



**Radford**  
UNIVERSITY

# CROWDFUNDING CASE STUDY

# Radford University: Using Crowdfunding to Tell a Meaningful Story

With an ever-changing donor landscape and a goal line that seems to keep moving, many RNL partners are adjusting their annual and leadership fundraising strategy in hopes of meeting donors where they are- they're going digital. RNL ScaleFunder partners at Radford University have worked for the last several years to build a Crowdfunding platform that is inspiring, touches all areas of campus, and tells a compelling story in hopes of reaching more alumni and donors in meaningful ways. Supported by their strong internal strategy and guidance from their RNL ScaleFunder Client Solutions Consultant Janice Ridolfi, the Radford University annual giving team has significantly grown engagement across campus through their Inspire platform since signing on in 2020. The team sat down with us earlier this summer to share their take on why they believe their efforts have been so successful and to talk about the ways they use Crowdfunding as a vehicle to forge meaningful connections with donors.



## The Results

**\$240,000**  
raised in 2024 on their  
Crowdfunding platform

“The investment that we make in the ScaleFunder platform comes back in new donors, reactivated donors, donors who convert, increased donors, and more. Donor acquisition is expensive, but this platform gives younger generations the options and impact they seek.”

Carolyn Clayton, Director of Annual Giving, Radford University

## Crowdfunding as a Donor Recruitment & Retention Tool

In the soon-to-be released RNL Advancement Leaders Speak report, an overwhelming 95% of fundraising practitioners indicated that increasing the number of donors who contribute to their organizations on an annual basis is a top priority for their team. Annual Giving and engagement shops of all sizes have been fighting an uphill battle to recruit and retain donors for the last several years, and it seems that donor priorities are significantly shifting as new generations move into the pipeline. Most of the research we are seeing about Millennial, Gen Z, and soon-to-be Gen Alpha donors is showing that higher education institutions are falling lower and lower on younger donors' priority lists.

What else do we know about these donors? They are more likely to give to specific causes rather than the annual or unrestricted fund, they rely on storytelling to paint a picture of potential impact, and they value human connection. That's where

Crowdfunding comes in. Noticing this growing donor gap among their constituent base, the Radford team has spent the last three years leaning into this idea of prioritizing storytelling and ease-of-giving through use of the RNL ScaleFunder Crowdfunding platform.

Expanding their efforts from traditional direct mail and calling programs was an obvious answer to the Radford team a few years ago when they noticed alarming decreases in new donor and returning donor numbers. Carolyn Clayton, Director of Annual Giving, shared, "The hard thing that annual giving teams need to realize is that we have around 5 living demographics in our alumni base and there is no one size fits all approach. The investment that we make in the ScaleFunder platform comes back in new donors, reactivated donors, donors who convert, increased donors, and more." Clayton continued, "Donor acquisition is expensive. The younger generations want options and impact- this (platform) is our way of giving them that and hoping we can find the new donors to become the next generation of Radford supporters." And Crowdfunding isn't just a stellar recruitment tool for bringing in new donors, it is also a key factor in Radford's annual donor retention strategy. Their team is seeing a higher number of repeat donors through the Crowdfunding platform, more so than any other channels or engagement mechanisms on campus. Clayton shared, "We have started to think differently about how we use the platform. When you have the right story and the right platform to tell it on, that can be the spark that brings someone back and re-engages them in what's happening on campus."

In addition to hosting targeted projects at certain times of the year, especially during athletic seasons and when students are



working to raise money for specific initiatives, the Radford team has put the Evergreen module of the ScaleFunder platform to work. Evergreen projects, which do not have an identified dollar goal and do not have a specific end date, have helped support everything from presidential priorities and the annual fund to scholarships in honor or memory of beloved members of the campus community. The Radford team treats these

as elevated giving forms, with an added storytelling capability. “Evergreen pages enable the story to be told in a more personal way than their main giving form – in the old days, our only storytelling mechanism was to tell someone in a person-to-person conversation or to send them a letter. (ScaleFunder) allows us to make a real connection with a lot of donors at a time.”

## **Building a Culture of Giving through Storytelling**

The Radford team uses all of the RNL ScaleFunder platform’s bells and whistles to tell the most complete story of impact as they can for each Crowdfunding Project. Their team shared, “We live in a fast world and we don’t always know each others’ stories- there’s something nice and slow and genuine about Crowdfunding allowing you to tell that story in so many ways. When donors contribute to make a project possible, it reminds us we’re human again. Because of this, we value ScaleFunder more than any other fundraising tool. Crowdfunding shows the power that philanthropy can have in small, consistent gifts- you can be a part of something bigger than yourself.” One of the ways the Radford team leans heavily on the Evergreen feature is to host their various tribute Projects.

