

# The Pollie Awards Judging Handbook

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*“...Pollies the Oscars of Political Advertising”  
- Esquire Magazine*

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The Pollie Awards are the political and public affairs industry's Academy Awards.

They are the most prized and sought after awards in our industry. From large consulting companies to individual consultants, this is the one arena where every piece of work is considered equal in competing for honors of excellence. The American Association of Political Consultants tradition of seeking out and rewarding the best, the most creative, the most effective, and the most unique political communication tools with its highest honor, The Pollies.

The eyes of the country—some would say the world—are on these award-winners: they are used in case studies at major universities; they are sold in special volumes; they are placed on the AAPC web page for the world to see; and they represent the concentrated history of American politics for the years they are awarded.

It is imperative that The Pollies Awards judges follow the highest ethical standards that have been developed over the years. This handbook provides the guidelines to help you understand the process and clear up any questions you may have.

### *To The 2010 Pollies Awards Contest Judges*

**Thank you** for agreeing to serve as a judge in the AAPC's Pollie Awards competition. The Pollie Award has become the best-known and most-coveted prize among political professionals. This year AAPC has created three separate divisions, to be judged Candidates, Ballot/Initiatives and Public Affairs Campaigns, there is also a fourth division called Overall that includes categories which all three above divisions can enter. We urge you to uphold the award's value by doing your best to judge fairly and to only score entries in the Pollie-earning range (70-100) if you feel that the work is truly outstanding.

## General Rules and Guidelines

The Pollie Awards honor the very best in political and public affairs expertise. Following are the over-arching ethical guidelines that judges are requested to follow:

- **You are not allowed to judge categories in any medium (TV, radio, Internet, etc.) in which you or your company has submitted an entry.**
- **If during the course of judging, you recognize a conflict, do not enter a score for that entry. (Your scores for other entries in that category will be accepted so long as you feel that they are fair and unbiased).**
- **Although cleverness of design and creativity will be taken into account, you will be asked to rate entries primarily on the basis of political effectiveness.**
- **By signing into the judging site, you acknowledge that you will follow all the judging rules and criteria.**

Each judge will evaluate each entry against an overall political standard—not solely against the other entries. Accordingly, it is possible that in a smaller category, which you may feel lacks quality; you may score all the entries below the Pollie-earning range.

## General Guidelines for Judging

**Political Effectiveness.** Pollie entries should be judged first and foremost in terms of their political effectiveness—the extent to which the submitted material appears to have met a specific need or solved a particular problem. To assist you in this judgment, entrants are required to provide additional information about an entry. No such information, however, should be taken simply at face value. It should be supplemented by any knowledge you may have about the campaign in question.

**Creativity.** Political effectiveness, of course, can never be totally separated from the question of creativity. Given the relative sameness of so much political communication, the impact of a piece of literature, broadcast commercial or other communication will always be based to some degree on uniqueness or cleverness of concept and design, and it's entirely appropriate to take these factors into account when judging Pollie entries.

**Professionalism.** Closely linked to creativity is the matter of professionalism, which in most cases means quality of execution. Although political campaigns generally operate on tight budgets, there's no excuse for any entry to appear cheap or amateurish.

**Contribution to the Democratic Process.** Ideally, the purpose of a public affairs campaign is to help the public make an informed decision, and Pollie entries should be judged in that light. Although political debate in a free society is and ought to be robust and unfettered, the AAPC does not wish to honor or encourage work that clearly attempts to misinform, slander, or otherwise degrade the process.

**Positive/Negative.** Of course, just because an ad or other piece of communication presents a negative view of the opposition doesn't necessarily mean that the message is unfair or out of bounds. The proper question when judging an entry with a negative tone or format is whether the message appears to be fair, accurate, and relevant—not whether it is positive or negative.

**Your Own Best Judgment.** You've been invited you to serve as a Pollie Awards judge because we respect your knowledge and understanding of the political process. With the above criteria as a general guide, all we really ask is that you use your own best judgment.

## Guidelines for Scoring

This year we are continuing to use a process for judging the Pollies that allows people throughout the country and from all walks of our political profession to join the judging: we are judging online. This system will also be accompanied by the familiar rating process of Gold, Silver and Bronze awards.

