



NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF BUSINESS
POLITICAL ACTION COMMITTEES

TOP 10 PAC FUNDRAISING MISTAKES

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Most successful association and corporate PACs have learned to avoid the following fundraising blunders. If your PAC is brand-new or having trouble taking off, take a moment to review this list and assess whether you need to make some changes.

#1 Fundraising without understanding the law.

If you have inherited someone else's fundraising strategy for the PAC, do not assume it satisfied the legal requirements. Make sure you understand what you can and cannot do, as it relates to your particular type of PAC. You not only may be doing something illegal, but you could be missing out on big opportunities. The best one we've heard: an attorney (not one specializing in election law, obviously) advised a corporate PAC that it could only solicit its restricted class twice a year, and speaking to someone about it in the hallway counted as one of those solicitations!

#2 Assuming your leadership understands the PAC because they were smart enough to hire you.

There have been many disappointed PAC managers who, once hired, have realized that the greatest barrier to the PAC's success (and therefore their own) is lack of management or leadership support. This doesn't always appear in the numbers, because these leaders may actually give you their financial support. But, what are they willing to do to advocate the PAC throughout your organization? If your answer is "very little," takes steps to educate them about the PAC's value, demonstrate how it compares to your competition and inform them what they need to do to make sure it succeeds.

#3 Assuming your organization is so unique that tried and true fundraising practices won't work.

Your organization may have a culture, structure, product or service that sets it apart from others, but that doesn't mean traditional and/or newer PAC fundraising approaches cannot be adapted. People, wherever they are, often have similar misconceptions, misunderstandings, and attitudes as it relates to PACs. Use proven fundraising practices and make sure your message uniquely addresses their concerns.

#4 Waiting for the "right" time.

There may never be a right time to conduct a PAC membership campaign. If you wait for the ideal moment, you will never have enough money to carry out the PAC's mission. This does not mean that significant events, like a company-wide reorganization, should not be taken into account. While such turmoil may rule out a broad solicitation, you possibly can target your PAC efforts in areas that will be less affected. United Way drives are another timing issue several companies have overcome. During the drive, they encourage contributions to the PAC and match them for the charity.

#5 Restricting the definition of your restricted class.

It should be easy to go after the low hanging fruit, i.e. the big money from your top leaders. But what will you do after that? Be sure you have thoroughly explored who may be included in your restricted class and set a plan in motion to communicate with them about the PAC.

#6 Failing to ask donors for specific amounts.

We still see this occasionally: a fill-in-the-blank PAC enrollment card with no giving guidelines or suggested amounts. Association PACs should ask for a range of dollar amounts tied to incentive "clubs" offering different levels of recognition and gifts. Corporate PACs should suggest a range of giving guidelines tied to different management levels.

#7 Ignoring the elephant in the room.

Do not ignore an overarching situation or problem within your organization that has the attention of your restricted class. It's usually best to address it in your PAC messages in an attempt to diffuse negative responses before they have a chance of occurring. Has your association raised membership dues? Lost members due to economic difficulties or mergers? Is your company reorganizing? Cutting budgets? These are examples of some of the elephants out there!

Don't just acknowledge the elephant; turn its existence into a compelling reason for the PAC and the need to support it.

#8 Apologizing or making excuses.

Don't apologize for asking your people to support the PAC! Still worse is the manager's letter that says "as distasteful as political contributions are, this is something we have to do..." In our country, political participation is a right, not a requirement. Convey pride for the PAC and all that it stands for!

#9 Overlooking the power of personal persuasion.

No fundraising technique is better than face to face, peer to peer solicitation. Direct mail and electronic communications have their place and are important for raising awareness, informing, and securing limited participation. But, if you have ambitions to vastly expand your PAC, you will need to use the personal touch.

#10 Not having a strategic plan.

You do not have a plan if all you do is send an annual letter to some part of your restricted class. Take a hard look at your PAC numbers. Where are the weak participation areas? Who could be giving more? What are your goals? And, how do you specifically plan to achieve them? Who do you need to help you? Answer these types of questions, and you will have a strategic plan that will actually grow your PAC.