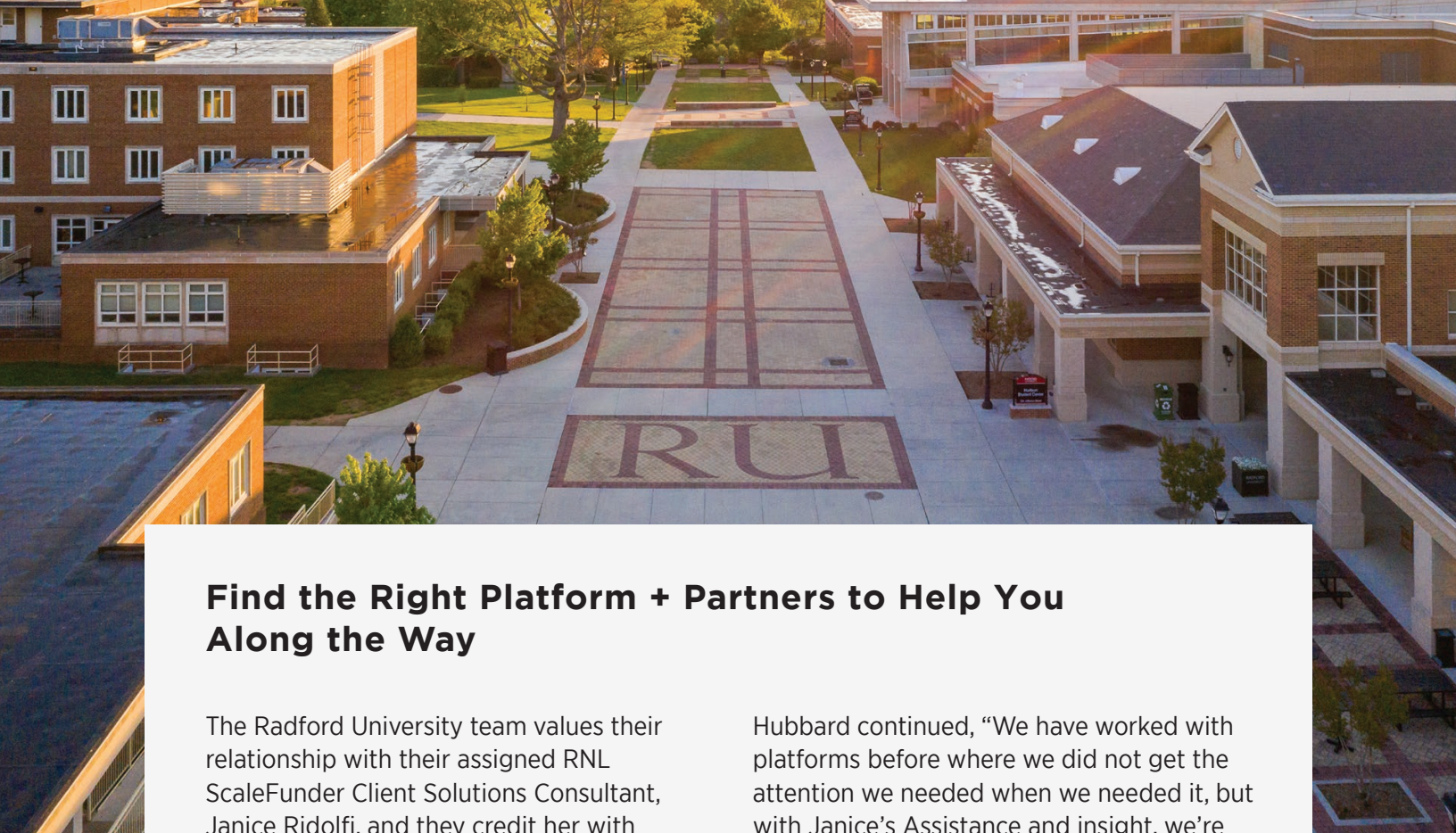
### ***Tributes: Gifts in Honor of Key Figures***

The Radford team has used Evergreen Projects to transform the way they manage gifts made in honor or memory of members of their community. Over the past year, they have received a record number of requests

from retiring faculty members and their loved ones to host Projects in honor of their careers here on campus- the storytelling and personalization they are able to achieve through the ScaleFunder platform makes a difference for their team.

### ***Tributes: Memorializing Beloved Radford Community Members***

They also lean on this feature when a beloved member of the Radford community passes away. Clayton shared, “ScaleFunder gave us the ability to see an opportunity to make giving easier for people, sometimes in really hard circumstances. It removes the obstacle and allows us to hold gently the moment where loved ones can see their person’s legacy being cared for and spun in a positive way- when you can hear a person’s request and make it happen quickly, that is so meaningful to the family.” She continued, “There is energy lost and it feels sterile [if not]- Evergreen Pages have allowed us to capture the person’s heart and memory and story in a responsive way.”



