**PAC 101: The ins and outs of political action committees**

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Recently I was asked to write about the political action committee: what it is; why is it important; why should members donate; how is the money used/ spent; and how does supporting PAC in turn help support our profession? In order to cover the information I thought it best to break it into a series of articles instead of laying all the information out at once (and hopefully avoid the deer in headlights or glazed over expression that occurs when too much information is presented at once.) I hope you find this series helpful and informative.

**Part 1: Definition and Classifications**

Definition: A committee formed by business, labor or other special-interest groups to raise money and make contributions to the campaigns of political candidates whom they support

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In the beginning, well pre- World War II, political action committees did not exist. PACs weren’t needed until the passage of the Smith Connally Act of 1943; which declared labor unions could no longer contribute funds to federal candidates.² In 1944 President Franklin Roosevelt (FDR) was up for re-election and the labor unions wanted to help support his campaign. In order to work around the Smith Connally Act the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) urged their individual members to voluntarily contribute money directly to the campaign and the first political action committees were born. Since then political actions committees have expanded into four different types: separate segregated funds; nonconnected or ideological; leadership and super.

Separate Segregated Fund (SSF): the most common type PAC, which collects contributions from a limited group of individuals (corporation, labor organization, or incorporated membership organizations-i.e. ASCLS) and uses these funds to make contributions to candidates whom support their issues. These PACs may receive financial support from their “connected organization”. In other words the Federal Election Commission limits solicitations to ***members only***.³ʾ4

Nonconnected political committees (nonconnected PACs): are financially independent and are not subject to solicitation restrictions and can ask for contributions from anyone. Nonconnected PACs are typically focused on a single issue or ideology (NRA, World Wildlife Fund, etc.)

Leadership PAC: formed by politicians to help fund campaigns of their fellow politicians. These PACs are formed in an effort to prove their loyalty to their party and/or to further their goal of being elected to a higher office.

Super PACs: Independent expenditure-only committees. Super PAC were created in 2010 after a decision by the Supreme Court in the trial of *SpeechNow.org v. Federal Election Commission*. The ruling allows these groups to raise money without any limits from individuals, organizations, and large donors such as corporations or labor unions. Super PACs are also not limited in the amount they can spend advocating for or against a candidate or issue; however they cannot directly work with a specific campaign or candidate. (Many critics have expressed concern that Super PACs may in fact “buy” elections; however groups have been created to monitor the activities between donors, candidates, lobbyists and campaign financing. These groups have been appropriately named ‘Watchdog’ groups.)

Works cited:

1. The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition copyright ©2000 by Houghton Mifflin Company, Updated in 2009. Published by Houghton Mifflin Company

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4. SSFs and Nonconnected PACs. Federal Election Commission. [www.fec.gov](http://www.fec.gov)