

So you want to run for office?

A guide to navigating the pitfalls of running a campaign



Prepared by the National Libertarian Party

www.lp.org

2600 Virginia Ave, N.W. Suite 200
Washington D.C. 20037

info@lp.org

Reproduce and distribute freely

Step 1: Are you ready?

Public office is about serving the community. To be elected you will need the support of the community behind you. The most obvious and important way this materializes is in from votes. However, there are many intermediate groups that will bridge the gap between your decision and Election Day.

Friends and Family First

Running for any office, from school board to senate, is a difficult and stressful process. It requires a large investment in time, money, and energy. Your first step is to talk to those closest to you because they will be your emotional support in addition to the first volunteers for your campaign! Get a feeling for their enthusiasm and ask tough questions about their level of commitment: How much personal money are you willing to spend? Are you comfortable being in the public eye?



Building your Community



If you haven't already get in contact with the state and local branches of the Libertarian party. A list of the state websites can be found here:

<http://www.lp.org/states>

The leaders of these groups will be familiar with the laws and demographics of your area. **If the local affiliate doesn't currently exist then start it up!** These members are your core constituents and primary source of volunteers so it's natural to get to know them! In addition to being active within the party you a good candidate will be invested in the community at large. Do you attend monthly board meetings? Are you a regular volunteer? Are you a prominent business leader? Perhaps a journalist?

Getting Serious: Exploratory Committee

Invite a small gathering to your home of the people who will be invested in your campaign. Be upfront with those who are attending and set your expectations by explaining why they are being invited and ask for tough critical feedback. Don't just invite friends but those who will be a good addition to your team. There should be at least one person who has managed/participated in a campaign before.



Agenda for the meeting

Listen. Those attending were chosen because you trust them and value their opinions.

Question 1: What hurdles do you foresee with my candidacy?

Your response to their questions should be thoughtful and constructive. At the same time, as your friends, they are likely holding back so assume that things are worse they appear.

Question 2: Do you think I should run?

Don't let them leave without a direct yes or no answer to this question. Also, ask if they are willing to make a significant commitment to your campaign. Rule of thumb: half of the people who commit will actually come through. This is true for everyone (life can get pretty busy) so make sure you have a broad enough base of support.

Writing the campaign plan

Having a written campaign plan is one of the most important, but most neglected, aspects of most campaigns. Writing a campaign plan will spare you a lot of anxiety and wasted effort. You should have a written plan before you do *anything else!* Here are the elements of a campaign plan.

How many votes?

People will tell you that you'll win this race on one issue, or with the support of one person, constituency, or neighborhood. The reality is, the *only thing* that will win the race is enough votes. You will need to go to your town hall's elections department to find the following numbers.

- **Number of people registered to vote:** An accurate number won't be available until a few weeks before the election. Until then, estimate this number by looking at the trend in this number over the last eight years or so (it varies in four-year cycles). For a more accurate estimate, look at the trend in the number of residents eligible to vote, and the trend in the *percentage* of these who are registered to vote.
- **Percentage of registered voters expected to turn out:** To estimate this number, again look at historical data (eight years back should be plenty). Make sure you're comparing your race with a comparable election year. Consider soft factors like the number of candidates in the race, and whether there are any hot issues on the ballot.
- **Percentage of votes needed to win the election:** In a two-way race, this is a pretty easy formula – half the votes plus one (actually, you should shoot for 51-54% to be safe). But many races have more than one seat, and more than two candidates. Look at past races that are similar to yours in the number of candidates and number of seats. Consider soft factors such as the extent to which one or a few candidates dominate the race, and consider how strong your competition's support is. You will have to come up with a target percentage that you think will win you the election, which is more art than science. Once you've settled on a number, pad it by a few percentage points to be safe.

The number of votes you need is the *estimated number of registered voters times the percentage turnout expected times the percentage you need to win*. As the election gets closer, many factors will change. You may need to revisit these numbers periodically over the campaign.

Where will they come from?

You will want to know how many votes to shoot for in every ward and precinct in your district. To estimate these, find a candidate that was like you in ideology. It doesn't matter if the candidate won or not, but it helps if they didn't totally bomb. More recent candidates are also better. If you don't have a comparable candidate, you can substitute the 2000 Ralph Nader results, or ballot question results like the single payer health care question. For your comparison candidate or question, calculate what percentage of the vote total came from each precinct. Then, take these percentages and apply them to your overall vote goal to get vote goals for each precinct.

How much money will it take?

Sometimes people make rough estimates about how much a campaign will cost. Usually, the suggestion is \$1 to \$2 per household in your district, or even as much as \$5. You should put together a more detailed budget as soon as possible, using real estimates of costs from vendors. Set a fundraising goal and meet it.

What's my message?

There are a few hard truths in campaigns, and one of them is that people only have so much attention for what you have to say. Therefore, you have to be able to let people know why they should vote for you in *just a few words*. Your message should differentiate you from your opponents in a meaningful way. While you should be able to discuss relevant issues intelligently and in detail, you should also be able to discuss them in about a quarter of the time that you'd like! You should have pitches ready in 30 second, three minute, and 10 minute versions. You should get used to the idea of saying the same thing over and over and over again.

