IEC Government Affairs Program Outline for Chapters

The merit shop electrical contracting industry’s ability to provide necessary services to their community and high quality, well-paying jobs is affected by policy makers at all levels of government. Therefore, it’s crucial that all IEC chapters establish a program to provide information and education in order to influence their decisions. This outline will serve as a guide for chapters interested in establishing a State or Local Government Relations program.

It’s critical that merit shop electrical contractors engage in public policy discussions since lawmakers know little about the industry. Legislators depend on your input as an expert to craft sound public policy relating to electrical contracting. This requires IEC contractors like you to seize the opportunity to provide this information to policymakers and their staff.

Getting Started: Establishing a Leader

It’s important that an IEC chapter determine who the appropriate individual is to put a government relations program in place. This person would likely be skilled in working with people, has an interest in politics and is generally familiar with the legislative process or willing to learn. In many instances, this will be the executive director or someone else on the chapter staff. In other cases, it may be a volunteer member of the chapter who will take the lead.

Government Relations Committee

A government relations committee is necessary part of any government relations program. Ideally, the committee should be made up of seven or eight IEC contractor members, but can be fewer for smaller chapters. A member will need to be appointed chair and another vice chair, so a succession plan is in place. The primary task of the committee is to discuss the issues relevant to the chapter, help develop policy and determine positions on issues and legislation. Volunteers for the committee can be solicited during meetings, through email and newsletters. A committee helps to spread the work around to many individuals, so that the burden does not fall on just one person. It also provides oversight of the program, to ensure the activities coincide with the needs and priorities of the chapter.

Government Relations Activities

The government relations committee should work to identify activities to your members and the membership as a whole. You may want to poll the membership on what issues are important to them and keep your efforts focused.

Activities that may want to be considered include:
- Tracking state and local legislation relevant to the merit shop electrical contracting industry.
- Tracking state and local regulatory activities relevant to the merit shop electrical contracting industry.
- Arranging meetings and interactions between your members and state and local legislators.
- Providing input, comment and testimony on state and local legislation.
• Joining and establishing coalitions with other like-minded groups.
• Promoting qualified contractors for appointment to state and local positions.
• Supporting industry representatives that choose to run for elected office.

**Determine Priority Issues**
The government relations committee will work to determine which issues are most important to the chapter and its members. Not all issues will be equally as important. It will be the task of the staff person or lead volunteer (ex. committee chair) to work with the committee to determine the issues that are most important.

**Take A Position On Issues**
The chapter will need to articulate a clear and concise position on each of the issues it deems a priority. The position should spell out whether the chapter is for or against a certain policy and possibly include suggested alternatives where relevant.

**Track State & Local Legislation**
Legislation at the state and local level can move quickly. The chapter will need to determine the best way to monitor the movement of bills that impact its members so that it may be able to influence the process. There are many vendors that provide bill tracking services that will update legislation and provide information and intelligence on what’s pending. Bills may also be monitored and tracked by a lobbyist or consultant working on behalf of the chapter, who should provide a regular report or updates to the committee.

**Track Regulatory Activities**
Regulatory agencies can have just as much impact on IEC members as legislation. It’s important for the chapter staff work with its government affairs committee to determine which agencies are the most important to follow. It can be beneficial for the chapter to meet with officials in the appropriate agencies and get involved in any commissions or committees that are formed that allow for private sector participation.

**Hire A Lobbyist**
The chapter may want to consider hiring a lobbyist to represent its members full time before state and local officials. This would likely be someone that already has contacts or experience working with government officials. Preferably, you will want someone with experience working for groups that represent the business community or perhaps the construction industry. Having a full-time (or even part-time) lobbyist will help to ensure your chapter’s position is being voiced in front of policy makers and their staff. To understand the cost associated with hiring a lobbyist on a full or part time basis, you may want to reach out to similar associations in your area or interview a number of different consultants.

