



Greetings from the PIN Chair, Greg Knopp!

March Madness, or The Importance of Front- Loading Your Political Program



"Front-loading" is defined as "to arrange or plan (a schedule, project, or process, for example) so that a large portion of activity occurs in an early period." But putting in much of the work in the first part of a project is just one of the keys; you also have to know what to focus on. As Abraham Lincoln once said, "Give me six hours to chop down a tree and I will spend the first four sharpening the ax."

If you haven't already, perhaps now is a good time to gauge the progress of your organization's political programs. Do you have a plan and are you on target this month to meet your PAC's fundraising and/or grassroots metrics for the year? What research have you done to better assess last year's failures and successes? Have you sharpened the ax before you begin to try and chop down the tree?

We encourage you to take stock of your programs as we near the end of the first quarter to make sure your focus is as much on **investigating, analyzing and preparing** as it is on "doing." When's the last time you did a member survey? Have you done any benchmarking against similar organizations with similar programs? [See more information below on the Council's current benchmarking projects.] Have you identified the 20 percent in your association or company that will accomplish 80 percent of the work needed to meet goals? How do you combine and leverage all of this data to grow your program?

Preparation is not glamorous. In fact, preparation is often dull and monotonous. But preparation is ultimately what makes any program or campaign successful. To quote Robert Schuller, "Spectacular achievement is always preceded by unspectacular preparation."

If you need any ideas or assistance with your own preparation, don't hesitate to [contact Hannah](#) and the excellent staff at the Public Affairs Council. They have access to hundreds of best practices, and just as impressively, access to hundreds of "best practicers": your peers and colleagues in the industry who are willing to share their own secrets of successful preparation.

To that end, I hope you won't hesitate to share with us your own secrets and success stories. We're always looking for your feedback, ideas and

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March 24 | Webinar
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Write to Change the World: How to Manage Your Political Message*+

suggestion for upcoming PIN sessions and articles. So remember, the work and research you do now will dramatically impact your chances for success at the end of the campaign. And that includes your NCAA brackets; good luck!

— **Gregory Knopp**, CAE
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Benchmark Your PAC and Grassroots Activities

As Greg mentioned above, benchmarking your program against those of your peers can help you define the activities to focus on in the year ahead. To that end, the Council is pleased to share several surveys currently open to the political involvement community:

Salary Surveys

Each spring, the Council collects information on PAC and grassroots professionals' salaries to help those in the community benchmark their staffing against that of other organizations. The results will be shared in a complimentary report later this spring. The surveys will take only a few minutes to complete and they should be filled out only by those whose PAC- or grassroots-related responsibilities account for at least 50 percent of their job.

[Grassroots Salary Survey](#)
[PAC Salary Survey](#)

PAC Match Survey

Finally, for those PACs offering charitable match, this survey delves into the detailed administration and execution of a matching program. This survey will take less than five minutes to complete and should be completed only by those with an existing PAC match program. The results will be shared with the PAC community in a complimentary report this spring.

[PAC Match Survey](#)

Please note that in no way will your name or organization be tied to your responses for any of the above surveys.

Making Your Messages Motivate Your Audience

At the recent PAC Conference, Mandy O'Neill, chief strategist at ConnectedNonprofit, Inc., shared her **Genius Copywriting Tips**. Since every political involvement professional is tasked with writing messages, seeking buy-in and urging action, here are some of Mandy's top tips to guide you in crafting your message:

1) **People like themselves.**

Immerse yourself in people's minds by trying to think like they think and

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*Eligible for credit towards the [Certificate in PAC & Grassroots Management](#)

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write like they would write. Talk to your audience. Note the language they use and try to replicate it. Don't write for what you want them to feel, but for what they actually feel. If there are concerns, questions, etc., then address them in your content. While short-term gains can be seen by "threat" messaging, it rarely results in long-term activity. People are naturally attracted by the positive framing of an issue.

2) Stir your readers' emotions.

