



American Society of Civil Engineers

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December 27, 2006

TO: ASCE Board of Direction

FROM: D. Wayne Klotz, P.E., F.ASCE, Chair, Task Force
on Political Involvement

RE: Task Force on Political Involvement

In mid-2005, ASCE's Board of Direction created a Task Force on Political Involvement to examine the Society's involvement in political activities, both current and future endeavors. During the 18-months the Task Force has evaluated our current activities and also looked at ways to increase the Society's public policy and political involvement.

The Task Force is recommending to the Board the establishment of a parallel 501(c) 6 organization, thus allowing increased lobbying and political activity on behalf of the membership of ASCE. With the current schedule, the Board will take action on the Task Force recommendations in April 2007.

Since July 2006, the efforts of the Task Force have been focused on reaching out to the membership in advance of any decision to provide more information and receive comments and suggestions.

Survey of ASCE Leadership:

In July 2006, the Board approved funding to survey the ASCE leadership regarding their opinions on a PAC and to test some messages regarding a PAC. This was part of the Board's charge to the Task Force to discuss the issue of a 501(c) 6 and a PAC more thoroughly with the membership.

The survey was conducted by the Showalter Group, a Cincinnati based public policy consulting firm. Staff compiled a master list of every ASCE Board Member, Region Governor, Section and Branch Leader, Institute Board Member, and National Committee member. The total de-duplicated list totaled around 1,300, and a representative sample was chosen. The survey was completed by using a combination of phone interviews and an on-line survey. Forty-five members were chosen for the phone interview (23 actually completed the interview). The on-line survey was sent to 516 ASCE leaders with 117 actually completing the survey.

The survey results are attached to this report and will be presented in detail at the January Board of Direction meeting.

Outreach Activities:

The Task Force on Political Involvement wants to hear from ASCE leaders on this important issue. To facilitate a dialogue we will be hosting a series of Town Hall Meetings and webinars in the next 3 months (See schedule below). Participation in these events is free and open to all ASCE members, though advance registration is required.

Website for ASCE members

To better disseminate the information prepared by the Task Force, we created a page on the "members only" section of the website. To access this page on the website, just go to <http://www.asce.org/govrel/politicalinvl.cfm> (NOTE: you will need your ASCE login and password to access this page).

Visits with Sections & Branches

The Task Force is aware of 19 ASCE Sections that have been visited or had discussions about the recommendations of the Task Force. We are continuing to reach out to Sections and Branches in an effort to educate as many ASCE members as possible. Additionally, a break out session was held in Chicago at the Council of Presidents meeting.

Visits with Region Governors

All Regions have been communicated with on a number of occasions. In person visits were done to all Region Governor Meetings with the exception of Region 4 and Region 5. The Region 4&5 Governors will be visited during the Nashville Leadership Conference

Visits with ASCE Committees

The Task Force has visited with the Committee on Younger Members, the Committee on Professional Practice, and the Committee on Government Affairs.

Webinars:

To better educate Section and Branch leaders as well as National Committee members, the Task Force on Political Involvement is scheduled to host three webinars in early 2007. The webinars are scheduled for:

Tuesday, January 10, 2007 – 3:00-4:00 pm ET

Wednesday, January 24, 2007 – 1:00-2:00 pm ET

Thursday, February 1, 2007 – 12:00 – 1:00 pm ET

Town Hall Meetings:

To reach out to Section and Branch leadership, the focus of the Town Hall meetings was changed to a discussion of ASCE's current efforts to increase involvement in public policy and politics. Everyone attending the Leadership Conference has been invited as well as the local section members.

The goal of these meetings is member education and to provide a forum so members can ask questions, raise concerns and offer suggestions.

Proposed Management & Contribution Criteria for PAC

The PAC would operate in a manner that is approved, first by the ASCE Board of Direction. First and foremost, a PAC would exist through the voluntary participation of individual ASCE members. ASCE's proposed 501(c) 6 would pay the administrative costs associated with the day-to-day operations of the PAC, ensuring that every dollar collected from individual ASCE members would go to candidates who support ASCE's issues. The PAC would be separate from both the 501(c) 6 and 501(c) 3 organizations.

