Peer Pressure: The Value of a Government Relations Peer Review Program

SELF-ASSESSMENT TOOL

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Direct Lobbying (Federal, State, Local, and/ or International)

1. Does the association have a Federal/State/Local/International Legislative or Regulatory Program?
   a. if YES, Proceed to question 2
   b. if NO:
      i. Does the Association’s membership engage in activities that would be impacted by federal/state/local/international legislative and regulatory actions?
      ii. Has the Association engaged in an informed debate on the pro/cons in not having a federal/state/local/international legislative or regulatory program in place to advocate on behalf of their members?
      iii. Are there federal/state/local/international affiliates or chapters that have federal/state/local/international legislative or regulatory programs in place?

2. Is the program carried out by a dedicated advocacy staff, or is the program volunteer driven? What is the breakdown of staff / volunteer participation? Is there a volunteer committee(s) that sets policy and or advocates on the issues?

3. How is the relationship between the national/state/local chapter organizations? Is information shared equally? Are advocacy efforts coordinated between the units?

4. Are outside consultants or lobbyists engaged to carryout the goals of the program? How is this expense budgeted? Is it shared with local/state/international affiliates of chapters?

5. Does the association form /or participate in coalitions to further their federal/state/local/international legislative or regulatory agenda?

6. Does the association engage the media to further their federal/state/local/international legislative or regulatory agenda?

7. Does the association have an annual or regularly scheduled event to train and /or educate volunteer members and or legislators or regulators?

8. How does the Association define success of the program and how does it communicate this to its membership and external stakeholders?
9. What type of monitoring systems are in place for federal/state/local/international relations?

### Grassroots

10. Does the association have a system in place to mobilize members into state legislative or regulatory action? How are volunteers educated or kept apprised of legislative or regulatory developments?

11. Do you know who your "key legislators" are? (key to your issues, constituency) Do you know who your members are who live/work in these districts/states?

12. Do you have an easy, quick method of communicating with your grassroots?

13. Do your "calls to action" clearly state: action requested, what to say, how to identify and contact elected officials, follow-up request, request to forward to others who might take action.

14. Do you have a method of tracking grassroots actions taken by your members? Can you name 100 members who have taken action in the past six months? 50 members? (can vary the number depending on size of membership) In the past month?

15. Does the association encourage member visits with legislators and regulators? If so, does the association play an active role in facilitating these meetings or events?

16. Do you have a way of acknowledging and thanking grassroots participants?

17. Are your leaders (staff and volunteer) participants in grassroots activities? Do they publicly support grassroots efforts?

18. Do you have a method of involving grassroots in setting government relations agenda of your organization?

### Political Action Committees

19. Does the Association have a Political Action Committee (PAC)?
   
   a. If YES: Proceed to question 2.
   
   b. If NO: Does the association fully understand the requirements, costs and potential benefits and challenges of Political Action Committees? Has it engaged in an informed debate and made an informed decision not to include a PAC in its government relations operations?

20. Does the association have clearly stated policies in place establishing the criteria used to determine eligibility of candidates who will receive PAC contributions (e.g; past support of association positions, position on relevant committee of jurisdiction, incumbent versus challenger, general election or primary, etc.)?
21. Does the association have a PAC committee, with clearly articulated policies on who is accountable for what activities (e.g.; PAC fundraising, decisions RE: expenditure of PAC funds, etc.)?

22. Does the association achieve a broad, generally bipartisan mix of contributions overtime or is it viewed as aligned with a particular party or interest area?

23. Does the association have a mechanism in place for ensuring the appropriate handling of PAC funds and bookkeeping and that required reporting (internal financial reports as well as required FEC filings) is made in a timely basis in full compliance with campaign finance regulations?

24. Are staff involved in PAC activities (within the Executive and Finance Departments as well as the Government Relations Department) fully aware of the restrictions and limitations on solicitation and acceptance of PAC donations and on PAC expenditures? Does the association have a mechanism and/or competent expert counsel available to ensure that PAC operations remain current with any changes in campaign finance regulations?

