

How to Run for Public Office

Thinking about running for office? That's great news! But first, it's helpful to answer a few questions before you decide:

First, why?

- Why do you want to run for office?
- What problems do you want to solve and are those problems at the local, state or federal level?
- How can you make a difference and why are you the best person for this position?
- Are you looking for a part time or full time position? What is the time commitment?
- Is the position paid? Some elected officials are paid a salary, others are paid a stipend, and others are not paid and only have expenses reimbursed.
- Is there a commute? What are the hours?
- Some positions require you to live away from home or travel across the state or country so consider your family obligations and how the position will fit within your current schedule?

Second, when?

- When do you want to run?
- Are you ready and able to run now?
- Are your family and financial obligations met?
- Have you done your research about your potential opponents?
- When is the next election and how often are elections?
- When is the position open?
- What are the age requirements for the position?
- Are there any other legal requirements that must be met?
- Are you in the right mindset? Are you ready to face public criticism and are you prepared to lose?

Third, where?

- Where do you want to run?
- Is the current area up for redistricting?
- How will that affect your race?

Also, ask yourself if you have these skills, which are useful when running for office:

- Public speaking
- Fundraising
- Recruiting and mobilizing campaign volunteers and supporters
- Time management

After answering those questions, consider these next steps:

1. Learn the filing deadlines and requirements to run for office. You can often find this information on your state/county's Board of Elections or Secretary of State/Commonwealth's website.
2. Learn what legal requirements you may have about announcing your candidacy.
3. Learn the requirements about fundraising for your campaign and contact your city or state's office of campaign finance to find out what paperwork you need to file.
4. Learn the boundaries of your district.
5. Learn the demographics of your district.
6. Learn who else has filed to run for office for this position.

The National Conference of State Legislatures has more information on election administration here: <https://www.ncsl.org/research/elections-and-campaigns/election-administration-at-state-and-local-levels.aspx>

How to Start a Campaign?

Leadership Institute provides a great deal of information, training, and resources for candidates and campaign professionals. Consider taking advantage of a class or boot camp offered in person or virtually. Your state may have an organization or your local political party may offer classes on starting a campaign.

Budget

Figure out how much it may cost to campaign and win for your race.

- Check out past races and look at what candidates spent by viewing their publicly listed campaign reports
- Prepare a budget for your campaign
 - Will your campaign staff be hired or volunteers?
 - Will you hire consultants for your campaign? Consultants can be helpful but they are costly. These are experts in their particular area. Common consultants include: General Campaign Consultant (knows the ins and

outs of a campaign and can help guide you. Often has partnerships with vendors who will make searching less time consuming), Media (TV/Radio/Digital advertising), Fundraising, Polling, Issue experts, Communications/Public Relations professionals, Legal

- Advertising (campaign signs, yard signs), Literature, Photography, Paid media: Radio/TV/digital advertising, Website design and hosting
- Events - What events do I want to host?
- Polling? Will you pay for a poll? How many polls? When?
- Swag - buttons, stickers
- What will travel cost? What office equipment will you need?
- Headquarters - Will you have one? Do you need to pay to rent a space? Will you need to pay for phones or computers?

Fundraising

Once you have built a budget and determined how much money you will need to raise for a successful campaign, you will need to make a plan to raise the funds.

- Ask your friends and family: Build your network and ask everyone you meet to donate to your campaign.
- Personal investment by the candidate: some candidates choose to self finance their campaign partially or fully if he or she has the ability to do so..
- PACs: A Political Action Committee will endorse candidates and donate to those who align with their interests. They interview candidates and will give candidates money if they think the candidate is worthy of a donation.
- Major donors: see who has donated to campaigns in the past. They may give to your campaign as well.
- Events and mail: You may send letters or host in person campaign events
- Loans that you can apply for or get co-signed by someone supporting your run for office
- Public funding programs: Some districts have a public funding program which will give candidates taxpayer money for their campaign
- In Kind: Some services and items can be given to campaigns with an in kind donation.

Website

Build a website that tells voters who you are and why you are the best candidate for the position. Include your bio, the issues you care about/want to fix, ways to donate, including info on donating online, sending a check, and how to give "in kind," contact information, event information, and news.

Campaign Plan

Build an outline of your campaign and how you will win. It should cover from the day you announce your campaign to election day.

Things to consider when building your campaign:

- How many voters you need to vote for you in order to win
- Which voters you will target in order to win
- How many people turned out in the last few elections
- What issues are most affecting your key constituents
- What are the demographics of your district? This will help you frame your message.

Things to include:

- Voter outreach
- How get your message out
- How/when you will engage political leaders and ask for endorsements
- Opposition research (including researching yourself)
- Campaign operations
- Deadlines to meet
- Get-Out-The-Vote plan
- Election Day Operations and a plan for a recount

Announce Your Campaign

Things to consider before you announce:

- Tell your friends and family
- Build a network. Write down a list of everyone you know and contact them asking for their support and a donation
- Create a press list and contact them
- Make sure your website is live
- Have a current headshot taken

If you decide not to run, you can still contribute to your community without being an elected official. Here are some ideas:

- **Talk to Your Friends:** Help your friends and family understand these important issues. Tell them about what's going on and encourage them to join you in getting involved.
- **Become a Leader in the Community:** Get a group together each month to talk about a political/policy issue (it will be fun! Serve snacks!). Write a letter to the editor. Show up at local government meetings and make your opinions known. Go to rallies. Better yet, organize rallies! A few motivated people can change the world.
- **Remain Engaged Politically:** Too many good citizens see election time as the only time they need to pay attention to politics. We need everyone to pay attention and hold elected officials accountable. Let your Representatives know your opinions. After all, they are supposed to work for you!
- **Volunteer:** You can volunteer your time, talent and treasure by working with a nonprofit or civic organization that works on issues you care about. Volunteer for or

- join your local or state political party or volunteer for another candidate
- **Serve your community:** You can serve on a board or commission at the local or state level. This will help you grow as a leader and expand your skill set.
- Read more here: [Policy Focus: Women in Public Office](#)

Other Resources:

These groups provide campaign training and other resources for women interested in running for office.

- Read more here: [Policy Focus: Women in Public Office](#)
- [Leadership Institute](#) - provides training in campaigns, fundraising, grassroots organizing, youth politics, and communications. The Institute teaches conservatives of all ages how to succeed in politics, government, and the media.
- [Women's Public Leadership Network](#) - provides women with the knowledge and resources to make running for elected office and engaging in the political process easier. Remove barriers and provide support for center- and right-leaning women seeking elected office and appointments..
- [Running Start](#) - Trains young women to run for office. Educates young women about leadership, campaign strategy and teamwork.
- [Republican Women for Progress](#) - Provides campaign training for Republican women. Ensures the full spectrum of Republican women's voices are represented in the media, develop and support the pipeline of Republican women who want to lead and run for office, and refocus the GOP on proper governance and policy.
- [The Campaign School at Yale](#) (Formerly the Women's Campaign School at Yale) - a nonpartisan, issue-neutral leadership program, whose mission is to increase the number and influence of women in elected and appointed office in the United States and around the globe. Provides a week long intense training program at Yale University.
- [She Should Run](#) - a nonpartisan nonprofit working to dramatically increase the number of women considering a run for public office.