Most importantly, an ASCE PAC would be run in a bipartisan manner with ASCE supporting those candidates that support ASCE issues. However, the question of which candidates would get contributions is an important consideration. The Task Force has crafted the following criteria that would be the basis for discussion if a PAC were approved:

The PAC would weigh a variety of criteria in determining which candidates for federal office should receive PAC disbursements. It is important to note that in general contributions would be made on the basis of past performance, not on the hope of future actions. Only individuals seeking election or re-election to the U.S. Senate or U.S. House of Representatives would be eligible for support. The PAC generally would not support primary election candidates. To the best of its ability, ASCE PAC will strive to support candidates on a bipartisan basis.

The following are proposed criteria that could apply to all candidates under consideration for support from the PAC:

- Favorable position on issues affecting the civil engineering profession
- Past assistance to ASCE on issues affecting the civil engineering profession
- Being a member of the engineering profession (civil, mechanical, electrical, etc.)
- Assignment to Committees relevant to civil engineering issues
- Seats in senior positions on these key Committees
- Election or appointment to leadership position
- Recommendations from PAC contributors

- Candidates for open seats must conduct interview with ASCE PAC board members.
- Position in an open-seat race (where no incumbent is running for re-election)
- Candidate must meet with local ASCE members and their employees, if applicable, before receiving PAC check.

To prioritize PAC giving, it may be appropriate to “weight” certain criteria. For example, if a legislator who has voted in favor of a high priority issue, but is in a race that is not close, he is not an engineer, and he refuses to meet with the local ASCE members, what do we do? If we weight certain criteria, it will give us some objectivity relative to contributions. We simply need to make sure that we have concrete, objective criteria.

AMERICAN SOCIETY OF CIVIL ENGINEERS

Public Policy Activities / PAC Attitudes Survey

Executive Summary

The goal of this project is to determine ASCE members' attitudes toward public policy activities, specifically a Political Action Committee (PAC). To that end, we engaged in two data collection methods.

An email survey was sent to 516 ASCE members, representing a variety of disciplines and geographies. We also conducted personal phone interviews with 23 members – 45 ASCE members were contacted for the phone interview.

Fifty-one percent of the phone interview candidates participated, and 22.8% (117) responded to the email survey.

Summary of Findings

The ASCE membership is very satisfied with the Society's existing public policy activities. The Key Contact program and the Report Card were overwhelmingly named as the most beneficial public policy activities.

When asked if they think that there are other public policy activities ASCE should support, 57% responded in the affirmative. These responses were quite varied, with 80% citing "other", 17% supporting a PAC, 10% requesting more state lobbying activity, and 10% wanted more direct lobbying activity.

PAC Attitudes

A majority of respondents, 66%, have financially contributed to a candidate. However, only 34% have contributed to a PAC.

When asked how members would talk about a Political Action Committee, 17% said they would not talk to a member about a PAC, due to philosophical opposition to PAC's. Of those who would talk to a member about a PAC (58%), most mentioned the advantage in the ASCE having a "bigger voice" in the legislative process. This was followed by what we term the "personal responsibility" frame, whereby members believe that they have a responsibility to themselves and to their profession to speak out on behalf of the civil engineering profession.

Message Frames

We asked the respondents to rate several PAC messages. The top two messages and the lowest one are explained in more detail in the following report. The most popular frame received a 4.19 average ranking on a 1 – 7 scale (1 = not convincing, 7 = very convincing). The next most convincing frame had a rating of 4.06 and at least convincing frame had a 3.52 ranking.

Inclination to Contribute to a PAC

It is interesting to note that, again, the membership is almost evenly divided on this question. We asked members: “On a scale of 1 to 7 (1 = no, 7 = very likely) how likely are you to contribute to an ASCE PAC?”

Forty-two percent responded in the 1 – 3 range, and 41% in the 5 – 7 range. Thus, the PAC preference is evenly divided, with only 17% in the “persuadable” category of a “4.” If we combine the 5-7 rankings with the “4” ranking, we have 57% who have reasonably positive PAC attitudes in that they are convinced to give to the PAC, and if not convinced, they can be persuaded to give.

Recommendations

More detailed findings and my recommendations are contained in the following pages of this report.

Survey Questions w/Results

1. What current ASCE public policy activities (direct lobbying, the Report Card, Key Contact Program/grassroots advocacy) are the most beneficial to you?

- 60% Key Contact/Grassroots
- 54% Report Card
- 22% Direct Lobby
- 23% Other

The responses equal more than 100% because many members mentioned more than one activity as being equally important.

