



California Voter Guide

Communicating with
California's Voters since 1986

Political Fundraising 101

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Sacramento, CA – Jesse Unruh (1922–1987), speaker of the California Assembly for eight years said, “money is the mother’s milk of politics.” This statement was made almost 5 decades ago and it still holds true today!

Fundraising, fundraising, fundraising... In this day and age of politics, a candidate’s message will not reach the electorate without spending significant sums of money on paid advertising and other forms of voter outreach.

Today fundraising efforts often start even before a candidate has ‘officially’ declared his or her intent to run for office. And, the fundraising often continues just a few days after a candidate is sworn into office. A candidate’s ability to fundraise is often used as a measuring stick for success – it can determine the longevity and viability of your candidacy.

For the first time candidate, fundraising starts with very simple fundamentals – by putting one foot in front of the other. You should make a list of your friends, family and business associates who have urged you to seek political office. It is at this point that you find out how serious and committed your friends really are to supporting your candidacy. Lists should be divided up based on those who can afford larger and smaller contributions.

Fundraising typically happens in 4 stages – get them on the phone, get them to commit, get them to send in the money and then collect the money. Usually, you have to repeat one or more of these stages.

Remember the old adage, when you can’t get through the front door, knock on the back door, when you can’t get through the back door, knock on the side door and if you can’t get through the side door, go through the basement and if you can’t get through the basement then go back to the front door and start all over again – This is the first lesson in political Fundraising 101 – It all comes down to commitment, prodding and persistence.

After a candidate has reached out to those people he/she knows, then it’s time to start the ‘cold calls’ to people who are perennially involved in politics. It helps to have a professional fundraiser who has significant experience and connections to the donors within your district.

When cold calling these major donors, you will need to introduce yourself and make a strong case as to why you’re the best candidate. It’s usually more than one phone call, but first impressions stick. After the donors have agreed to take your call and you’ve made your pitch,



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most donors will want to meet with you to discuss issues of common concern.

Then the follow up and persistence kicks in... follow-up calls, notes to the donor and subsequent meetings may be required. It's important not to get frustrated, this process could take one day or many months. It really is like planting a seed and waiting for it to bloom.

Politically active donors are in a 'club of their own'. They counsel with each other and seek each other's advice concerning all of the candidates running for office; so it's vitally important to have one of their peers serving as a volunteer member of your finance committee. This 'finance chair' will be instrumental in carrying your message to the donors. This finance chair should not only be accepted by 'the group', but should also have the ability to make the sale, follow-up and close the deal.

The constant cultivation of donors and the competition between candidates going after the same donors has turned the art of fundraising into a 'star wars arms race'.

Independently wealthy candidates have a built in advantage or leg up on their competition for the obvious reason that they start out with immediate cash on hand, and have the ability to write checks at will. However, this advantage does not always transfer into immediate electoral support. In some cases it can have a negative effect if the candidate is perceived as trying to 'buy' the office. It's important that even when a candidate has the ability to fund his/her own campaign they should still take the opportunity to reach out to donors and voters through fundraising.

Despite term limits, contribution limits, spending caps, corporate restrictions, etc. political fundraising continues to be relevant and thrive in the 21st century.

The inflationary costs of television, radio, print, postage and staff continue to rise. And, with the substantial increase in permanent absentee voter status, candidates are forced to spend more money, earlier in the political campaign season to reach these 'early' voters.

The recent rise of internet fundraising in major races of state and national prominence and their success, has clearly shown us where we are headed in the future... Internet fundraising is the 'new frontier' of political fundraising.

Buyers beware in this business (and it is a business), there is no room for threats, goading or coercing! One can be firm and assertive, but be careful to remain respectful. All candidates and their staff should remain committed to the process, while maintaining a lighthearted nature.

IMPORTANT - The word 'thank you' in the written or verbal form can never be said enough to the donor!



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Political action committees (PACS) or independent expenditure committees (IE's) need to be treated with 'kid gloves'. PACS/IE's can be a tremendous asset to your campaign by sponsoring advertising, etc. at no cost to you. However, they can also be very damaging. It's important to 'court' the PACS/IE's who are like minded; but it's also just as important to avoid antagonizing the groups who may choose to use their resources against your campaign. If a PAC/IE comes in to the race in opposition to your campaign it will force you to raise even more money to match their independent efforts.

Campaign Finance Laws at all levels should ALWAYS be strictly followed; and remember to never accept CASH!!

Wendy Warfield is one of California's premier fundraising professionals. She founded Wendy Warfield & Associates in August of 1997 and in less than twelve years has become one of California's most preeminent fundraising consultants. Her firm, located in Sacramento, specializes in fundraising for Associations, Republican political candidates and issue campaigns throughout the state. Warfield is best known for her aggressive and persuasive fundraising campaigns. She also has a well-established reputation for the personal and individual attention she offers her clients. To contact Wendy or to learn more about the services she offers please visit her company website at www.wendywarfield.com.