

## State Political Action Committees

Federal law and most state laws prohibit or limit corporations, labor unions, and non-profit associations from engaging in political activity. Therefore, to remain in compliance with these laws, an association organizes a PAC to coordinate its political activities. For example, PACs can endorse candidates for office, contribute to a candidate's campaign, or contribute to a political party. PACs can participate in the political process because they are a legal entity separate from the association.

### Does Your State Association Need a PAC?

While PACs may be useful, your state association should first decide if there is a need for a state podiatric medical PAC. Consider the following suggestions to determine if you need a PAC.

**Engaging in Political Activity:** An increase in political activity may be needed if there are issues that the state legislature is actively considering or is expected to consider in the near future. A PAC can also be effective in countering any lobbying efforts conducted by an opposing association.

A PAC will be helpful if your association wants to become more pro-active. There are many ways to influence public policy; contributing to political campaigns is one tool. Consider your lobbying plan and determine if a PAC can or should play a role. Seek advice from your lobbyist about whether a PAC is necessary.

**Similar Organizations:** Consider the issues in the state legislature. If they are specific to podiatric medicine, a PAC may be necessary. If the issues affect the healthcare community at large, you may want to direct your members to give to a healthcare PAC that is in line with the perspectives of podiatrists in your state.

**Resources Available:** PACs take a significant amount of time and resources to get started and to administer. Before forming a PAC, evaluate the association's staff to determine if they can devote time to forming the PAC, fundraising, and completing disclosure forms. Also, make sure you have the financial resources to operate a PAC. Assess your membership to determine if there are enough podiatrists in your state willing to give to the PAC. If you cannot raise money from your members or if there are not enough members in your state to give, then a PAC will not be beneficial to your association.

### Getting Started

After you determine that a PAC will help your association's lobbying efforts and that you will have the resources available to administer the PAC, one of your first steps should be to hire a competent attorney in your jurisdiction to help form the PAC. State laws can be confusing and cumbersome, and an attorney will guide you through the process. Lawyers will also assist in complying with state and federal tax laws. If mistakes are made in establishing the PAC and associations do not comply with all applicable state laws, you and your association will be liable.

The next step is forming the PAC board. Members of the PAC board should be podiatrists who are already politically astute. An ideal PAC board member would know legislators on a personal level, have run for office before, or have sat on the state board of podiatry. Depending on your state laws and how

active you want your board to be, PAC board members should be comfortable with fundraising for the PAC, mobilizing podiatrists in the community, and engaging in direct lobbying with legislators.

State laws require PACs to have bylaws. Bylaws are the governing documents of the PAC and they define the PAC's purpose, outline procedures for electing officers and their duties, delineate membership requirements, and specify how often the PAC board will meet.

### **Fundraising**

Before the PAC starts fundraising, you will need to set up a separate bank account for PAC funds, budget for the upcoming fiscal year, and develop a fundraising plan.

The PAC fundraising plan consists of your yearly goal and a fundraising calendar. Make your goal realistic by evaluating your members' abilities to give to the PAC and determining how many contributions you want the PAC to make throughout the year. The fundraising calendar will help you plan when and how you will solicit members. You can solicit members throughout the year with a direct mail campaign, set fundraising goals for PAC board members, and solicit members at an annual fundraising dinner. Additionally, offer various donor levels and provide each level with a unique benefit to entice members to give more.

Finally, make sure you know your state laws concerning fundraising or consult with an attorney. Some states are more lenient than others and your association's PAC must be in compliance with state and federal laws.

### **PAC Activities**

PAC activities are conducted throughout the year. For example, staff and PAC board members will decide which campaigns the PAC will contribute to, attend fundraisers, meet with legislators, and engage in grassroots lobbying. Periodically, you will need to file reports with the secretary of state's office that include disclosure of donations received and contributions made. Occasionally, you will need to re-evaluate the PAC to make sure you are meeting your fundraising goals and that the PAC is still a beneficial lobbying tool.