

Creating timelines for pre-election constituency-building and finance elections

a white paper from Banach, Banach & Cassidy (BB&C)

In planning a finance election, two sequential timelines generally overlap as one timeline ends and the next begins.

Pre-election constituency-building (PECB): The first timeline

The first timeline is what we call the *Pre-election constituency-building* (PECB) timeline. Generally, this has to do with effective year-round communication and community engagement.

The PECB timeline is composed of a sequence of communication and community engagement activities intended to generate and solidify support for the client generally and a financial proposal specifically.

Communication activities during this timeline should accommodate a pre-election theme (e.g., educating identified audiences about client needs). Communication activities should include reaching identified audiences (e.g., parents of school-age children, current students, alumni, community influentials, etc.) with multiple delivery methods ranging from formal, written communications such as newsletters and news media articles to social media messaging to personal communication vehicles such as face-to-face exchanges, personal phone calls, or emails to few individuals.

Community engagement vehicles include initiatives such as feedback, 10-12 person focus panels, 25-100 person focus groups, representative surveys, and more.

During community engagement, Banach, Banach & Cassidy believes that clients should never begin an initiative with “a blank sheet of paper.” Rather, they must go to those involved in the initiative with *something*, whether a draft plan, a list of proposed projects, or something else. People expect this from leaders and—without saying so—are dependent on having something to jump-start their thinking.

And, so, that is how the process of engagement begins. Leaders go to those involved in an initiative, present something, and ask those in attendance to “Help us strengthen our thinking.”

Participants in focus panels or focus groups must be representative of key groups in the client’s service area. For example, it might be appropriate to have focus panels composed of students, staff, community leaders, parents, etc. Conversely, we don’t believe clients should make a special effort to involve naysayers or “devil’s advocates.” They rarely add anything of substance and tend to dampen the spirits of others.

Similar cautions apply when conducting surveys. First, questionnaires should not be “blank sheets of paper,” asking questions like: “What do you think we should put on the ballot?” or “How much more do you think homeowners would be willing to pay in taxes?”

Surveys also must be representative of the population the school district is surveying. This requirement essentially limits most forms of written or online surveys.

Pre-Election Timeline (PET): The second timeline

The second timeline is called the *Pre-Election Timeline* (PET). This timeline begins with the administration of *The ABC Pre-election Audit*, a research-based series of questionnaires administered to a small group of select individuals. Responses to the *Audit* questionnaire are compared to several databases. Then multiple algorithms are applied to the data. Ultimately, *The ABC Pre-election Audit* generates the probability of electoral success for a given proposal and recommendations for maintaining or improving this probability.

Next, the PET calls for using information from a variety of sources to create a database and central message for the election.

The PET is refined by adding specific, research-based informational messaging, specifying the communication vehicles that will be used, the date(s) informational activities will be implemented, and the responsible individual(s) for each activity.

The timing of timelines

How long are the two timelines? Ideally, the PECB timeline began when the previous election ended. It is, in essence, the backbone of a year-round, two-way, planned communication program. In reality, the PECB timeline is typically nonexistent (although BB&C recommends that it be 6-12 months in length).

The *Pre-election Timeline* (PET) is usually 6-12 months in length. Again, in reality, this ideal length is often much shorter.

If you don't have the amount of time recommended for the PECB and PET timelines, call us. We have some ideas for clients who don't have a lot of time.