Those who responded that “Key Contact/Grassroots” is most beneficial like having “access” to their legislators, and receiving issue information that they otherwise would not know of. “Exclusivity” (of information, access, etc.) is considered to be a highly persuasive benefit that helps organizations gain member allegiance. Keep providing exclusive information and opportunities to your Key Contacts; always consider your communications in light of the “exclusivity” prism.

Because we should build from our strengths, our challenge will be to get more Society members enrolled as Key Contacts.

The “Report Card” respondents indicated that the card gives them “credibility” with elected officials and the public.

Several respondents indicated that “the government affairs staff does a great job, keep doing what you are doing.”

There was a significant amount of “other” responses (below), with no pervasive direction.

| Other (explain):* | <u>Totals</u> |
|------------------------------------|---------------|
| • Not sure/none | 5 |
| • Those related to the NEHRP | 3 |
| • This week in Washington | 2 |
| • Policy articles in CE magazine | 2 |
| • Development of policy statements | 4 |
| • Legislative Fly-in | 3 |
| • Support from National staff on | |
| • state/local advocacy efforts | 2 |

* (Only those with 2 responses or more are listed)

2. Are there additional public policy activities that you believe the ASCE should support?

- 56% Yes
- 43% No

What additional public policy activities should the ASCE support? **

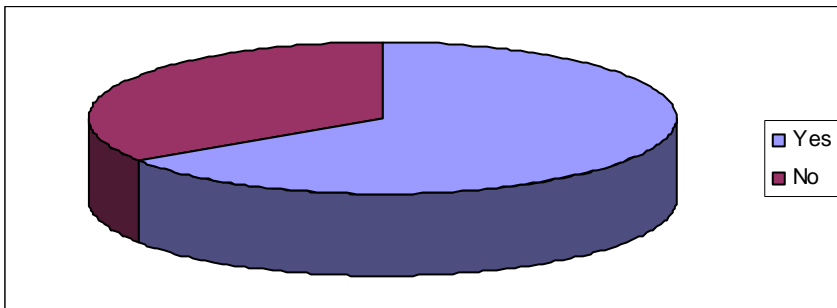
- AASHTO and other organizations re: funding for transportation infrastructure 2
- ASCE activities that support communication of key issues, projects, events and activities 2
- Continue organizing meetings with national govt (and need info/assistance on communications with same – both oral & written) 2
- Math, Science, Engineering Education K-12 2
- Engineering candidates with broad public appeal 3
- Infrastructure funding 3
- Lobbying - state level and state government relations 7
- Increase public awareness of engineering, incl. salaries, education 4
- Infrastructure assessment/needs/communication 4
- Don't know/Not sure 5
- Lobbying - additional direct 7
- Political Action Committee (PAC) 15

** (Only those with 2 responses or more are listed)

Of the variety of suggested activities, a PAC was rated highest with 21%. Ten percent of the respondents wanted more direct lobbying and state lobbying.

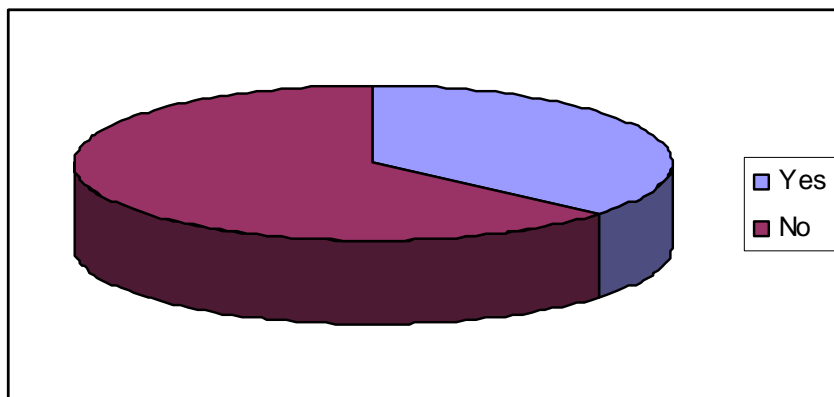
3. Have you ever financially contributed to political candidate?

- 66% Yes
- 34% No



4. Have you ever contributed to a PAC?

- 63% No
- 36% Yes



Here we see a distinction: a clear majority of respondents are familiar with political giving, and are obviously comfortable contributing to individual candidates. However, they give less to PAC's. This can be due to lack of opportunity, or, of course, philosophical opposition to PAC's. It appears that they trust their own personal judgment relative to political contribution, but not that of a collective PAC.