25. Does the PAC have clear and specific goals for each year or election cycle in terms of fundraising targets and issues to be focused on?
   a. Is there a mechanism for assessing performance against goals?

26. Are a variety of fundraising approaches utilized (In-house, peer-to-peer, outside consultants)?

27. Does the PAC succeed in securing both new (first time) donors as well as retention and increased level of support from past donors? Is there substantial (preferably full) participation by volunteer leadership as donors to the PAC?

28. Is the association’s volunteer leadership (board, committees, etc.) and general membership aware of the role and importance of a Political Action Committee, and of the activities of the association’s PAC?

29. Does the PAC have an incentive program to promote contributions or to increase the amount contributed?

30. What type of recognition programs exist for PAC contributors?

**Governance / Management**

31. Does the association have clearly stated goals and objectives in place for the government relations program? How often are the goals and objectives reviewed and is this procedure aligned with the association’s strategic planning or budgeting processes?

32. Does the association have a formal mechanism in place for identifying public policy issues of importance to the membership?
33. Does the association have a clearly articulated and well understood process for how policies are adopted and by whom? Are these policies strictly followed?

34. Are policies identified on an ad hoc basis, or is there a clear hierarchy of policy decision making (e.g.; association strategic plan drives establishment of a general, long term “platform” of legislative/regulatory objectives, which in turn is used as the basis for annual or tactical advocacy plans)?

35. Is there a formal mechanism for tracking performance against advocacy objectives?

36. Is there a formal mechanism for reviewing and updating public policy positions, and eliminating those no longer relevant?

37. Is there a mechanism for keeping volunteer and staff leadership informed, on an ongoing basis, of association advocacy efforts?

38. Is there a mechanism for keeping the general membership informed, on an ongoing basis, of association advocacy efforts?

39. Are the association’s members and leaders effectively involved in association advocacy efforts?

40. Is the government relations staff organized in a manner to:
   a. Best accomplish the association’s advocacy mission?
   b. Accommodate fluctuations in the advocacy opportunities and workload?
   c. Effectively assess and forecast the political landscape and the resulting or anticipated advocacy opportunities/challenges?

41. Are the government relations and communications/public relations operations of the association closely coordinated, with clear delineation of areas of authority and accountability?

COMPLIANCE ISSUES

Internal Revenue Service

42. Has the association reviewed the Internal Revenue Service rules and regulation regarding lobbying by 501(c)(3) and 501(c)(6) organizations?

43. If you are a 501(c)(6) organization does the organization report the non-deductible portion of membership dues on the renewal form? Is this recalculated annually?

44. If you are a 501(c)(3) organization has the organization made the 501(h) election?

Congressional Lobbying Rules

45. Has the association registered with the House and Senate in compliance with the Lobbying Disclosure Act of 1995? Is everyone who needs to be registered under the LDA actually registered?
46. Does the association file semi-annual reports required under the LDA?

State and Local Lobbying Rules
47. If your association is lobbying at the state or local level are state and local laws regarding lobbying reviewed to ensure compliance? Has the association registered if necessary?

Lobbying Ethics
48. Does the association require its lobbyists to adhere to either the ASAE Lobbying Code of Ethics or the American League of Lobbyists Code of Ethics?

49. Does the association review with its employees the Congressional Ethics rules regarding gifts and travel?

50. If lobbying at the state or local level does the association review state and local laws regarding gifts and travel?

**Volunteer Leadership – Evaluation Tool**

*Use this simple survey tool to ask key association leaders and staff about their impressions of the association’s government relations program.*

1. Is the mission of the association’s government relations program sufficiently clear and focused?

2. Does the association have the necessary and optimum mix/balance of internal and external resources to support the government relations mission?
   a. Budget
   b. External Consultants/Lobbyists
   c. Information resources
   d. Outsourced Functions

3. How should the association’s government relations staff be organized to best accomplish the public policy mission?

4. How should the association’s government relations staff be organized to accommodate fluctuations in advocacy opportunities/workload?

