



*How to Run for*  
**LOCAL  
OFFICE**

So, you're considering a run for local office? That's so exciting. Local officials have the power to transform their communities for the better. In this guide, we'll go over the basics that you need to know in order to field a successful campaign. When you're ready to dive deeper on a topic, we've linked to resources that can give you a more robust understanding. We've also created a [Campaign HQ page](#) that has up-to-date resources. We're here for you. Let's get started!



# WHY YOU'RE RUNNING

Why are you running? No, seriously. Why are you running for office? This is the story that you'll tell about yourself, your campaign, and your community throughout the course of the campaign.

It's okay if you can't fully articulate your answer yet. Maybe you woke up with a gut feeling that you wanted to do more for your community. Maybe you're worried about the impact that new developments are having in your neighborhood or you're ready to fight for a change in your local schools. **Whatever your reason, the vision and values that inspired you to get involved will define your campaign and attract your supporters.** Here are a few questions to ask yourself as you hone your answer:

*What draws you to public service?*

*What problems are you trying to solve?*

*What do you offer to voters?*

Write about why you're running, answering all the questions above. Once you have articulated your vision and values on paper, try honing those thoughts into a three- to five-minute speech. This is the speech that you'll give as you're recruiting supporters.

Practice that speech with friends and family. Get their feedback. Ask them if you sound authentic and how your messaging resonates with their values and concerns.

When you're ready, break it down to a statement that you can share in under a minute. You'll need both the short and long pitch as you talk to donors, volunteers, and voters.





# ARE YOU READY?

If you are passionate about your community and want to make a difference, you are qualified to run. It's as simple as that. But you can't do it alone. You'll need a lot of support to win.

To field a successful campaign, you need to **be ready to ask for help**. Prepare to reach out to everyone in your network that supports you and your vision. These people will help leverage their time, money, and social networks to make your candidacy possible.

**Be ready to learn how to fundraise.** Not only will donations help you start and grow your campaign but asking people to give money increases their investment in your success, which can pay off in numerous ways. There are a lot of resources available to help you learn how, but you need to be willing to start asking for money.

**Be ready to listen.** You'll have conversations with hundreds or thousands of voters, some of whom will disagree with your vision and values. Prepare yourself for all these conversations. Do your research on all the issues that you'll be able to impact if you win and get ready to listen to stakeholders in your community.

Running for office is a big undertaking. A lot of candidates feel anxiety. Here are our answers to a couple of common concerns:

### *What if I'm not good enough?*

Our ability to create thoughtful and effective policy is only limited by the number of perspectives in the room. If you're thoughtful and willing to listen to your constituents, you're good enough. It doesn't matter if you've been to college or have a law degree. You have something valuable to offer your community.

### *I don't think I could ever ask people for money.*

At its core, fundraising is about building relationships and helping donors see themselves as part of the story of your campaign. Fundraising is a learnable skill. It takes time, effort, and practice, but you can get there and putting in the work will make you a more effective leader.



# SET YOUR STRATEGY

## Calculate Your Win Number

To develop a strategy, first you'll need to know how many votes you need to win. Your win number is an estimate of the votes you need in order to get elected.

Start by estimating voter turnout. The most reliable technique is to calculate the average number of ballots that were cast in the races for the office you're running for in the last three similar elections. Think carefully about the circumstances of each previous election to determine which years had races comparable to yours.

To win, you need 50% of all votes cast (turnout), plus one additional vote. That doesn't leave much room for error, so we prefer this equation:

$$\text{Expected Votes Cast (Turnout)} \times 53\% = \text{Basic Win Number}$$

Ready to dive into the numbers? Read our full instructions and use our handy win number calculator [here](#).

## Get on the Ballot

As soon as you decide to run, you'll need to file to run for office. **If you don't file on time, you won't appear on the ballot.**

In order to file, places can require anything from a fee to a certain number of signatures from the community. Research filing deadlines for this cycle by contacting your state's election office, the local board of elections, or town clerk's office.





# MOBILIZE AND ORGANIZE

Your campaign has one main goal: getting enough of your supporters to the polls on election day. Seems simple enough right? But to orchestrate that victory, you'll need to raise money, organize volunteers to engage voters, and communicate your message through multiple channels.

Start this work with your friends, family, and network. Write down the names of everyone that you know. This should include your best friends, your casual acquaintances, your early mentors, former co-workers, internet friends, that smart person you connected with at an event, everyone.

As you're gearing up to run, reach out to everyone on this list. Tell them that you're running for office and ask them to get involved to support you. After you make your pitch, ask them to donate to your campaign.

Whether or not they give, ask them to help out in other ways. Be thoughtful about their connections, expertise, and resources. Some people will excel in organizing volunteers, some will be able to connect you to local organizations and communities, and others will be able to introduce you to new donors. These are the people who will make it possible for you to win.