## Find the Right Platform + Partners to Help You Along the Way

The Radford University team values their relationship with their assigned RNL ScaleFunder Client Solutions Consultant, Janice Ridolfi, and they credit her with much of their success. Crystal Hubbard, Assistance Director of Annual Giving, shared, “We recognize that her talent and skills are invaluable factors in our success. She has made a world of difference- she is responsive and available, and her responsiveness allows us to be agile.” Relying on Janice’s extensive knowledge of the ScaleFunder platform, industry best practices, and the ‘Radford way,’ the Radford team feels confident in their ability to grow their Crowdfunding platform year-over-year.

Hubbard continued, “We have worked with platforms before where we did not get the attention we needed when we needed it, but with Janice’s Assistance and insight, we’re all better positioned to excel.. She makes us feel like there really are no crazy questions.” Clayton also shared her thoughts on the value the RNL ScaleFunder Client Solutions Consultant team adds to their efforts, “They understand our end goal and can give us a tailored response that speaks directly to our specific issues, not canned answers that are not applicable to our needs. We really can’t replace that.”

The Radford team is already thinking ahead to new ways they can use the platform to

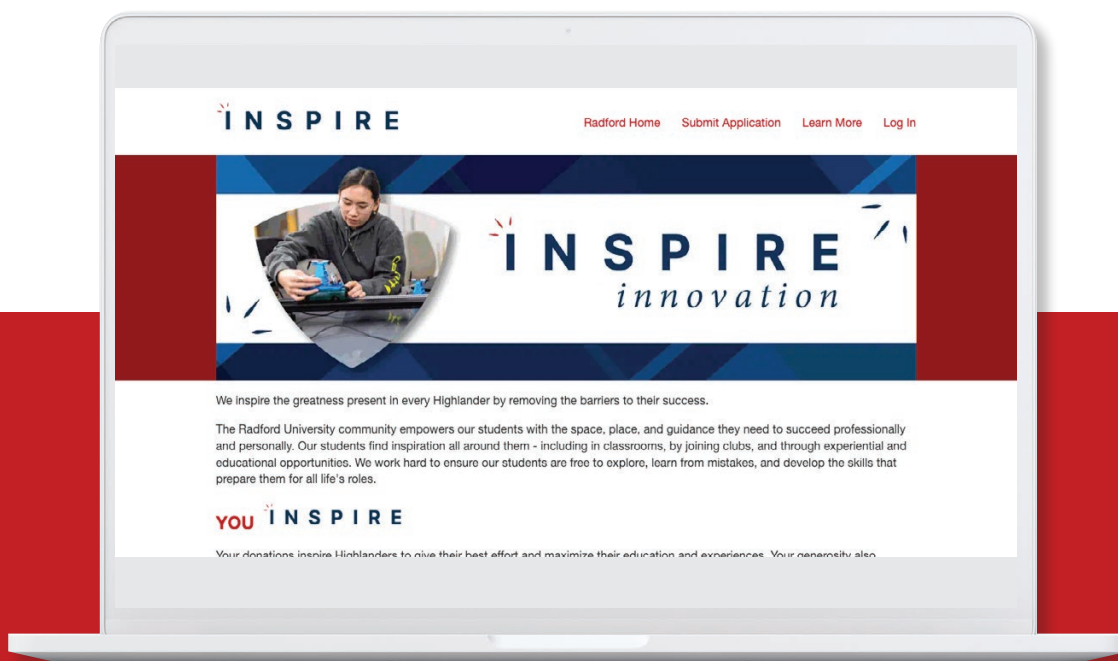


help them meet their goals, engage new donors, and energize institutional interest from long lost donors. We asked them what advice they would share with someone considering the addition of a Crowdfunding program on their campus. Their response?

1. The name of the game for Radford's team is to plan ahead, leave room to pivot as-needed, and then return to the plan. They shared, "Incremental growth

comes from having the plan, working the strategy, and being flexible to work with change. The ScaleFunder platform allows us to do that quickly and we can seize funding and storytelling opportunities as they arise."

2. "There's no time like the present. ScaleFunder takes the 'scary' out of going digital and you get to grow a little every year."



*Want to “take the scary out” of Crowdfunding? Tired of feeling like you’re on an island with your digital fundraising efforts? Connect with RNL today to learn how you, too, can leverage a best-in-class platform and expert consulting support to crush your goals and tell a new story about philanthropy on your campus. **Request a Demo of RNL Crowdfunding ([ruffalonl.com](http://ruffalonl.com))***