

How to Run for Public Office

(Adapted Summary from *Politics the Wellstone Way* – Copyright 2005)

PREPARATION & PLANNING

Why do you want to run for public office?

- What are the problems you see and would like to remedy?
- What do you hope to accomplish?
- Do you have an understanding of what the job entails?

Important questions to ask yourself before you decide to run:

- Do you have work or family obligations that will prevent you from putting in the time to run a campaign?
- Does your family agree with and support your decision?
- Can you summarize your reason for running in three sentences? One sentence?
- What is the base of supporters you would start with?
 - Is there a clear path to expand that base?
- Are you planning to seek party endorsement?
 - If yes, are you prepared to recruit every person you know—and their friends—to attend each precinct caucus in your ward/district this winter?
 - If yes, do you plan to attend endorsement screenings?
- Are you ready to raise money?
 - Have you asked family if they'd contribute?
 - Have you asked friends if they'd contribute?
- Are you ready to door-knock every day if necessary, once the pandemic is over, or call every day, if not?
- Do you have good, talented people around you who will help you and can give you honest advice, including advice you might not want to hear?

Define what you need to win your election:

- Determine how many votes you need to win your particular election
 - Contact party officials for data from previous party endorsing conventions (if seeking party endorsement)
 - Get election results for past, similar elections from city/county election board or secretary of state's office for legislative office

YOUR CAMPAIGN'S MESSAGE

A good message is the core argument of your campaign

- Your message must be
 - Credible (factually accurate)
 - Clear and concise
 - Communicate values
 - Be easily and repeatedly delivered & adjusted over time
- All organizing will be around this message
- It should be a link between the campaign and the intended audience, with campaign's self-interest aligned with audience's self-interest

Determine your audience

- Audience will grow as campaign progresses
- Initially it will be party caucus attendees
- After the caucus, it will be party convention attendees
- After the convention, it will be all voters in your ward/district

Be authentic, bold, clear with a set of values you'll fight for

- Address people's concerns
 - Listen at neighborhood meetings, house parties, grocery stores, door knockings, phone calls
- Appeal to people's hearts and instincts
 - Make it resonate so that people willingly & actively support the campaign & enlist other supporters

Research

- Research issues that are important to your community
- Do self-research to be prepared for potential attacks
- Research opponents to gain an understanding of their background, history, votes, and statements to hold them accountable

BASE BUILDING

Focus on base voters

- Core group who can be counted on to support your campaign
- Defined by geography, demography, shared experiences, issues
- Do not take your base for granted

Identify your base

- Start with family, friends, colleagues, members of your community
- Review Voter Files from previous elections
 - Available from Secretary of State's office for a fee
 - Information in these files can reveal historical voting patterns and preferences by precinct and district
- Identify sectors of society that have been associated historically with a particular issue or political party
- Try to connect with non-voters about an issue or value that might engage them in conversation with you to see if you can inspire them to vote for you.

Expand your base beyond your initial core group

- Engage new voters & constituencies as campaign allies
 - Learn about new communities you're not familiar with
 - Attend community and cultural events
 - Become acquainted with specialty media
 - Consciously create a climate of inclusion and mutual respect
- Build new strategic alliances
 - People inspired by your message
 - Political party activists
 - Groups normally left out of the process

Find campaign volunteers

- Use lists from identified supporters
- Ask everyone: friends, colleagues, activists you've worked with
- Identify and ask for help from non-profits who offer this service to candidates

Volunteers are your ticket to building your base

- Treat your volunteers well and they will get others to join
 - Give realistic jobs
 - Create welcoming environment
 - Show appreciation

COMMUNICATIONS

Media strategy

- Create a campaign website
- Find a photographer or a group of volunteer photographers: pictures are key to communications
- Research media outlets and build comprehensive list that includes
 - Up-to-date phone numbers, email and street addresses, names of individual reporters and their beats
 - Deadlines, format preferences
- Schedule candidate meetings with reporters
 - Provide them with media packet (bio, photo, relevant press clippings)

Online communications

- Create and maintain campaign website
- Campaign message should be reflected in all aspects of the website
- Use website for everything, including donations, press stories, lawn signs