You can't do this without them. So, remember, be gracious, always say thank you, and strategically move folks up the [ladder of engagement](#). That means that you'll provide continual opportunities for folks to take on more responsibility for the campaign. This makes them feel valued and helps you get more done. Invest your energy in developing leaders among your supporters early on.





# FUNDRAISING

Political campaigns are all about mobilizing people to create change. Having money makes that work much, much easier. A healthy budget will help you build your campaign infrastructure, hire staff, and reach voters through mailers and ads.

Let's start with the basics. You'll want to reach out to your entire network and ask them to support your candidacy with their money, time, or both. This is how you can raise the seed money that you need to build your campaign infrastructure.

We call this direct phone outreach [call time](#). Be sure that you're ready with:

## 1 THE STORY OF WHY YOU'RE RUNNING

- This is where your pitch comes in. Talk about your vision for your community and how their donation can help bring that vision into fruition. Always center the donor. The conversation should be about how they can help bring change.

## 2 A THOUGHTFUL ASK

- When deciding how much to ask for, consider how much money your campaign needs to raise and how much the supporter may be able to contribute. When in doubt, ask for a higher number.
- Make sure that you can accept contributions in multiple forms so that people can give in the way that they're most comfortable with. In addition to accepting checks, make sure that you have a mobile-responsive online donation form.

## 3 A BACKUP ASK

- When you hear no, be prepared with a backup ask. If a supporter says that they can't contribute at the level you requested, try asking for a lower amount.
- Ask them to get involved in the campaign in other ways.

The sophistication of your fundraising operation can grow with your campaign. Check out this [blog post](#) for an overview of political fundraising, [this guide](#) to raising money over the phone (also known as call time), and [this guide](#) for throwing a fundraising event.



# COMMUNITY ORGANIZING

Community organizing (also called field organizing) is about having direct conversations with voters to educate and mobilize them. Since it isn't realistic for you to talk to every single voter yourself, you'll need to recruit a team of volunteers who help you have these conversations.

The primary goal of organizing is to identify supporters and turn them out to vote. At its heart, field organizing brings a personal, human approach to campaigning, hinging on deep relationships between campaign staff and [committed volunteers](#), and the power of one-on-one conversations to build connections and activate voters in a community.

Successful field organizing is informed and driven by precise data and science, allowing campaigns to closely target the prime voters to invest resources in contacting. You'll want to focus most of your energy on reaching voters who need an extra push to support you (swing voters) and/or turnout on election day (unreliable voters).

There are a few main organizing tactics: [door-to-door canvassing](#), [phone banking](#), and [campaign rallies](#). Campaigns may also utilize direct mail programs, [robocalling](#), [texting](#), and radio or television advertisements. Before you get started, check out this [comprehensive guide](#) to building a field organizing plan.

## What is GOTV?

GOTV stands for Get Out the Vote and encompasses a campaign's mobilization efforts in the final weeks leading up to an election. Rather than continuing your efforts to persuade undecided voters, GOTV only targets voters who support your campaign. **Basically, GOTV is the process of turning abstract support into real, tangible votes.** For more on GOTV, watch [this webinar](#).



# DIGITAL

Digital outreach through your website, email, and social media accounts is crucial. At its core, digital organizing is still organizing, and digital fundraising is still fundraising. Going digital just employs a new set of tools and technology to expand the influence and reach of your campaign.

Rather than being a small subset of what your campaign or organization does, digital should be [at the heart of everything](#) you do. It empowers you to tell (and distribute) your own narrative and effectively reaches supporters where they are.

Start with [a good website](#). It needs to accomplish at least two things: collect email addresses (to grow your mailing list) and accept donations from visitors. Ideally, your website will also include a biography that tells the story of why you're running and a breakdown of the issues that matter to you.

Next, work on building out an [email program](#) and [establish a presence on social media](#). You can run digital ads and promote your content on social media to grow your audience. Consider using video to tell your story. A [smart and thoughtful video](#) will help grab attention, often bringing in more supporters and donations. For more on digital campaigning, start [here](#).



★ ★ ★ YOU GOT THIS! ★ ★ ★

The future of our country depends upon what happens within its communities. Local decisions about schools, housing, and public safety often inspire far-reaching solutions to our toughest problems.

You have lots of hard work ahead of you. This is your opportunity to present a positive vision for your community. Go pick up the phone, hit the pavement, and win this office!

# Everything You Need to Run a Winning Campaign.

Get Elected with **NGP VAN**.

Trusted by campaigns of every size, NGP VAN's industry-leading organizing, fundraising, compliance, and digital tools have elected thousands of Democrats to local, state, and federal office. When you're ready for the technology to fuel your operation, reach us [here](#).

Our guiding philosophy is to create intuitive technology so that anybody, whether they're running for school board or President of the United States can use our tools. You don't need to be an expert on the latest and greatest. We create tools for your campaign that are easy to understand and use.

