

Workshop:

How to run a political campaign

Massachusetts Green Party

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Should you run?

Questions to ask yourself

- What are the specific changes you want to make in your community?
- Is running for this office the best way to make these changes? What powers does a person in this office have to create these changes? How else could you work toward your objective?
- Are you the best person for the job? Is yours the face you want on your local Green Party? Is it the face the local wants for itself?
- Do you really want the job?
- Are you absolutely healthy and sane? (You will be under tremendous pressure)
- Does your partner think it's a FANTASTIC idea? (Don't even think about running if the answer to this is not "yes")
- Do you have the support of a Green Party local?

Forming your exploratory committee

You are not going to run for office alone. You will be relying heavily on the people around you. So don't *decide* to run for office alone, but involve those people in the decision who will be working on your campaign. The first thing a prospective candidate usually does is to host a small gathering in their home to pitch the idea and see what kind of support might be available.

It's very important to get the right people at this meeting. Don't just invite your friends. Invite those people who will be critical of the idea. Make sure that someone present has managed a campaign before.

What you're listening for:

If they want you to run, the people at your exploratory committee meeting should ask you very tough questions, be very impressed with your answers, and express their enthusiasm about your campaign without hesitation. As the prospective candidate, you will want to hear this. Be very careful not to convince yourself that you hear this if you don't. Ask someone you trust if they are hearing the same things you are.

What you will more likely hear:

The people in the room like you. If they've come to the meeting, it's because they care enough about you to give a little of their time. They don't want to hurt your feelings. So when they voice concerns, assume that their reservations are even bigger than they say. Listen for hesitation and doubt in people's voices. What they might want to say is that they don't think you should run.

What you might also hear:

People will feel flattered to have been invited to this kind of "inner circle" meeting. People like to feel important. Some people will advise you to run because it will make them feel important to be part of your campaign. The kind of support you want is the kind that comes from a shared commitment to the goals of the campaign, not someone's glory – not yours, and not anyone else on your campaign.

Who comes to the meeting?

If someone doesn't come to the meeting, it's probably safe to say they don't think your candidacy is worth their while. But don't assume that if people come they *do* support you. Good attendance at an exploratory committee meeting is not the same as support.

The final word

Before they leave, *ask* people if they think you should run. Ask for a yes or no answer. Also, ask if they are willing to make a significant commitment to your campaign.

What to expect from people

A rule of organizing is that only about half of the people that commit to something will actually come through. This is true for your close friends and advisors too. Things happen in people's lives, and people that you are counting on *will* drop off the campaign. Make sure you aren't relying on too few people to get this big job done.

Being a Green Candidate - no, it's not easy

The Greens are not just any old political party. We have some important views about democracy and representation that you should be familiar with.

Grassroots Democracy

In principle, every person should have an equal say in making decisions for the group. In practice, this becomes impractical for more than a few people at a time, so we develop systems of representation. The Greens advocate structures that are designed to come as close as possible to the democratic ideal without over-burdening the members. Greens believe that is the duty of the representative to communicate the wishes of the people s/he represents to the representative body.

Imperative Mandate

The democratic ideal is that community members decide issues for themselves and instruct their representative on how to vote. The representative is said to carry an imperative mandate. Since this can be impractical under our current system, we see the job of the representative as threefold: to provide information about decisions to the group s/he represents, to work with that group to develop a consensus about the issue, and to carry the mandate of the group to the larger body, along with any significant minority opinions.

Accountability

Accountability structures are essential to Green Politics. Representatives must be open and honest in all dealings. They must keep constituents informed of the decisions they have participated in and those they will participate in. But accountability is a two-way street. It's very difficult for a representative to keep members informed about the issues if the members themselves are not engaged. Members need to keep informed about what's going on, and to communicate their wishes about these things to the representative.

If a representative is not properly communicating the wishes of the group, the Greens have *recall* measures, to remove that representative. We also encourage *term limits*, so that representation is less about the person and her/his own power and recognition, and more about a service that the representative provides to her/his local group.

Leadership

Our principle of grassroots democracy is hard to reconcile with the concept of leadership, especially when one person starts getting more recognition, authority, or power than others. Our organizational structures are designed to be anti-authoritarian, or "bottom-up". But leaders almost always emerge, on the basis of such characteristics as charisma, commitment, available time, talent, experience, or the conviction, confidence, and perceived authority that can come from being male, white, straight, etc. Since leadership *will* develop, it's best to be open about it and decide what kind of leadership the group wants, and to develop leadership in that way. Here are some ideas about what kinds of qualities are appropriate for Green leaders:

<i>A leader does....</i>	<i>A leader does not....</i>
see leadership as a service to the group	see the group as a supporter of the leader
help the group articulate its wants and needs, and facilitate working toward those goals	use the position of leadership to provide a more prominent place for her/his own goals
continually work to develop leadership qualities in others	believe that s/he is too important to step down from a position of leadership
share information, skills, and experience with others, contributing to the institutional knowledge of the group	make him/herself indispensable by hoarding information, skills, and experience
respect the group's organizational structure	act without the knowledge and approval of the group
pull her/his own weight and share tasks appropriately	do everything her/himself, nor shy away from the dirty work

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 the race is dominated by one or a few candidates, 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 houseparties.
- **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 they are asked personally by a friend. 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 voter 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.

Notes