### *Scoring System*

Scoring is based on **100-point system**, with 100 being the top value. If you think an entry is worth a Gold, score it between 90 and 100; if Silver, between 80 and 89; and if Bronze, between 70 and 79. Entries that, in your judgment, do not deserve a Pollie should be scored lower than 70—with the poorer the entry receiving corresponding lower scores.

At the conclusion of the judging period, your score for each entry will be averaged with the scores from all the other judges evaluating that entry. The software will then determine the Pollie winners by using a system that is designed to both recognize top scoring entries and also hold the entries to an objective standard of quality. An entry with an average score of:

- 90-100 will be **eligible** for Gold
- 80-89 will be **eligible** for Silver
- 70-79 will be **eligible** for Bronze

The fourth place finisher, if it scores over 70 points, will get Honorable Mention. *For categories in which no entry achieves an average score of over 70, no Pollies will be awarded.*

For all the largest categories, there will be a maximum of 3 awards (assuming no ties): Gold, Silver and Bronze. Entries must meet the minimum score criteria to earn each level of award. **However, just meeting the minimum score is not sufficient to win.** For example, if multiple entries have valid average scores in the 90-100 range **they will not all get a Gold Award.** The Gold will only be awarded to the highest average scorer, the second highest average scorer will get Silver, third Bronze and fourth will get Honorable Mention. See Table below for a demonstration:

Average Score	Award
98	Gold
96	Silver
95	Bronze
93	Honorable Mention
91	No Award

If the scoring for a category is low and no entry scores in the 90-100 range then there will be no Gold awarded. See Table below for a demonstration:

Average Score	Award
89	Silver
83	Bronze
78	Honorable Mention
77	No Award
75	No Award

If the scoring for a category is low and no entry scores in the 80-100 range then there will be no Gold or Silver awarded – only Bronze and Honorable Mention.

If the scoring for a category is even lower and no entry scores over 70—then no awards will be given. **This system ensures that all Pollie winners meet a minimum criterion of excellence to be awarded at each level.**

**In the event of ties**, the winners will receive the same award. The occurrence of ties may increase the number of awards that are given in a category.

For categories with an exceptionally large number of entries, the award system is calibrated to select more than three entries to receive Pollie Awards.

Overall, we are striving to ensure that the Pollie Awards maintain a standard of excellence.

**A Gold Pollie Award must be an outstanding entry, which the judges agree is the best in the nation.**

## Direct Mail Judging Guidelines

Direct mail is one of the most effective and most used outreach tools within any public affairs campaign. It seeks to use words and images to deliver a variety of messages and to promote branding. Direct mail is often recognized as the backbone of any campaign—whether national or local in scope. It is the foundation from which other forms of outreach (radio, phone) work.

The Pollie Awards Direct Mail category is highly comprehensive and covers a wide range of topics. In some cases, it is distributed in more than one language or in a language other than English. Use the general criteria for judging direct mail pieces—creativity, professionalism, contribution to the democratic process, positive/negative, political effectiveness, and personal judgment. Following are some questions to consider while judging direct mail pieces.

***Please note that you can view the pieces online and that you've also received hard copies of all the direct mail entries that you are assigned to judge.***

### **Creativity**

- Is the piece engaging?
- Does this piece stand out from the others represented and in general?
- Does the ad successfully brand the campaign in a memorable way?

### **Professionalism**

- Does the piece appear to be professionally produced?
- Does the headline and main visual grab you?

### **Contribution to the Democratic Process**

- Is the piece informative and is the information useful?
- Is the information presented clear and unfettered?
- Is the ad ethical, avoiding slander and other types of misinformation?

### **Positive/Negative**

- Does the message inform the public in a fair manner?
- Does the piece answer criticism and/or present information about the opponent in a clear, informative manner?

### **Political Effectiveness**

- Does it serve a specific purpose within the political context described?
- Does the piece create a strong identity and message?
- Will it leave a strong impression of the sponsor and aid in the recognition of future communications from this source?
- Does the piece motivate action and outline the steps of that action?
- Is the body text convincing?