**Meet With State And Local Legislators/Officials**
Chapters, in conjunction with their government affairs committee, should devote a day or two each year to have members meet with their elected officials. This is often referred to as a “Fly-In” or “Day at the Capital.” Engaging your membership, beyond the government affairs committee members, in meetings at the city hall or state capitol will help to demonstrate the just how important these issues are to the industry as well as its representation and impact throughout the community.
A fly-in is another opportunity for IEC members to further educate them on the industry and how it issues impact it. Unless they come directly from the industry, elected officials do not have the time to focus on a multitude of industries and how they operate. Therefore, they likely do not know how a merit shop electrical contractor functions and what it takes to be successful. Meeting with them in their office to explain your position on issues and how it affects your operation is critical of any government affairs program.

Chapters will also want to invite state and local government officials to the chapter or to a contractor member’s facility. Demonstrating what goes into an electrical contracting operation or the chapter’s apprenticeship program will help to grow the relationship and will help to provide further understanding of how many issues are connected to the industry.

Submit Written Comment And Testimony
When legislation and regulations are proposed, it will be important for the chapter to submit letters stating its position. It is beneficial for the chapter to send a letter to lead sponsors of legislation thanking them for introducing bills that they support. Committees will also often times hold hearings on legislation, which will provide IEC chapters the opportunity to provide public comment. This can come in the form of a letter of support or written testimony to the committee of jurisdiction. The chapter may also have the opportunity to deliver oral testimony to a committee, where an IEC witness will be given the chance to answer questions on the issue.

With regards to regulations, usually there is a public comment period, that may last anywhere from 30 to 90 days. It’s important that the chapter submit comments stating the chapter’s positions to the regulatory agency proposing the rule during this comment period.

Join And Establish Coalitions
There is strength in numbers. The more individuals and groups that show support or opposition for an issue, the more likely it can be influenced. In addition, each member of a coalition has its own unique set of resources that can help in lobbying campaigns. That’s why it’s important to join coalitions of like-minded groups for each issue. That way, the influence on an issue can be exponentially increased by utilizing the resources of more than just one IEC chapter.

Establish A Political Action Committee (PAC)
Running for any elected office involves fundraising. Your chapter may want to establish a political action committee (PAC), which is a separate entity that should be governed by a separate committee, apart from the government affairs committee. The PAC raises money specifically for the express mission of contributing to the campaigns of candidates for office. Each state has its own rules and regulations over PAC that you will want to follow. These rules can cover a wide variety of things, to include how much money a PAC can collect, who may contribute to the PAC, the type of money it can collect (personal or corporate or both) and when it can collect contributions. It also may limit how much money you can give to candidates and the timing of these contributions. Depending on how complex the rules in your state, a chapter may want to consider hiring a consultant or legal counsel to help establish the PAC and help with compliance.

A PAC can play a key role in your government affairs program, by providing you with the opportunity to monetarily show support for candidates that support the industry’s issues. It can also help provide you with additional access to candidates and their staff.
**Identify Important Legislators/Officials**
The chapter and committee will want to identify key leaders in the legislature and regulatory agencies. These important officials will include chairs of specific committees that have jurisdiction over priority issues or leaders or officials in agencies that issue rulings relevant to the industry. It will be important to meet with these leaders in particular to educate them on the industry.

It is also worthwhile to research which legislators and officials may already understand the merit shop construction industry. Often there are elected and bureaucratic officials that either come from the construction industry or may be sympathetic to many of its issues. Meeting and developing relationships with these individuals is important since they could likely become champions for the chapter’s priority issues.

**Communication/PR**
Communicating with your membership, public officials and the general public is a key component of any government affair program. You can keep your membership informed via an electronic newsletter and updates as you deem appropriate. You will also want to have the ability to send “action alerts,” which urge your membership to write their legislators about an issue at a critical time. State legislative alerts can be posted to IEC Nationals grassroots site, IEC Votes. Posting alerts or information to social media outlets like Facebook and Twitter can also prove to be worthwhile tools. Legislators can often be influenced by the public nature of a twitter post that is tied to them or urges them to act.