When does it all happen?

Despite long campaign seasons, the majority of voters don't make up their minds until the last couple of weeks of the campaign. This is especially true for local elections, when a fairly large group of voters (about 15%) go to the polls undecided! While most of your work persuading and turning out voters will go on in the last couple of weeks to one month before the election, there is a lot of work to do to prepare for the campaign. Much of this can be done well in advance, such as planning, fundraising, message development, volunteer recruitment, etc. The better prepared you are, the smoother things will go during the crucial period at the end.

Campaign Structure

The Candidate

Once the candidate has hired a manager, it's her/his job to sound and look good and stay on message (say the same things over and over again) making it sound fresh each time.

The Kitchen Cabinet

These are advisors to the candidate, like family and personal friends. They do *not* oversee the campaign.

The Treasurer and Assistant Treasurer

The Treasurer of the campaign is legally responsible for any financial irregularities. S/He is also responsible for making sure that campaign finance reports are filed correctly and on time, which can be extremely challenging. But because the Treasurer's name appears on all pieces of campaign literature, some campaigns would rather have a well-known person than someone who knows how to do these things as treasurer. In this case, they sometimes appoint an Assistant Treasurer to actually do the work.

The Campaign Manager

A great campaign manager is someone who works well under pressure, who knows how to delegate responsibility, and who can keep focused on the goal in the face of interminable distractions.

The Steering Committee

Some campaigns have a 'Steering Committee', which should really be called a list of high-profile endorsers. They do not necessarily do any work on the campaign; just lend their good names.

The Advisory Board

This is what your exploratory committee will eventually become. An advisory board is a low-profile group of people with experience running campaigns. They are the ones who decide on direction and strategy.

The Campaign Chair

This is basically the chairperson of the board (the Advisory Board, above). This should be a fairly well known person, but also someone who will put in significant work on the campaign, particularly in networking.

The Spokesperson

This can be the same person as the campaign chair. The spokesperson is the first person the media go to.

The Campaign Committee

- **Field Manager:** This is the person responsible for the voter ID and Election Day Get-Out-The-Vote activity.
- **Fundraiser:** The fundraiser does the follow up with pledges, events, and house parties.
- **Volunteer Coordinator:** This person recruits volunteers to do phone calls, door knocking and literature dropping, and makes sure enough volunteers show up for each activity.
- **Media Coordinator:** This is the person to send out press releases to local media, welcomes media to your events, and keeps up with what the media are saying about the race.
- **Scheduler:** You will need someone to handle all the requests you get for the candidate to appear at events. The scheduler is the one who determines which events are worth going to and arranges for a trustworthy volunteer to drive accompany the candidate there.
- **Constituency Organizer:** You should have constituency organizers for every constituency that's important to the campaign. Constituencies can be based on ethnicity, identity (*e.g.* GLBT, elderly), or affiliation (*e.g.* unions, students). The job of these people is to identify important issues, get the candidate's message into the community, recruit volunteers, and collect voter ID's.
- **Administrator:** This person runs the office.
- **Research and Writing Coordinator:** This person gathers together all the experts who will help the candidate write position papers and supervises the production of well-written campaign materials.

Fundraising

Fundraising doesn't have to be scary or horrible if you plan well and set achievable goals. You'll raise enough money to run the campaign and get it off your mind, and avoid sending yourself to the poor house as well.

Candidate calls

By far the very best way to raise money is for *the candidate* to go through all available lists, pull the people s/he knows even vaguely, decide how much money to ask each person for, call them up and ask them for a commitment in a specific amount. Being successful at candidate calls is all about the follow up. You should send a confirmation letter to the donor right away with an envelope for them to send the check. You should then follow up the pledge every two weeks until you get it. Depending on how comfortable your candidate is with this, this is far and away the most money you will make for the investment of time and money required.

Fundraising Team

Everyone is more likely to give if a friend asks him or her personally. Because your candidate only knows so many people, a fundraising team broadens the number of people who can be asked on a personal level. Good candidates for your fundraising team are those who believe deeply in the campaign, who have an extensive contact network, particularly one that doesn't overlap substantially with your candidate, and who is likely to do what they say they'll do. The flake factor applies here as well as everywhere else: 30%-50% of the people who make commitments to you will not come through. And 30%-50% of those who make commitments to your fundraising team members will also not come through, so plan accordingly! Make sure your fundraising team have all the materials they will need (campaign literature, your bio or resume, etc) and check in with them often! It's the job of the fundraising team member to secure the *pledge* of a contribution, and the job of the campaign to follow up on it.

House Parties

House parties are small events hosted by campaign supporters who invite people from their own contact networks to meet the candidate. The host of the party must tell the guests ahead of time that they will be asked to contribute money and volunteer time to the campaign, then make a pitch after the candidate has given a very brief speech and answered questions. House parties are very time intensive because the campaign has to follow up very closely with people who agree to host house parties. Of course, the flake factor applies here as well. But at least the cost of food and invitations is usually born by the host. Hosting a house party is a good way for someone who is not ready to commit to the fundraising team to help with the fundraising. House parties also can create positive voter ID's, identify new volunteers, and create lists of names for the candidate to call personally later for larger donations.