### **Your Own Best Judgment**

- In your experience, is this piece memorable in terms of messaging, effectiveness and creativity?
- Will you remember what the piece was for, the key argument presented, and what position it urged you to adopt?

*All hard copies should have a sticker on them with the Entry ID number, Category it is entered in and the Name of the entry, if that is not the case contact Melissa Cressey, Pollie Conference Coordinator & Development Director, at [mcressey@theaapc.org](mailto:mcressey@theaapc.org) or (202) 544-9815.*

## **Print/Graphics Judging Guidelines**

Print/Graphics material is often a necessary tool in public affairs campaigns. Print/graphics is the foremost marketing tool, branding the campaign and channeling grassroots support. Print/graphics material is used to promote an image in the public's mind in a way that no other material can. Sometimes a campaign will hinge on successful print, graphics and marketing. The Pollie Awards Print/Graphics category covers extensive public outreach like Logo Design to individual public outreach like Doorhangers. Below are some questions to consider while judging print/graphics pieces.

**Creativity**

- Is the item engaging?
- Does this item stand out from the others represented and in general?
- Is the branding memorable?

**Professionalism**

- Does this item appear to be professionally produced?
- Is the branding visually appealing?

**Contribution to the Democratic Process**

- Does the item inform you in a fair manner?
- Is the information clear?
- Is the message ethical—not slanderous, misinforming or inappropriate?

**Positive/Negative**

- Does the message inform the public in a fair manner?
- Does the piece present information (about the candidate or opponent) in a clear, informative manner that is not slanderous, misinforming or inappropriate?

**Political Effectiveness**

- Does the print and/or graphic create a strong identity and message?
- Is the message effective and persuasive within the political context described?
- Does the print and/or graphic leave a strong impression of the sponsor and promote the recognition of future communications from the same sponsor?

**Your Own Best Judgment**

- In your experience, is this branding and central message memorable and effective?
- Will you remember whom this ad was for, their central message, what issues they represent?

## Newspaper Judging Guidelines

Newspaper ads have been making a comeback in political campaigns. Ads are used to persuade and market ideas both from campaigns directly and to increase the impact of the editorial boards. Newspaper has been considered a more cost-effective medium. It remains powerful due to its large audience of older, more-frequent voters and its targeted appeal. In addition to this more traditional application, newspapers appeal to a wide audience of the under-50-year-old public through partnerships within their websites.

Use the general criteria for judging newspaper pieces, including: creativity, professionalism, contribution to the democratic process, positive/negative, political effectiveness and personal judgment. Following are some questions to consider while judging newspaper pieces.

### **Creativity**

- Does the ad stand out from other newspaper ads?
- Is it engaging and thought-provoking?

### **Professionalism**

- Does the ad appear to be professionally produced?
- Is the ad an attention-grabber?

### **Contribution to the Democratic Process**

- Is the ad informative?
- Is the information clearly presented?
- Is the ad ethical—not slanderous, malicious or inappropriate?

### **Positive/Negative**

- Does the message inform the voter in a fair manner?
- Does the ad either present information or answer criticism about the opposition in a clear, informative, non-slanderous manner?

### **Political Effectiveness**

- Is the message strong and within a given political context?
- Will it leave a viable impression?
- Does the ad motivate to action and instruct on how to best take that action?
- Is the body text convincing and/or persuasive?

### **Your Own Best Judgment**

- Based on your experience, is this ad memorable in terms of messaging, effectiveness and creativity?
- Will you remember whom or what the ad was for, the key argument presented, and what position it urged you to adopt?

## **Radio Judging Guidelines**

Radio is a widely-used medium. Its effective use combines the creative use of copy, voice and sound to communicate one or more messages. These messages can either be broad or narrow—focusing on various aspects of a campaign message. Ultimately, the question that must be asked is whether the spot achieved its purpose.

### Regarding players and playback issues:

- a) If a radio piece doesn't play when you're trying to listen to it, try downloading the radio spot and play it outside the browser in a player on your computer, such as Windows Media Player, Quick Time or Flash.
- b) If the player on your computer won't support the file format you can download the free VLC (Video Lan Client) at <http://www.videolan.org/vlc/>. It's exceptionally reliable and tends to play videos and digital spots other players won't.