Your stakeholders will be moved to act by emotions, not logic. They will be more attracted by benefits (e.g., being seen as a leader in your company) than features (e.g., networking opportunities). Translate this into your headlines by conveying the benefit of action — for example, "You are not alone." What is especially impactful in great headlines? Using questions and numbers.

3) Urgency translates to action.

Tools like countdown clocks and the use of language such as "time is running out" or "last chance" all help motivate advocates and donors to act. In a deadline-driven society where your target audience is overwhelmed by the many messages they receive, helping yours stand out by expressing the urgent nature of your request can stimulate a stronger response.

4) Make it easy.

If there is language not critical to your core message, cut it. The goal is to make your messaging (and that includes your website) clean and easy to navigate. The more white space and fewer words you use, the easier it will be for your audience to find the key takeaway. Part of that also means efficiently directing your reader to where they need to go next. Use icons and action words (e.g., "check it out," "make your friends jealous," "join now") to direct readers to your call-to-action.

5) Ditch the complex copy.

In general, you want to write to about an eighth-grade reading level. [A Princeton study](#) found that using unnecessarily fancy words doesn't help your cause and actually hurts it. Why? It decreases conversion rates and reduces your credibility. Use smaller, simpler words to express your goals.

So the next time you go to write a PAC letter or grassroots action alert, remember to keep it simple, short and put yourself in the place of your reader. Happy writing!

2015 National Grassroots and PAC Conferences: Top Twitter Insights and Takeaways

Participants at February's National Grassroots Conference in Key West used the [#GRC15](#) Twitter hashtag to interact, share ideas and pass on tips they learned in each conference session. Here are a few of our favorite takeaway tweets from the conference:

The Changing Face of Advocacy

- Give a "Myth/Fact" report to people unfamiliar with an issue & 40% will still believe the myth. — Sarah Neale Rand

Certificate Programs

[Certificate in PAC and Grassroots Management](#)

[Certificate in Public Affairs Management](#)

Contact Us

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(@SarahNRand)

- Confirmation Bias = If you have considered point of view and are shown evidence to contrary, you become more entrenched in original POV. — Allyson Frazier (@YoureTheCure)
- How do you change people's minds? Narrative Transport. — Importance of #storytelling via @CGraves. — Shana Glickfield (@dconcierge)
- Humans are wired for empathy. Drive empathy through narrative. Show don't tell. — Kim Kaylor (@KaylorK)

Communication Platforms: What Works When?

Wayne Stanley (@waynestanley), manager, public affairs at the American Land Title Association, and **Meg McGinty**, government relations manager at H & R Block, provided helpful tips for determining which communication platforms are most effective for reaching an organization's intended audience and when to use them. Some key tips included:

- Don't just run toward shiny new tool. Always something new. But is it relevant? Is your audience there? — Tara Young (@taryou)
- .@Waynestanley says you have to keep finding ways to still reach non-connected "paper-people." Good point! — Tony Kudner (@GrassrootsTony)
- "50% of the world's population is under 30. Automation and personalization will be key." — @waynestanley. — Beekeeper Group (@BeekeeperGroup)

Running an Effective Fly-In

Participants heard from **Heidi Ecker**, director, government affairs and grassroots programs at the National Association of Chain Drug Stores, and were provided time-tested components of an effective fly-in as well as new ideas to keep their lobby days fresh and interesting. Top tips shared included:

- Heidi Ecker of NACDS hosts concurrent Virtual Hill Day. Draws attention to Hill Day & makes others want to attend next year. — David Lusk (@LuskyNDC)
- Interesting idea: Using photo booth/video booth at your fly-in to get content. — Federica Rabiolo (@Feddster)
- Fly-in tip from Heidi Ecker: Have a debriefing center on the Hill for advocates to refuel, regroup and share feedback. — Hannah Wesolowski (@HannahWes)