Events

Large events, or benefits, are probably the biggest time and money suck in the fundraising world. Events hardly make any money for the effort, but since they're so visible, people think of them as the primary fundraising mechanism. Events can lose money as easily as they can make it. However, events can serve a useful purpose, such as punctuating a fundraising drive (a celebration of meeting your goal) or putting on a good show for the media or your supporters. Events should be farmed out to a highly trusted volunteer or even a paid consultant to avoid taking up too much of the campaign's focus. If an event looks like it's going to bomb, it's better to cancel ("postpone") it. It looks a lot worse to have a poorly attended event than to reschedule one.

Direct Mail

Direct mail is mostly used by very large campaigns with a lot of money, by professional mailing houses to lists of prospective voters. Usually, the first mailing loses money or breaks even. Then the mailing house will send another fundraising piece to those who responded to the first one, and that's how they make money. On smaller campaigns, you might periodically send fundraising solicitations to people on your own campaign list of volunteers, supporters, and voter ID's. Fundraising letters are much more effective if followed up in a timely manner with a phone call. People who send in small donations are likely to send larger donations if asked for them, so the candidate should give small donors a call.

The Meat of the Matter

The purpose of a campaign is this: to identify *by name* enough voters to win the election, and to turn these people out on election day. The way to do this is to contact voters and ask them if they support your candidate. Assign numbers to names: Yesses are 1, Maybe's are 2, and No's are 3. Your job is to identify enough 1's to win— actually, you should identify 130% of the 1's you need, because 30% will probably 'flake' on you.

How to identify voters

1. Word of mouth: ask your supporters to find you 10 voters ID's each
2. Phonebanking: Get lists of voters from your city or town. Look up the phone numbers, call people, and ask them if they support your candidate. Don't ask more than one question in a phone call.
3. Door Knocking: During the course of persuading voters, you will also make some ID's.

How to affect turnout

On election day you should have the names and phone numbers of the people who said they'd vote for your candidate. One to three days before the election, call all these people and remind them to vote, and ask whether they'll need assistance getting to the polls. On the day of the election, a campaign volunteer sits at each polling place all day with a list of ID's from that precinct. As voters come in and tell the election official their name, your volunteer looks for that name on his/her list and crosses off the name. Two hours before the polls close, your poll workers call in or deliver these lists. The people who have not showed up to vote must be called and reminded to go to the poll. If necessary, someone must be ready to pick them up and drive them there.

How to persuade voters

When you know who your 2's are, you can go to work turning them into 1's. One good way to do this is by mailing them literature designed to sway them your way, or leaving it on their doorsteps (*not* in their mailboxes). Another good way to turn a 2 into a 1 is to get a visit from the candidate. Door Knocking is very time intensive, so you shouldn't waste it on people who are already with you (1's) or people who are already against you (3's). In addition to these very precise persuasion methods (called 'high quality' contacts), you can use the media to persuade voters your way. Because you have much less control over the message and who receives it this way, media attention is called 'low quality' contact. Other types of low quality contacts are advertisements and radio spots. A popular estimate is that it takes 3 to 8 contacts to persuade a voter.

Laying it on the map

Now go back to your comparable candidate and categorize the precincts by their support for that candidate (high, medium, low) and by the turnout in the last election (high, medium, low). This will help you decide where your efforts can make the most difference. Don't waste your time trying to persuade voters in low support precincts, and don't try to squeak a few more ID's out of high support precincts. Stick to your persuadable voters in medium support precincts. Another good way to target persuasion efforts is to concentrate on repeat voters. A review of the voting lists in the past few elections will help you identify these people. Likewise, trying to increase turnout in high turnout precincts isn't going to give you much result for your work. Instead, concentrate on low and medium turnout precincts. In precincts with very low support, any campaigning you do can activate people to go out and vote against you. These are good places to collect voter ID's by word of mouth. Don't forget absentee voters – these are the most likely to turn out! Your town hall can give you a list of people who have requested absentee ballots.

What's not meat

Campaigns face considerable pressure to focus too much on visibility efforts such as candidate appearances, lawn signs and bumper stickers, and groups of supporters standing at traffic circles with signs. These are necessary evils, most useful for giving your existing supporters confidence in your campaign. But they persuade only a few people, if any, and do not provide *any* positive voter ID's. Don't concentrate on these. Voter registration is a worthwhile effort, but is not the best campaign strategy unless it's clear that you can't win without it. The reason is, the more votes you add to the mix, the more you dilute the effect of each vote. So persuading a likely voter is a much more valuable campaign activity than adding a new voter to the mix.

Campaign Checklist



Important Dates

Filing Opens	
Filing Closes	
Primary Election	
General Election	

Important Contacts:

Clerk of Courts

Name:

Phone:

E-mail:

State LP Coordinator

Name:

Phone:

E-mail:

Local LP Coordinator

Name:

Phone:

E-mail:

Demographics

Registered Voters	
Percentage turn out	
Number of Votes to Win	
Fundraising Goal (Number of votes x 1.5 x \$)	