The following questions may be helpful in determining whether that goal was met:

**Creativity**

- Is the ad engaging?
- Does it use copy, sound, music, and/or voices to create a picture in the mind of the listener?

**Professionalism**

- Is the spot professionally produced?
- Does it initially grab your attention in a positive way that makes you want listen to the entire ad?

**Contribution to the Democratic Process**

- Is the spot informative, clear and direct?
- Is the ad ethical, Free of slander and misinformation?

**Positive/Negative**

- Is the information contained in the spot fair and true?
- Does the commercial answer criticism and/or present information clearly?

**Political Effectiveness**

- Is it convincing?
- Is there a clear call to action?
- How likely is the spot to influence the future behavior of the listener?
- Does the spot successfully brand the campaign?

**Your Own Best Judgment**

- In your experience, is this commercial memorable in terms of messaging, effectiveness and creativity?
- Will you remember whom/what the commercial was for, the key argument presented, and what position it urged you to adopt?

***Some of you might have received a DVD, CD or USB-drive with the digital spot on it, this is because the file exceeded the maximum limit, and can't be viewed properly online. The digital spot should be marked with the entry ID number, Category it entered in and the Name of the entry.***

*If the digital spot is not marked contact Melissa Cressey, Pollie Conference Coordinator & Development Director, at [mcressey@theaapc.org](mailto:mcressey@theaapc.org) or (202) 544-9815.*

## Television Judging Guidelines

Television is a powerful, visual media that is highly influential on public opinion.

A political message can be communicated in many different ways—including starkly stating a message point, drawing a contrast, bluntly presenting a positive or negative attribute, or subtly and effectively urging specific action. Ultimately, viewers should receive some information that brings them closer to a voting decision.

Television advertising should be evaluated upon the basis of creativity, professionalism, contribution to the democratic process, positive/negative, political effectiveness and personal judgment.

### Regarding players and playback issues:

- a) If a video doesn't play when you're trying to view it, try downloading the video and play it outside the browser in a player on your computer, such as Windows Media Player, Quick Time or Flash.
- b) If the player on your computer won't support the video format you can download the free VLC (Video Lan Client) at <http://www.videolan.org/vlc/>. It's exceptionally reliable and tends to play videos that other players won't.

Following are some questions to consider when judging television ads:

### **Creativity**

- Does the spot stand out?
- Was it memorable?
- Is this a spot that would likely break through the clutter of a busy election season?
- Is the ad unique through the use of drama, emotion, humor, or setting?

### **Professionalism**

- Did the use of actors, music, lighting, and editing enhance the finished product?
- Is it professional?
- Do the first five seconds grab your attention?

### **Contribution to the Democratic Process**

- Was the message informative and credible?
- Did the spot use credible sources of information in support of the statements in the ad?
- Is the ad ethical—not slanderous or filled with misinformation?

### **Positive/Negative**

- Does the message inform the voter fairly?
- Was the viewer given some resource (website, phone number, newspaper citation) to verify the accuracy of the information presented?
- Does the ad answer criticism and/or present information about the opponent in a clear, informative manner?

### Political Effectiveness

- Was there a central message that was clearly communicated?
- Was the message compelling?
- Is this a spot that you would remember or might discuss with a friend or relative?
- Is there a clear call to action and outline the steps that you need to take?

### Your Own Best Judgment

- In your experience, is the television ad memorable in its message, effectiveness and creativity?
- Will you remember whom or what the television ad was for, the key argument presented, and what position it urged you to adopt?

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## Phone Calls Judging Guidelines

Phone calling is an essential piece to a campaign and if used effectively it can significantly strengthen the overall campaign by focusing on specifics. When judging the effectiveness of a phone program or script, the intent and outcomes (endorsements, support, and defense strategy) should be considered. It should create an overarching story, taking into account general effectiveness as well as creativity. A phone program or script cannot be judged in isolation. It must be judged in the political context to assess its effectiveness in the overall campaign strategy.

