

Plug In and Recharge

NOREEN FENNER wonders:
the 2016 election is over. Now what?

A hhhh ... did you hear it? That collective sigh of relief rising up from Tallahassee and across the Sunshine State. Election season is over. Go ahead ... exhale. *But make it quick!*

The coffers were emptied to help old friends repel challengers, win elections to a new office, or assist new friends join the elite group that is the Florida Legislature. As introductions are made, and legislative issues dominate conversations again, government affairs consultants are already looking to the 2018 and 2020 election cycles, sizing up contests and calculating contribution dollars.

The 2016 election cycle was very expensive thanks, in part, to numerous heated primary and general election battles. We continue to see political contributions rise with each election, and 2018 will be no different, especially with all of Florida's Cabinet officers term-limited.

If not a big fish in the political pond, how does an association or employee political committee (PC) raise funds for the next round of campaigns?

It is never too early to start. At board and member meetings, explore legislative agendas and educate members on the benefits of a successful legislative plan.

Members are excited to be part of the political process, as proven by many well-attended Legislative Days at the Capitol every Legislative Session.

Government affairs consultants play a key role in this education, bringing insight into the legislative and regulatory processes, and how association members are professionally and personally affected.

Once excited, it is time to get members financially engaged to support the mission. Strategies such as including a voluntary PC contribution amount on association dues invoices, setting up recurring credit card contributions (ensure there is a limit set), or even instituting payroll deduction programs work well. Direct mail and email solicitations for PC contributions are effective, but are much more effective if they include discussions about upcoming legislative and regulatory initiatives.

Harnessing online tools is essential in today's digital campaign world, and that includes the power of plastic. When you have a member's attention, seal the deal with a contribution to the PC by utilizing on-the-spot credit card readers or online contributions via your website. The ability to make an online donation is an important source that should not be overlooked.

Holding workshops at annual and quarterly meetings to educate members on the role campaign contributions and PCs play in the legislative process; and hosting fundraisers like silent auctions, golf tournaments, fishing tournaments, and PC-sponsored legislator meet-and-greets at annual and quarterly meetings are event-based ways to get your membership involved. No matter what you do, though, it's important to engage and educate members and connect them with government affairs consultants to help build relationships with legislators and experience the process firsthand.

By utilizing every available opportunity to connect with membership, association and employee PCs can use these two years to significantly increase bank balances in time for the next round of candidate contribution requests.

Noreen Fenner is the president of PAC Financial Management, a Tallahassee-based campaign finance management firm, specializing in establishing, maintaining, and reporting for Florida candidate campaigns and political committees of all sizes. For additional information, visit PACFM.net.