 17.2. *ThinkBright TV*, WNED's 24-hour lifelong learning channel, is broadcast on digital channel 17.3 and Time Warner channel 21 in Erie County and portions of Niagara and Chautauqua counties. To enjoy our 24-hour classical music service, tune to Classical 94.5/WNED-FM Buffalo or 87.9 WNJA-FM Jamestown. For around the clock news and information, keep your dial on AM 970, WNED-AM, The Information Station. Or listen online at [www.wned.org](http://www.wned.org).

**Lifelong Learning Services:** When WNED went on the air as the first public television station in New York State, the "ED" stood for "Education." That strong institutional commitment to education continues today, more than 45 years later, across WNED's full range of television, radio, and online services. *ThinkBright Lifelong Learning*, a service that combines a digital television channel, rich online resources, and community outreach, has become a valuable asset for students, teachers, parents, and adult learners in the community. In addition, WNED-TV services 200,000 young people through in-school programming and provides thousands of teachers with learning materials and workshops on the use of technology in the classroom. WNED's 4th floor is home to the *Buffalo Professional Development and Technology Center* and is devoted to bringing first-class teacher training to Buffalo educators and beyond. This groundbreaking partnership involves the Buffalo Public Schools, the Buffalo Teacher Center, the University at Buffalo's Center for Applied Technology in Education, Buffalo State College, Erie 1 BOCES, and WNED. In addition to teacher training, WNED also provides a GED On TV Adult Learning Service and an early childhood outreach initiative called Ready to Learn.

## Public Broadcasting & Paid Membership

### *About WNED continued*

<http://www.wned.org/about.asp>

**Community Outreach Initiatives:** WNED is also committed to the research, design and implementation of multi-media outreach campaigns addressing timely social issues. With the valuable assistance of many community partners, our Education and Outreach Department has made significant contributions in the areas of adult and family literacy, health and wellness, family caregiving, youth participation in government, early childhood education and more.

**Content Creation:** WNED's goal is to develop content on multiple platforms for local, regional, national, and international audiences.

#### *Radio:*

- WNED-FM produces the 13-part classical music series, *Music from Chautauqua*, which is distributed nationally via Public Radio International (PRI). Our FM station also enjoys an on-going broadcast and production relationship with the Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra. Classical 94.5 WNED produces the *Top 10 Opera Series*, our annual *Making a List* program, and other special broadcasts, such as *Uncrowned Queens*.
- WNED has begun production of a new series called *Uncrowned Queens*, which will highlight the often unheralded contributions of African-American women. The program could potentially be distributed nationally.
- AM 970 is our region's leading provider of news and information programming, mixing the best of NPR, PRI, the CBC, the BBC and more with local reporting and community forums. AM 970 regularly files reports for NPR from our region.

#### *Television:*

- WNED is the proud founder and co-creator of the Emmy-award winning *Reading Rainbow*, one of the longest-running, most-watched, and best-loved children's series in the history of public television. New programs for the series are being produced in partnership with Educate, Inc.
- WNED has produced a wide range of television specials, including *Fort Niagara*, *The Pan American Experience*, *Polonia*, *Buffalo's Houses of Worship*, *b-Healthy for Life*, *Taking Charge of Your Child's Future*, *Demystifying Dyslexia*, and the *Our Town* series showcasing local communities.
- WNED has committed itself to becoming a major producer of high-definition programming to highlight local cultural treasures through national broadcasts that will stimulate tourism in our bi-national region. PBS has nationally broadcast programs recently produced by WNED, including *America's Houses of Worship*, *Window to the Sea*, *Niagara Falls*, *Frank Lloyd Wright's Buffalo*, and *The Marines*.

Digital broadcasting technology is making it possible for WNED to more fully achieve our mission and community vision. With continued support from generous members, foundations, and corporations, WNED pledges to maintain the standard of excellence that has been its hallmark.



## Appendix G

### *Volunteer*

<http://www.wned.org/VOL/default.asp>

### Volunteer Opportunities at WNED

#### Upcoming Events

TV Pledge Drive  
June 5-13

FM Pledge Drive  
June 18-30



**Volunteers of the Year 2009**  
**Dianne Kubiczek & Helen Sanders**


*Community Service ... Teambuilding ...  
Camaraderie ... Fun ... Awareness*

**Volunteer for WNED:  
Your Public Broadcasting Station!**

**Volunteer News:** Check out past issues of  
[WNED Volunteer Gazette](#)

Join the many volunteers who help make WNED come alive through station promotion, community outreach and fund-raising activities. Join this dynamic group of people to give a hand or learn new skills. Work with fantastic people and contribute to a valuable community resource, your PBS station WNED. It's fun! It's challenging! It's creative!

Whatever your interest, there's a role for you. Previous experience is not necessary— we'll train you. Find out what's available now!