5. How should the association’s government relations staff be organized to effectively assess and forecast the political landscape and the resulting or anticipated opportunities/challenges?

6. What is the most effective balance (now and in the foreseeable future) of the association’s advocacy activities in the federal and state arenas?
7. How should the association measure the effectiveness of our government relations work?
8. Are the association’s members and leaders effectively involved in the association’s public policy activities?
9. How does consumer advocacy tie into the association’s public policy mission?
10. How does the association best align members’ desired outcomes with the feasibility/possibility of success in any given area?
11. What is the most effective (and reasonable) balance of staff effort relative to keeping members involved and informed and advocating for the professions and their issues?
12. How can we best communicate with the association’s members regarding public policy efforts/goals/outcomes on their behalf?
13. What balance of public policy activity with association/national office activities and responsibilities is appropriate for the government relations staff?

Possible Groups to Interview within your Association

Executive Committee
Association members, Committee volunteers, Board members
External contacts
Association staff

Answer Key
Your Guide to additional information on each question

Direct Lobbying


9. Monitoring Systems

Grassroots


17. See “Maintaining the 20/80 in Grassroots Advocacy,” Amy Showalter, ASAE GR Newsletter, April 2002.


**Political Action Committees**

19. For information on the nature and role of PACs and the how to form one, see *Association Law Handbook* by Jerald Jacobs (ASAE 1996); “Getting Started and Staying Legal,” ASAE GR Newsletter, July 1998; “PACs 101: Political Action Committee Basics,” ASAE GR Newsletter, October 1997; and http://www.asaenet.org/asae/cda/index/1.1584,PID14353.00.html


For information on how Federal candidate voting records, assignments, etc, see: http://capwiz.com/asae/home/


22. See 7 Habits of Highly Effective PACs by Gary Andres and “PAC Plays,” Campaign & Elections, April 1999.

23. See http://www.tray.com/fecinfo/


27. See “Commitment: The Key to Successful Fundraising,” ASAE GR Newsletter, September 1995.


30. See [http://www.asaenet.org/asae/cda/index/1,1584,PID14394,00.html](http://www.asaenet.org/asae/cda/index/1,1584,PID14394,00.html)

**Governance / Management**

31. See: [http://www.allianceonline.org/FAQ/strategic_planning/what_are_basic_steps.faq](http://www.allianceonline.org/FAQ/strategic_planning/what_are_basic_steps.faq)


35. See “Benchmark Your Way to Success,” ASAE GR Newsletter, January 1998


40. See “Managing Your Government Relations Staff,” ASAE GR Newsletter, September 1998 and Human Resource Management in Associations edited by Phyllis Roderer and Sandra Sabo (ASAE 1994)

42. If you answered yes, that is great. You might want to review these rules again just to make sure you are well acquainted. There are good summaries in the Association Law Handbook by Jerry Jacobs (ASAE Bookstore).

43. You can find a summary of the lobby tax law on ASAE’s website, and in the October 2000 issue of Dollars and Cents (ASAE Finance and Business Operations Section newsletter). A more detail discussion can be found in the Association Tax Compliance Guide by Jeffrey Tenenbaum, Esq. (ASAE Bookstore).


45. Compliance information on the Lobbying Disclosure Act of 1995 can be found at http://clerk.house.gov/pd/index.html. One note forms must be filed with both the House and the Senate in order to be in compliance.

46. See answer to #45.

47. See www.stateandfed.com for a complete listing of state lobbying laws, or visit a specific state’s website and search for lobbying regulations.


50. See www.stateandfed.com for a complete listing of state legislator gift laws, or visit a specific state’s website and search for legislator gift regulations.