Branding That Works

In a presentation by **Joey Tackett**, chief creative officer at SevenTwenty Strategies, and **Kate Kunitz** (@kate_kunitz), specialist, government affairs at Target, conference participants heard how they can leverage their organization's existing brand and value propositions to advance their grassroots programs. Examples of these insights included:

- Digging into branding that works. Communicating isn't enough — brand must inspire. Don't be a "messageless marketer." — Kim Kaylor (@KaylorK)
- Trends change but your attributes remain the same so stay fresh with your brand, just don't mess w/ who you are. — Mike J. Cowden (@Mike_Cowden)
- Being labeled irrelevant is one of the hardest brand perceptions to change. (Think MySpace.) — Ben Tomchik (@bentomchik)

National PAC Conference

In late February, PAC practitioners from around the country joined the Council in Orlando for the National PAC Conference. Participants actively shared their favorite strategies and ideas from speakers and each other via Twitter's [#PAC15](#) hashtag. Here are some key topics discussed and insights gathered:

Chairman's Outlook: An Inside Look at the FEC

Ann Ravel (@AnnMRavel), chair of the Federal Election Commission, spoke with conference participants and answered their questions about recent changes in campaign finance rules, what is going on at the FEC and what changes the PAC world can expect in the future. Some top tips included:

- Get to know your FEC analyst says @AnnMRavel. — Jeni Reynolds (@jenlea1)
- Good news: FEC chair @AnnMRavel says revamped FEC site could come as soon as June. — Nathan Gonzales (@nathanlgonzales)
- FEC Chair Ann Ravel: Technology (incl. microtargeting) is transforming civic engagement & campaign finance. — Public Affairs Council (@PACouncil)

Anatomy of a Fundraising Event

Event expert **David Adler** (@davidadler), CEO and founder of BizBash Media, shared strategies for running a compelling and successful fundraising event, including how to create buzz for the event, make it memorable and show a strong ROI. Key takeaways included:

- We are curators of content, community and collaboration in planning events. — Sarah McDonald (@sarahsmcdonald)
- At events, “Conversation plus exploration equals creative problem-solving,” says @davidadler. “Forget content — contact is king!” — Public Affairs Council (@PACouncil)
- “Sell and tell” is gone; what works is “ask and engage.” Find influencers who will support your cause/promote your event. — Sarah McDonald (@sarahsmcdonald)

Communicating Across Generations

Participants heard from **Dennis McCarthy**, strategic lead of *The Next Generation of American Giving: The Habits of Generation Y, X, Baby Boomers and Matures* and director of sales at Blackbaud. He shared insights on what motivates different generations to give and how PAC practitioners can attract engage new eligibles without disenfranchising longtime PAC donors, including:

- Gen Y assumes everything is shared, no expectation of privacy. Share both the positive and negative. #generationaldifferences — Jewelyn Cosgrove (@JewelynCosgrove)
- As age increases, so does importance of time. Older donors find it harder to give time, more likely to give more money instead. — Matthew Dybwad (@mdybwad)
- Giving is related to disposable income and connection to faith and house of worship. — Elizabeth Z Bartz (@ElizabethBartz)

See all the great advice shared on Twitter and follow the Council at [@PACouncil](#) to stay on top of public affairs best practices.

Resources to Boost Your Political Involvement Program

Stories vs. Data: Defining Your Grassroots Strategy

Rikki Amos, the Council's director of U.S. public affairs practice, shares insight in [this video](#) about how and when to use personal stories or hard data to boost your grassroots outreach efforts.

Performing an Annual Grassroots Review

When was the last time you sat down and scrutinized all elements of your grassroots strategy? In [this Council resource](#), we provide a list of the questions you should ask your key stakeholders, as well as grassroots program elements that you should review on a regular basis. As you map out your yearlong strategy, doing an operational audit is key to long-term success.

How are you incentivizing long-term PAC involvement?