Of note, only two of the respondents indicated that they gave to a PAC for "access" to legislators.

Regardless, the key finding here is that they are not averse to political giving, it is simply the giving mechanism that produces the conflict. When they see the value in providing a contribution, they do so. The top three reasons for personal contributions were:

- Because I agreed with their philosophy
- Thought they would do a good job
- Because I knew them personally

To get members more comfortable with political giving, we need to clearly enumerate the candidates' beliefs and philosophy, and "humanize" legislators by providing more exclusive information about them than just their voting record. This would of course be accomplished through the PAC criteria, but also through PAC member communications/Key Contact communications, staff presentations, etc. The goal is to have your members feel as if they know the candidate beyond legislative issues.

Message Frames / Message Testing for PAC Giving

5. Imagine that you are having a conversation with a member and you want them to contribute to the PAC. What would you say?

Fifty-eight percent (58%) would talk to a member about the PAC, but the rationale was varied with no particular theme other than the topics below.

- 17% I would not talk to a member, because I do not support an ASCE PAC
- 8% It would give us a bigger voice with policy makers
- 6% It is our personal responsibility
- 4% I'd demonstrate results
- 4% It gives us more access to legislators
- 3% I would talk about the criteria used to make contributions

Thus, members who support the PAC would not be afraid to recruit others to do so. This is an important finding, because members who receive negative PAC information are more able to resist that message frame when they receive a counter frame from someone they trust.

6. How inclined are you to contribute to the ASCE's PAC?

| | |
|----------------|-------------------|
| 1 = not at all | 7 = very inclined |
| 1-3 | 42% |
| 4 | 16% |
| 5-7 | 41% |

Response average: 3.74

Again, we see polarization with very few “persuadable” members at present. This does not mean that the members who rated their answer between 1-4 are not persuadable, rather, it is indicative of the need for certain conditions to be present for them to be persuaded to support a PAC.

7. The following comments are frequently made when commenting on PAC's. How convincing do you find each comment? (Top two frames and least-preferred frame are outlined in this report)

Highest – Rated Frames

#1

“It takes money to win our public policy campaigns. The ASCE's tax status limits the amount of money we can spend on direct lobbying and other political and public policy related activities. If we add a 501 (c) (6) organization we will be able to spend more money on direct lobbying grassroots and political activities.”

Please rate from 1-7 1=not convincing 7=very convincing

Response average: 4.19

A 4.19 is not a convincing ranking for the highest frame. I would have hoped that the most favorable frame would be in the 5-7 range. Of note, those who rated this frame highly used words like “true” “correct” “logical” and “objective” to support their ranking.

#2

There are basic best practices to any government relations program. Direct lobbying, grassroots advocacy and PAC's are widely considered to be the cornerstones of an effective government relations effort. It's not consistent for us to encourage best practices in our profession and then hamper the effectiveness of our government relations program by withholding the necessary tools for success.”

Please rate from 1-7 1=not convincing 7=very convincing

Response average 4.09

This was rated very close to the highest ranked frame, so I would view each equally in terms of effectiveness. Many who rated this in the 1-3 range questioned who determines government relations best practices, so there is an education component to this frame that needs to be embellished before it can work.

#3

”To keep good employees we need to reward them by providing salary increases and professional development opportunities. PAC contributions work in a similar way by helping our champions stay in office. We have an obligation to help keep legislators friendly to civil engineering in office.”

Please rate from 1-7 1=not convincing 7=very convincing

Response average 3.78

Even though this frame is ranked third, it just doesn't score well enough to be used effectively.

Least-Popular Frame

“Virtually any organization that has to deal with elected officials has a PAC. Without the voice that a PAC brings it is almost guaranteed that our elected officials will make decisions that will compromise what we stand for. Civil engineering might as well not exist if it continues to deny itself a strong respected voice in politics. If PAC's are good enough for doctors, lawyers, architects, organized labor and school teachers it is certainly good enough for us.”

Please rate from 1-7 1=not convincing 7=very convincing

Response average 3.52

This was ranked lowest because members feel that they are not similar to doctors, lawyers, architects and teachers. Several indicated that "ASCE is a learned society, and thus has no need for a PAC." There is a fundamental conflict with how they view the Society and these other organizations. Several stated that if they knew of similar engineering organizations that have PAC's, they would be more influenced to support a PAC.