Phone Calls should be judged on: creativity, professionalism, contribution to the democratic process, positive/negative contrast, political effectiveness, and personal judgment. Following are some questions to consider while judging phone calls.

### Regarding players and playback issues:

- a) If a phone recording doesn't play when you're trying to review it, try downloading the file and play it outside the browser in a player on your computer, such as Windows Media Player, Quick Time or Flash.
- b) If the player on your computer won't support the file format you can download the free VLC (Video Lan Client) at <http://www.videolan.org/vlc/> . It's exceptionally reliable and tends to play recordings that other players won't.

### **Creativity**

- Is the message satisfactorily engaging and distinguishable from other messages?
- Is the message of the appropriate length to hold the listeners interest?
- Is the language concrete and vivid?
- Does every word count?

### **Professionalism**

- Was the message executed in a professional and persuasive manner?
- Is the message clear and salient?
- Is the targeted group of people logical for the purpose of the phone program?

### **Contribution to the Democratic Process**

- Does the phone script effectively enable voters to make informed decisions?
- Is the message motivating?
- Does the phone script deliver a clear call to action?

### **Positive/Negative**

- Is the message delivered from a person who the listener likely knows and respects or from someone who has some other hook?
- Does the message present a fair and accurate case of the situation at hand?
- Does the message misinform or present an unfair bias that would lead the listener to make incorrect assumptions?

### **Political Effectiveness**

- Does the message create a strong identity for the campaign?
- Is the phone program reinforcing other communication elements, such as electronic media, mail, and polling?
- Is the purpose of the call clear?
- How likely is the call to influence the listener's opinions and choices?

### **Your Own Best Judgment**

- In your experience, is this phone message memorable in terms of messaging, effectiveness and creativity?
- Will you remember whom or what the message was about, the key argument presented, and the position it urged you to adopt?

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## Internet/Electronic Media Judging Guidelines

The internet and electronic media are powerful parts of a campaign toolkit—some would say the most powerful. They create campaign identity, fundraise, advertise, and inspire the public to action. Their accessibility and popularity make powerful campaign tools that can visually and audibly influence and sway public opinion.

The following guidelines are provided to aid in judging websites and internet communications.

### **Creativity**

- Is the website/email an attention-grabber? Does it stand out from others? Is it memorable?
- Is the color scheme appropriate?
- Does it break through the clutter of other electronic media?
- Is it unique? Is the use of drama, emotion, humor, or its setting especially effective?

### **Professionalism**

- Is it easy to navigate throughout the Website? Is it cluttered?
- Is the information appropriately organized?

### **Contribution to the Democratic Process**

- Is the website/email ethical?
- Does the website/email inappropriately attempt to misinform the voter, slander the opponent, or otherwise degrade the electoral process?

### **Positive/Negative.**

- Is the website/email fair and relevant?
- Does it answer criticism from and/or present information about the opposition in clear, informative manner?
- Can its claims be verified through a reliable resource?

### **Political Effectiveness**

- Is it engaging? Does the website/email clearly reflect the appropriate message?
- Is it persuasive? Is the website/email convincing and persuasive?
- Is it motivating? Is there a clear call to action?
- Does it create a strong identity? Does the website/email successfully brand the campaign? Does it leave a viable impression of the sponsor that will aid in the recognition of subsequent communications?

### **Your Own Best Judgment**

- In your experience, is the website/email memorable in terms of messaging, effectiveness and creativity?
- Will you remember whom the website/email was for, the key argument presented, and what position it urged you to adopt?

## Conclusion

Judging Criteria Guidelines are just that—guidelines. In the end, it will be each individual judge's years of experience, innate knowledge, and unique perspective that will carry the day and make the 2010 Pollie Awards Contest a robust and meaningful event.

**Thank you** is a small phrase to express the gratitude of the competitors, your fellow judges, and the political public affairs industry as whole wishes to convey to each judge. But it will have to do, for there is simply no other appropriate way to acknowledge the time, talent and inspired intuition that each judge brings to this responsibility.

*For questions and additional information contact Melissa Cressey, Pollie Conference Coordinator & Development Director, at [mcressey@theaapc.org](mailto:mcressey@theaapc.org) or (202) 544-9815.*