There are many elements of your program to evaluate when you are looking to make the case for why being involved with the PAC matters. In [this video and accompanying tip sheet](#), Hannah Wesolowski, the Council's senior manager, political involvement practice, goes over the key things to look at and plan for to ensure long-term engagement.

Empowering Politically Involved Leaders

As you look to grow in your career, how can you stand out — both to your current organization and future ones? Here are some tips from the recent PAC and Grassroots Conferences to help you get noticed.

1) Diversify your resume.

As you seek new opportunities, think about how you can change things up. Always worked for corporations? Try a trade association. The more diversity of experience you can show, the more marketable you will be. Also look for things that differentiate you from the crowd, whether that is relevant volunteer experience, an advanced degree, professional certificates, etc. Learn more about the Council's [Certificate in PAC & Grassroots Management](#) and [Certificate in Public Affairs Management](#) to help you in this area.

2) Get everything you can out of your job experience.

A great way to demonstrate your investment in your organization is to take on new challenges. This has the added benefit of giving you new skill sets and broadening your expertise. Cross-functional teams or working groups also provide ways to both help out on strategic priorities and meet colleagues from other functions. Take advantage of every opportunity in your current organization. They may help you identify a new passion, cultivate mentors or friends and give you more experience to list on your resume should the time come to move on.

3) Be a better listener.

Listening to your colleagues' needs — and offering support — engenders trust and a collaborative environment. In citing *The Cross-Cultural Study of Leadership in Public Relations and Communication Management* (sponsored by the Plank Center for Leadership in Public Relations), Grassroots Conference speaker Lisa Ryan of Heyman Associates says soft skills like “better listening, cultural sensitivity, emotional intelligence, conflict resolution capabilities, and change management skills” are the signs of a successful future leader.

4) Find and engage a mentor.

You may have one mentor over your career (or many), but find someone to help guide you. Mentors are critical to helping you navigate your career development path by sharing hard-learned advice and helping you find your own way. Don't have one already? Sign up for the Council's [mentoring program](#).

5) Be your own champion.

When negotiating a salary or asking for a raise, don't assume you'll get what you want because you deserve it. Make the case for what the organization loses if they don't have you. Like anything else that requires resources, make the business case for what you are asking for to demonstrate the value of meeting your request. Also, if you can, use benchmarking information on salaries, like the Council's [PAC Salary Survey](#) and [Grassroots Salary Survey](#), which, when filled out, provide you and your peers with vital information to help keep you moving forward.

In the News: Political Involvement News You Should Know

FEC announces inflation-adjusted 2016 contribution limits: Last month, the FEC announced a series of contribution limit increases for the 2015-2016 election cycle as part of its routine two-year cycle adjustments for inflation. The Council shared [the new limits](#), reminding the community that they do not impact political action committee limits, which are not indexed for inflation.

New database tracks the activities of members of Congress, makes many future interns' lives easier: Following a trend in analytics applied to Hill activity, two Harvard undergraduates recently [launched Quorum Analytics](#), which provides information about the relationships between members of Congress and their effectiveness. According to *The Washington Post*, the database's algorithms examine legislative data, tweets and census-level data to create snapshots of legislators and help interest groups, lobbyists and others know where valuable relationships exist.

Super PACs take center stage for presidential hopefuls: With the 2016 primary season less than a year away, presidential hopefuls are [relying heavily on super PACs to make their dreams come true](#). *The Washington Post* reports that many potential candidates are embracing super PACs and testing the limits of campaign finance law. This includes launching super PACs before they launch their campaigns, which allows them to raise money before the coordination rules (which kick in once they officially announce) hinder their involvement with the committees. The *Harvard Law Review* also addressed this issue recently with an article on [candidate assistance with super PAC fundraising](#).

Coalition presses President Obama to issue executive order requiring more political disclosure: According to *The Hill*, a group of more than 50 public interest groups, unions and corporations has asked the president to [issue an executive order](#) requiring companies that contract with the federal government to disclose contributions to dark money groups.

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