

Getting Ready to Run: What to do Now to Win Later

Step 1: Questions only YOU can answer (self-assessment)

- Why do you want to run?
- What can you offer voters? What do you bring to the table?
- Would your family and employer support your decision?
- Would you have the time to mount a successful campaign? Are you able to take time off boards/work/other community commitments?
- Do you have a base of supporters? (for fundraising and volunteers)
- Do you really understand what it will take to win? (stamina, time, discipline and vision)

Sweeping the Skeletons out of the Closet (self-research)

The four major personal areas of attack are:

Education

- Did you drop out? Default on loans? Lie about educational background?
- Did you publish controversial papers or do anything controversial that could come back to haunt you?

Business/Employment

- Have you been fired?
- Do you have disgruntled business associates?
- As an employer, did you pay your taxes? Did you offer workers' benefits? Were your employees unionized?
- Any work related lawsuits? Better Business Bureau complaints? Other questionable practices?

Financial

- Are you in default of loans? Bankruptcy?
- Do you pay your taxes? Any liens on your property?
- Have you paid child support and alimony?

Personal

- Have you been arrested – court/legal action?
- Controversial past opinions? Past donations to candidates?
- Mistakes about issues in the public record?
- What's been in the newspaper/online about you?
- Have you voted consistently?
- Ties to controversial organizations?
- Do you live in the district you want to run in? How long?

Step 2: Know Your District and What It Will Take to Win

Know the District

- What are the *boundaries*?
- What are recent election *trends*?
- How many people are *registered to vote*?
- Who votes? What are the demographics (renters vs homeowners, age of residents, immigrant community, families vs single person homes)
- What's the *turnout*?
- What *issues* will improve people's lives?

Drive the district – find out where people hang out, what the different neighborhoods look like, where are the problems?

Know the Position:

- Who is in the position now? Who would you be working with – other council or board members, seatmate?
- How much was *spent* by the last winners?
- Are there term limits?
- Who got what *endorsements*, and why?
- Who *gave* to the winning/losing candidates?
- Why did the last candidate win/lose?
- What skills, experience, community representation, etc is missing/needed?
- Who is the weakest link/the strongest?
- What are the responsibilities of the position you want to run for?

Step 3: Building the Foundation of Your Campaign

Public and Civic Life (build a base in your backyard):

- What community organizations are you involved in as a volunteer, member or board member?
- Study and learn the issues and attend meetings of the body that you are running for
- Attend your local party meetings and volunteer with the party and/or local candidates to learn “how it really works” and make connections
- Can you be more active in your base organizations?
- Can you do a community service project that helps your community standing? Can you get press on this?
- Meet key community members, decision makers, journalists, big donors etc through work and in other organizations
- Get to know the decision makers for party unions and ideological PACs both in and out of the district
- Get to know the money people in your district
- Meet people who regularly volunteer in political campaigns

Fundraising Base:

- Good candidates keep contacts from every event, gathering, party, work related meeting, conference group, workshop, church, parents of your kids classmates, etc.
- Assemble your lists in electronic format
- Make sure you have correct addresses, work phone, home phone, cell phone, fax number, email addresses (not govt)
- Add in spouse name, birthdays, names and ages of children and any other personal info
- Every group has a connector, find them
- Mail your list a birthday/holiday card to make sure you have a correct address and to renew connection with you
- Call people who you haven’t talked to

Step 4: If you’re 5+ years out what can you do?

- Can you relocate to a different community to improve your electoral chances?
- Can you add experience to help your candidacy – Education? Boards and Commissions? Volunteer activities? Build you base?
- Can you change jobs to improve your prospects?
- It’s never too early for steps 1-4!