Earned media

- News stories
 - Pitch stories, hold media events
 - Content, location, timing should reinforce campaign's message
 - Timing: best Mon-Thurs, 10am-3pm
 - Give press 2-3 days notice with news release that can be used as a quick reference for reporter to write the story
- Op-ed pieces and commentaries
 - Identify volunteers to be part of a rapid response network for op eds
- Editorials
 - Set up meetings with editorial boards to educate them about your concerns, issues, candidacy
- Talk radio: Don't ignore...many listeners are independents
- Specialty, bilingual, and community media
 - Less expensive and reach a targeted constituency

Paid media

- Neighborhood papers, online papers, radio (TV is too expensive for local campaigns)
- Radio is usually the most effective form of paid media for smaller budgets and local candidates

FIELD ORGANIZING & DIRECT VOTER CONTACT

Rule of 10: Some candidates think a voter needs to see or hear you, your name or materials ten times to become a supporter.

Canvassing

- Most effective way to directly engage voters is in one-on-one conversations
- Candidate should be actively door knocking as many days and evenings as possible in local races
 - Determine best routes to walk
 - Use well-briefed volunteers to help
- Candidate should be direct and ask people to vote for them
- If person not home, handwritten note should be left with a phone number where candidate can be reached

Phoning

- Phoning is inexpensive, fast and convenient, even though it's tough to get people to answer
- Using your volunteers well
 - Over-recruit
 - Make reminder calls to volunteers
 - Have a good written script for volunteers
 - Take the time to train volunteers
 - Be available to answer questions
- Types of Scripts for phoning
 - Voter ID script: brief script to determine who voter is supporting
 - Persuasion script: more involved script to use with voters ID'd as undecided
 - GOTV script: brief script to use with your supporters

Direct Mail

- Keep it simple, focused and have continuity between pieces
- Use professional photos and if using a professional printer, if you want labor support, be sure it has the "union bug."
- Great if you can participate with other candidates in a coordinated campaign

Visibility

- Yard signs, bumper stickers, flyers etc.

INTERNAL CAMPAIGN COMMUNICATION & STRUCTURE

Internal campaign communication

- Must be rapid in the fast paced, intense environment of campaigns
- Email is mandatory & use of email “group” or “listserv” is helpful
 - Use care with emails
 - Every email should be written as if the world might see it
- Cell phones are needed by all key staff & volunteers
- Text messaging is helpful
- Zoom campaign conference calls – very important

Campaign database

- At start of campaign, research different database software and choose wisely
 - Ask other campaigns what they use
 - Consider using web-accessible, online databases
- Basic tool of organizing is an easy to use and well-maintained database
 - Track donors, supporters, voters
 - Maintain financial records
 - Manage volunteers
 - Track voter contacts

BUDGET & FUNDRAISING

Campaign budget

- List everything campaign might need
 - Database, media, staff, mail, phones, rent, cell phones
 - Get background by talking with candidates from the past election and organizers, party officials.
 - Get estimates before making decisions
- Categorize and determine what can be covered by in-kind donations
 - Office supplies, volunteer food, stamps, copy machines, office furniture, offices for evening phone banking, event food
- Create budget categories
 - Direct voter contact
 - Staff (usually 1-2 in local races)
 - Fundraising costs
 - Overhead
 - Technology
 - Earned Media Expenses
 - Paid Media Expenses
 - Research on issues and opposing candidate's or candidates' positions
- Establish timeline for when expenditures will be made
 - Month by month cash flow sheet

Fundraising plan

- Set goals
- Establish lists with target individual and group donors
- Set up database to track
- Timeline: week by week calendar for bringing in money to campaign
- Events: require work and careful planning
- Other ways to raise money:
 - Using surrogates
 - Direct mail
 - Internet fundraising

SCHEDULING FOR ELECTORAL CAMPAIGNS

Scheduler's Duties

- Campaign manager or responsible volunteer in small campaigns
 - Must be able to deal with constantly changing circumstances
 - Must understand the candidate's needs and personality
- Manage requests for candidate's time
 - Get all requests in written form
 - Evaluate requests based on:
 - Host & content of event
 - When event is to occur
 - Where it is occurring
- Prepare briefing book
 - 3-ring binder/folder that contains details about upcoming events
 - Schedule