Recommendations

The Katrina Context

Every influence attempt must be considered in light of context – the environment surrounding the influence prospect. For our purposes, context represents your members' current organizational, political, legislative and professional conditions.

An often-heard refrain via phone and email from those opposing the PAC was that the PAC will reduce ASCE's credibility. When asked to elaborate, members said that because they are called upon to provide testimony and give expert advice, a PAC would sully that reputation for expertise and unbiased advice. The civil engineering profession's contribution to the post-Katrina investigations, etc. was cited over and over as the rationale. It is almost an article of faith that a PAC instantly and irrevocably removes ASCE credibility. This context makes the influence challenge a bit more difficult, but not insurmountable.

ASCE members are very concerned about what is "true" and "correct", but yet will assert, without any proof whatsoever, that a PAC equals a negative impact on the civil engineering profession. None provided any proof of their assertion. Therefore, we should verify whether the ASCE's credibility is indeed hampered by a PAC.

Dr. Rhodes and I recommend that we write two informational statements about the ASCE. One paragraph will include a sentence that the ASCE is discussing whether to establish a PAC, and another will state that the Society does not have a PAC. This should be distributed to 20 to 30 individuals who deal with the ASCE on a regular basis, such as regulators, certain legislators, government officials, etc. We can also distribute it to target audiences via the web. We can then determine with certainty if a PAC does indeed reduce the Society's credibility.

The Success Context

Another contextual reason that a PAC is problematic for half of the survey respondents is due to your grassroots and Report Card success. Many claim that the "Grassroots and Report Card work very well, so why have a PAC?"

To counter this, it is necessary to demonstrate what is lost, what results the Society is prevented from achieving, and what is not possible because ASCE does not have a PAC. This can be a painful exercise, because we have a proclivity to demonstrate our successes, which is natural and appropriate. However, we are not providing adequate influence triggers for our prospects if we omit this information.

We also need to reveal the distinctions between the Key Contact program/grassroots efforts and a PAC. Do your members know what the PAC can achieve that the grassroots cannot? Do they know how the current tax status really limits you in terms of lobbying and issue promotion? Again, we have to demonstrate what is *not* occurring.

Within this context, I am also concerned that there appears to be no image of an opponent or hostile outsider who can hurt the ASCE members. For example, the

Chamber has the trial lawyers, the environmentalists have the polluters, etc. Your success has prevented the image of the hostile outsider from being more fully established. The opposing camp is indistinct, and thus, there is no sense of urgency to add tactics to your public policy efforts via a PAC.

The Scandal Context

Only one respondent mentioned the current lobbying scandal as a rationale for not supporting a PAC, but the pervading cynicism among the non-supporters is bolstered by recent events. It's best to acknowledge it, and cite (see PAC Transparency below) clear PAC contribution criteria and the distinctions between that behavior and the behavior of law-breakers.

I also believe that the members are hostile to the PAC on an almost molecular level because of the very nature of their jobs. They may have experienced negative interactions with local politicians and thus assume all political involvement breeds corruption. Personal experience does drive values, values drive attitudes, and attitudes drive behavior. Therefore, their professional experience can be influencing their PAC attitudes. One respondent said: "There is a political edge to everything we do; this is why we are so cynical about it."

PAC Transparency

Although this is commonly done after a PAC has been established, I highly recommend that you develop a list of candidate contribution criteria that is available to all members, and outline the PAC contribution decision making process, complete with PAC Board structure, etc. Many respondents stated that knowing the precise contribution criteria would be helpful in garnering their PAC support. While this is traditionally done after PAC has been established, it shows a good faith effort on your part to have a transparent, open process.

PAC Supporters

As with any influence campaign, the negative voices are going to be more vociferous and thus can appear to be representative of the majority. In fact, people naturally remember negative messages more than positive ones. We need to inoculate and equip the PAC supporters among your membership. Your champions really need to be bolstered with some positive talking points so that they can defend the PAC.

Because joining a PAC is a personal decision absent of "expert" advice, people look to similar others to help make their decision on whether to join a PAC. I recommend that if you proceed with a PAC, that you heavily utilize your PAC champions to serve as peer recruiters. It appears that your members are almost suspect of outside advice relative to PAC involvement. I recommend a cover memo or e-mail that is sent in advance of a PAC recruitment message that includes a quote from a well-liked, respected ASCE member. The message should be targeted by geographically, and the testimonial should come from a local ASCE member.