

NEWS AND ANALYSIS

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The Benefits of a 'Blended' Campaign

By Heather Joslyn



ELIZABETH LAMARK/RIT

Rochester Institute of Technology's Magic Spell Studios opened in October, creatively financed by a combination of government, corporate, foundation, and individual gifts.

Rochester Institute of Technology is capitalizing on its reputation for innovation with a \$1 billion campaign — while making a novel case to donors about getting more bang from their donations.

Transforming RIT: The Campaign for Greatness aims to raise \$1 billion in a "blended" drive, to support the goals of a new strategic plan and expand research. The "blended" effort means that revenue from sources usually not counted in such campaigns, such as government grants and contracts, is included in the tally along with the usual contributions from individuals,

foundations, and corporations.

As of late March, \$581 million had been raised. About \$236 million, or roughly 41 percent, of that comes from the typical private donations campaigns raise, says Lisa Cauda, vice president of development and alumni relations.

The university decided to run a blended campaign not only to raise funds to support its new strategic plan but also to signal its emergence as a research institution. RIT recently received an upgraded classification to accredited research university, in recognition of its increasing number of doctoral graduates.

A blended campaign is especially attractive to supporters, Cauda says, because combining their contributions with others' will fuel greater results than they could finance on their own.

"Philanthropic donors are interested in impact," she says. "When gifts are leveraged to secure additional gifts, it enhances that impact."

Campaign Magic

RIT's new Magic Spell Studios building is a prime example of how the various streams of support converge in the blended campaign. Opened in October, the facility fosters the creation of film, animation, and interactive games. The economic potential of works created in the studios — and of encouraging their creators to stay in the region after graduation — helped spur a \$13.5 million commitment from New York State, matched by money from tech companies Cisco (\$12.4 million) and Dell (\$3 million). With those contributions secured, Cauda says, "We were off and running.

"When funding to complete the building fell \$1.5 million short, RIT conferred with Danny Wegman, chairman of Wegmans Food Markets, a supermarket chain based locally. Wegman's family foundation gave the final \$1.5 million. As the opening of the facility approached, "We still didn't have all the technology we wanted to make it a true premiere event," Cauda says. So, to buy gear needed for the studios' soundstage and new Wegmans Theater, RIT allocated \$1 million from a \$50 million gift made in 2017 by Austin McChord, a 32-year-old alumnus who founded Datto, a data protection company.

In addition to its blended campaign, RIT is breaking ground in how it's engaging young donors from the tech industry, like McChord. It added a fundraiser in Silicon Valley and a leadership giving officer focused on digital engagement.

The digital specialist, Cauda says, is "someone who's based more on campus rather than traveling, but who is establishing relationships with constituents through social media: those who might not be coming out to events but who are engaging and liking on our pages all the time."

RIT also benefits from volunteer groups of alumni and other business leaders, in the Silicon Valley area and in Los Angeles. With their help, the university is making inroads on the West Coast, Cauda says. (It is, however, looking to replace its Silicon Valley development officer, who took another job after 18 months.)



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"One thing we hear from these industries is that you have to be there to understand how it all works," she says. "Being thousands of miles away, we are at somewhat of a disadvantage. But we have good people on the ground now."

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