

Community Membership Frequently Asked Questions

Why is Open Signal launching a community membership program?

We need to raise money in order to protect access to our media education, equipment and the airwaves. Membership is part of a large-scale fundraising effort that will help keep us financially stable in changing times.

We are also looking for ways to make it an even better experience to be part of our community, and we have designed our membership program to do that.

How does the membership program help me?

It preserves our cable access resources for you and the rest of the Portland community, and provides these additional benefits for each member:

- Access to our production studios & equipment (certifications are still required)
- Members-only trainings and events, including an annual appreciation event
- Free drinks for members at public events
- Ability to participate in meetings and on advisory committees that help shape the services and resources we make available to community producers
- A customized membership card
- A membership newsletter

What's the cost of community membership?

Full community membership benefits are available for just \$1 per year, and we encourage everyone who can afford more to donate that in addition to their membership fee in good faith.

Why is it only \$1? Can I give more than \$1?

When we decided to choose a membership program, we knew ours would have to be different. The most important thing was to make this a program that anyone could be a member of. We just don't want to leave anybody out. We will also use our participating member numbers to seek funding from outside sources, so there is real strength in numbers.

However, \$1 doesn't cover our cost of the program and we'd love for everyone to donate more, but we understand that isn't a possibility for everyone. We're leaving it open so you can donate whatever feels appropriate to you.

As a guideline, we are trying to get an average of \$45 from each member, which means that we're counting on some people to donate much more than that and expect some people to donate a lot less.

What if I can't afford to pay at all?

We will waive your fee, no questions asked. Open Signal will not deny access to anyone due to lack of funds. We would rather waive the fee for someone who could have paid and be mistaken than run the risk of leaving anyone behind.

Every year, Open Signal receives money from the City and the cable franchise. Isn't that enough?

Unfortunately not, because the income from the cable franchise is shrinking. Consumers are increasingly opting for online content rather than traditional cable television. In the 2018-19 fiscal year, we're expecting to lose \$60,000 in cable company income.

With the inevitable and rapid decline of this funding, we are left with two options: reduce services to the public as the funding is reduced, or get busy establishing alternate funding sources to replace the lost funding and sustain services to the community.

In general, it's not smart to run an organization that is dependent upon just two funding streams. In order to preserve and even expand our services, we have decided to fundraise in a variety of ways, and membership is one of them. The alternative would be to get smaller and smaller until we disappear along with our funding.

Why now? What's changed?

We can no longer absorb the cuts without reducing services. Over the years we have been able to absorb funding cuts from the City through cost cutting, and recovery of overhead and some wages from our Capital funds. We have exhausted our ability to reduce and recover funds in this manner. Every dollar decrease going forward will have a commensurate decrease in service unless we can raise new revenue.

From talking with the community, we know you want more services, not less. So we're fundraising in order to maintain our current level of service as well as make the increases we all want. These things cost money, but we're committed to reaching out for that funding.

Can't you get grants or corporate sponsorships instead?

Yes, and we already have. But we need both grants and donations from individuals, as well as businesses, in order

to stabilize our funding. Plus, grants and sponsorships are not a good substitute for what a membership program can do for us.

Individual giving tends to be the one funding source that doesn't drop off in hard times. Donations from individuals also mean important access to unrestricted funds that we can use to keep the lights on, pay for staff, do building maintenance and other processes that are vital for our continued operation. It also makes us accountable to the community first, rather than to the priorities of a corporation or a foundation.

Why are you relying on those of us who can't afford it, instead of going after wealthy donors?

We believe funding coming from many diverse individuals who connect deeply with the mission of this organization (instead of funding from a few wealthy, privileged individuals) will ensure that our mission doesn't change, and that our role in digital equity and social change gets stronger. We want the people we serve to shape this organization, and we want to answer to them.

Is Open Signal having funding problems?

No, but due to our slowly dwindling public funding streams and because we can't predict the future of our economy at large, we're trying to be prepared. We need to make sure our financial reserves are strong, just in case. So while we do not currently have issues, the landscape for community media is changing and we have to get out in front of it.

Will the \$1 rate change?

Open Signal is committed to maintaining the membership cost at \$1, but it depends upon whether we are able to raise enough money from this program with our sliding scale. We will do what we can to ensure that future changes in leadership will not negatively impact this commitment. But none of us can know the future. Changes in technology, politics, and other conditions may lead to circumstances we can't predict.

Do other community media centers have membership fees?

Yes. In fact, 20 of the 31 community media centers we researched across the country had membership programs for individuals with fees ranging from \$10 up to \$500 per year.

Do I have to be a member to check out gear?

Yes, beginning January 1, 2019, community membership will be

required to check out gear and our studios, in addition to necessary equipment certifications.

Do I have to be a member to take classes or attend events?

No, classes and events will continue to be open to the general public.

When does membership renew?

On January 1 of each year. But if you buy your membership after October 1 of the previous year, it is automatically rolled over into the next year. In order to make membership administration as easy and as cost-effective as possible, the membership year starts on January 1 every year. But is it fair to ask someone who joined on December 30 to pay again for the next year? We didn't think it was.

Will membership give me legal ownership over Open Signal, or a right to vote on organizational policy?

No. This is a community-building and fundraising tool. We couldn't legally sell shares of Open Signal, nor would we be for sale even if we could be sold. In order to preserve our commitment to free speech and access, the best possible governing process is the one we currently use, a non-profit guided by a volunteer board working closely with our executive director.

However, membership will give you access to serve on committees that will give you more opportunity to learn about and give input to the workings of our organization.

What will community membership fees pay for?

Your contribution will help us keep the lights on, keep staff at the front desk and expand our mission in a time with free speech and access to media equipment is needed more and more by more and more people. Thanks in advance for your help in protecting the public's access to community media!