## Public Broadcasting & Paid Membership

*Volunteer continued*

<http://www.wned.org/VOL/default.asp>

### TV and Radio Campaigns

During the campaigns, volunteers record pledges called in by viewers/listeners. The task is essential, but also great fun. Refreshments are provided and you may be part of a live broadcast. (Open to volunteers age 15 or older.)

### Special Events

Volunteers help out with events in both Buffalo and Toronto. Recent examples include Antique Home Show concerts, Kid Fest, Buffalo City Forum presentations, and premieres of [WNED-produced broadcasts](#).

### Bring in your Group: Our 'Thank You' Package

... to all our volunteering organizations!

**Would you like to see *your* organization featured on TV?**

WNED offers a prime **opportunity** for organizations that provide 10 or more volunteers for TV Membership Campaigns. As a thank-you, each group receives:

- On-air **acknowledgements**, group and individual camera shots
- A full-color graphic with your **logo** shown live on-air
- An on-air **interview** with a spokesperson from your organization, providing the opportunity to share your mission, product or service
- An acknowledgement on [wned.org](http://wned.org) with a link to your website

A unique **teambuilding** activity for employees

### Join Us

**To sign up or find out more:**

Please e-mail [volunteers@wned.org](mailto:volunteers@wned.org) or complete our online [Volunteer Registration Form](#).

Or by mail:



**(716) 845-7025**

[volunteers@wned.org](mailto:volunteers@wned.org)

## Public Broadcasting & Paid Membership

*Volunteer continued*

<http://www.wned.org/VOL/default.asp>

### Join Us

To sign up or find out more:

Please e-mail [volunteers@wned.org](mailto:volunteers@wned.org) or complete our online [Volunteer Registration Form](#).

Or by mail:

**In the U.S.:**  
140 Lower Terrace  
Buffalo NY 14202  
Phone: (716) 845-7025

**In Canada:**  
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Phone: (416) 363-3444

**(716) 845-7025**

[volunteers@wned.org](mailto:volunteers@wned.org)

[Information For Our Volunteers](#) (pdf - 317kb)

WNED would like to thank the following organizations for their volunteer support during our recent TV Membership Campaign:



[Actors Equity Association](#)



[Buffalo Music Hall of Fame](#)



BURCHFIELD PENNEY  
ART CENTER  
*at Buffalo State College*

[Burchfield Penny Arts Center](#)



[Journey's End](#)

## Appendix H

### *Member Memos*

[http://www.wned.org/membership/member\\_memos.asp](http://www.wned.org/membership/member_memos.asp)

### *Member Memos!*

*\* The WNED Membership Department is delighted to announce we are making a big change to serve you better. We are in the process of moving our thank-you gift inventory and shipping operations to a new vendor, which will enable us to dramatically improve our service to you in two important ways.*

#### *Faster, more accurate service*

*Our new state-of-the-art vendor will maintain inventory for us electronically, enabling us to track shipping and delivery dates on-line and shipments, allowing us to speed thank you gifts to our members.*

#### *International shipping*

*Our new vendor will act our broker with Canada Customs, eliminating time consuming delays and surcharges to our members.*

*We ask for your patience as we work through this transition over the next several months. Once completed, the new arrangement will allow us to deliver on the promise of our thank-you gifts in much the same way we deliver on the promise of our programs- quickly and conveniently.*

*\* When you make a gift to WNED, your thank you letter also serves as your official tax receipt. In a paragraph titled "Please retain for tax purposes" at the bottom of the letter, the amount of your gift, including the fair market value of your thank you gift, if appropriate, is noted. You were mailed a thank you letter for each gift you made to WNED-TV, WNED-AM and WNED-FM. This is a very cost-efficient way of providing you with accurate and timely gift receipts and tax information.*

#### *By mail in the US:*

*Tax Receipt Request Membership  
WNED  
PO Box 1263  
Buffalo, NY 14240-1263*

#### *By mail in Canada:*

*Tax Receipt Request  
Membership  
WNED  
PO Box 399  
Fort Erie, ON L2A 5N1*

*\* When you pledge your support during a membership campaign, please honor your pledge as soon as possible. Your prompt payment saves WNED money on additional reminder mailings.*

## Public Broadcasting & Paid Membership

### *Member Memos Continued*

*[http://www.wned.org/membership/member\\_memos.asp](http://www.wned.org/membership/member_memos.asp)*

*\* WNED does not sell, rent or trade its membership lists with political organizations. WNED does on occasion exchange its membership list with like-minded not-for-profit organizations, to reach new audiences and potential members. If you wish to be excluded from such exchanges, please notify WNED's membership department at 1-800-678-1873 (toll free), (716) 845-7038, or e-mail [membership@wned.org](mailto:membership@wned.org).*

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