

CPA-Zicklin Framework for Corporate Political Spending

Preamble

The heightened risk posed by engaging in political activity makes it paramount that companies adopt a framework to govern their political participation. Whether a company is directly contributing to or spending in elections or indirectly participating through payments to political or advocacy organizations, a framework commits senior management and directors to responsible participation in our nation's politics. The Framework is a public commitment to employees, shareholders and the public to transparency and accountability. It not only mitigates risk but also demonstrates the company's understanding that its participation in politics must reflect its core values, its respect for the law and its responsibilities as a member of the body politic.

With investors and the wider public placing ever more emphasis on companies being responsible members of the broader society and accountable participants in the democratic process, a framework becomes an essential tool for meeting those demands. It is also an element of Corporate Social Responsibility. An indication of the importance of this is the Business Roundtable's Statement on the Purpose of a Corporation (August 2019) which addresses the relationship companies should have with a full range of stakeholders.

The scrutiny that a company's election-related spending is receiving, how the spending aligns with a company's values, and how it affects the wider society and other stakeholders require the board and senior management to pay close attention to where the company's money goes and its wider consequences. In the end, directors and officers are responsible and accountable for the political choices and broader impact that may result from their company's election-related spending, no matter how financially immaterial it may seem.

The Framework is intended as a guide for companies that seek to:

- be responsible members of society and participants in the democratic process and responsive to the range of stakeholders, in both letter and spirit,
- be recognized for their leadership in aligning corporate integrity and accountability with codified values,
- prudently manage company resources, and
- avoid the increased level of reputational, business and legal risk posed by the seismic shifts in how society engages with and scrutinizes corporations. The risk is exacerbated by the evolution of social media and a resurgence of activism in civil society.

Companies are encouraged to develop standards and procedures beyond those outlined in the Framework that demonstrate their commitment to ethical behavior as they engage in political activity. At the same time, companies are discouraged from making accountability and responsibility claims that, in any way, are incomplete, exaggerate accomplishments, or otherwise lack integrity. Reputation for adherence to the Framework must be earned, deserved, and countenanced by responsible parties.

Framework

1. Political spending shall reflect the company's interests, as an entity, and not those of its individual officers, directors, and agents.
2. In general, the company will follow a preferred policy of making its political contributions to a candidate directly.
3. No contribution will be given in anticipation of, in recognition of, or in return for an official act or anything that has appearance of a gratuity, bribe, trade or quid pro quo of any kind.
4. Employees will not be reimbursed directly or through compensation increases for personal political contributions or expenses.
5. The company will not pressure or coerce employees to make personal political expenditures.
6. All corporate political expenditures must receive prior written approval from the appropriate corporate officer.
7. The company will disclose publicly all direct contributions and expenditures with corporate funds on behalf of candidates, political parties and political organizations.
8. The company will disclose dues and other payments made to trade associations and contributions to other tax-exempt organizations that are or that it anticipates will be used for political expenditures. The disclosures shall describe the specific political activities undertaken.
9. The board shall require a report from trade associations or other third-party groups receiving company money on how it is being used and the candidates whom the spending promotes.
10. The board of directors or an independent committee of the board shall receive regular reports, establish and supervise policies and procedures, and assess the risks and impacts related to the company's political spending.
11. The company shall review the positions of the candidates or organizations to which it contributes to determine whether those positions conflict with the company's core values and policies. This review should be considered by senior management and the full board of directors annually.
12. The board of directors shall, independent of this review, consider the broader societal and economic impact and risks posed by the company's political spending.

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