

## Crowdfunding for Conservation

This past summer, the Conservation Center for Art & Historic Artifacts (CCAHA) built a crowdfunding platform. On September 19, it made its public debut with the launch of Pennsylvania's Top 10 Endangered Artifacts.

Crowdfunding is the art of raising donations through the internet for a tightly defined purpose, usually over a limited period of time. As an example, the Louvre could launch a crowdfunding campaign to conserve Leonardo da Vinci's *Mona Lisa* on the popular crowdfunding platform Kickstarter. Their Kickstarter page might announce that their goal is to raise \$5 million in three weeks. Visitors to the webpage would be encouraged to contribute \$10, \$20, maybe even \$1,000 toward the project. And of course the campaign would have to follow the strict Kickstarter rule: it would be all-or-nothing. If they raised only \$4.9 million at the end of the three weeks, the Louvre would receive nothing and the *Mona Lisa* would remain untreated.

With many traditional funding sources on the decline, it's getting even harder to fundraise for the work of collections care. This is why many museums, libraries, archives, and historic sites are looking at emerging forms of digital philanthropy, with crowdfunding chief among them. Entrepreneurs and small businesses with bright ideas have realized enormous success with crowdfunding platforms like Kickstarter. Why not collecting institutions, too?

Launched in 2009, Kickstarter quickly established itself as the crowdfunding industry standard. In 2010, approximately \$27 million was pledged to projects on the site. Just two years later, in 2012, the total amount skyrocketed to more than \$300 million. Other crowdfunding platforms entered the market, including Indiegogo, CrowdRise, and RocketHub. Some offered more nonprofit-friendly incentives than Kickstarter, which tends to be entrepreneurial in its focus.

At CCAHA, we envisioned something new. As we developed a Top 10 Endangered Artifacts competition, loosely modeled on a popular Top 10 program led by the Virginia Association of Museums, we considered the possibility of adding a crowdfunding component.

Generous funding from The Pew Center for Arts & Heritage helped turn our dream into a reality. With the grant funding, we enlisted the website design firm P'unk Avenue to assist us in creating a new crowdfunding website dedicated to collections care projects. We wanted the user-friendly ease of the standard crowdfunding model married to a design that reflected CCAHA's preservation-focused mission.

The crowdfunding platform that emerged is appropriate not only for Pennsylvania's Top 10 Endangered Artifacts, but as a permanent addition to CCAHA's roster of fundraising assistance services. In its design, we emphasized photographic images over videos, keeping our platform accessible to organizations that might not have the resources to produce a polished video. And we built in a backdoor so we could count contributions that went directly to the organization (avoiding online transaction processing fees).

The result: a crowdfunding platform that at first glance might look like a Kickstarter or Indiegogo page but—on closer examination—reveals itself to be considerably more nonprofit friendly.

The platform design complemented the objectives of Pennsylvania's Top 10 Endangered Artifacts, which was conceived as something different than the standard internet popularity contest. We used a peer review process to select the 10 artifacts, convening a panel of judges, representative of all regions in the state and with deep experience in history, art history, and preservation. The panel reviewed nominations for 60 organizations and then, after a day of intense deliberations at CCAHA, emerged with a list of 10 remarkable artifacts.

When the identities of Pennsylvania's Top 10 Endangered Artifacts were revealed at a special event hosted by First Lady Susan Corbett at the Governor's Residence in Harrisburg, the campaigns for votes and dollars began. At the conclusion of the six-week campaign period, the winner of the most votes would receive the "People's Choice Award." But, more importantly, all 10 organizations would get to keep the money they raised, including an initial contribution to each from Beneficial Foundation, the philanthropic arm of Beneficial Bank.

The institutions received support in developing marketing strategies from Canary Promotion, a full-service communications firm. Collections care initiatives rarely receive opportunities for state- or nationwide promotion. Thanks to Pennsylvania's Top 10 Endangered Artifacts, 10 amazing pieces in important Pennsylvania collections were widely recognized for their historical and artistic significance.

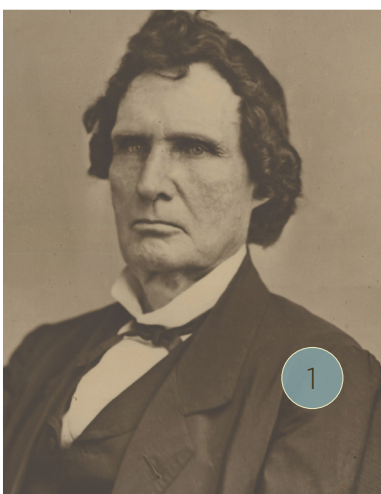
Responding to the challenge of crowdfunding, some of the institutions became creative in their strategies. LancasterHistory.org held a Thaddeus Stevens look-alike contest to draw attention to their Thaddeus Stevens wig. The Chester County Historical Society hosted a click-a-thon at a local restaurant to raise awareness of their campaign for the Passmore Williamson visitors' book, a treasured artifact of the abolitionist movement. Others used Facebook and Twitter to spread the word.

Digital philanthropy isn't going away, and collecting institutions want to know where they will fit into the picture. Relatively few have ventured into crowdfunding to date, and the results have been somewhat mixed for those who have. It turns out that crowdfunding is not as easy as it may appear. But the promise remains huge.

At CCAHA, we're still reviewing the impact of Pennsylvania's Top 10 Endangered Artifacts. Over six weeks, the 10 campaigns brought in 5.2 million votes and over \$16,000 for collections care initiatives. There was no downside. The artifacts received more attention than ever before, along with an infusion of money for their preservation.

CCAHA's crowdfunding infrastructure is now in place, with a winning platform for generating interest and donations. Fundraising for collections care at CCAHA has entered a new era.

—LEE PRICE



1 / Congressman Thaddeus Stevens (1792-1868) (collections of LancasterHistory.org)

2 / Contestants in LancasterHistory.org's Stevens look-alike contest (image courtesy of LancasterHistory.org)