

HOW TO BE A GOOD CANDIDATE

This guide is intended to help every candidate put together a successful campaign, but particularly for those who are running for office for the first time. It may seem daunting at first, but if you follow these recommendations, and you and your campaign leadership team refer back to this document regularly, you will have the basic tools that you need to launch your campaign and get your message to your voters.

Successfully running for office requires lots of planning long before announcing your candidacy for office and meeting the filing deadline.

When first considering whether to run for office, every prospective candidate should be able to provide a well thought out, honest response to the following questions.

- **Why do you want to run for this office?**
- **Why did you choose this particular office?**
- **Is this a realistic choice at this point in your life?**
- **What do you think the most important issues in this race will be, both during the primary and general election?**
- **Are you listening to a broad swath of voters and their concerns?**
- **What do you hope to accomplish as a member of this elected body?**
- **Do you understand what the role, responsibilities, and limitations of this office are?**
- **As the person holding this office, how will you help the people and the community that you will represent and serve?**

As you consider running for a public office, look at your background, expertise, skill sets and interests. Your work schedule and other commitments will determine how much time you will be able to devote to this campaign, and if elected, the amount of time you can devote to official duties (particularly for part-time offices). Plan carefully. Ask yourself these questions and review your answers frequently as you proceed:

- **Will your reasons for seeking office and the campaign message you create focus on important issues that will resonate with and be embraced by a broad range of voters?**
- Can people imagine you holding elected office?
- Do you project confidence and competence?
- Are you demonstrating that you have leadership skills and can be decisive?
- Do people think of you as being a dynamic go-getter?
- Are you visible in the community and do you have name recognition from other leadership roles or activities?
- Do the voters see you as empathetic, compassionate, and concerned about people?
- Can you demonstrate that you have passion for this endeavor?
- Are you knowledgeable about the district and issues that are important to voters?
- Do you already have a network of potential supporters (church, civic groups, work colleagues, social organizations) that you can depend on to help you with your campaign?
- Do you have a positive presence on social media?
- Do you have any potential conflicts of interest or other personal matters that could be used as issues against you.

***Notice that none of these questions involved an incumbent or their positions. Candidates frequently don't succeed when the main reason they decide to run is because they don't like the incumbent, particularly when running as the minority party candidate for that district. Unless an incumbent no longer has the support of their key voters, they will always have an advantage over a newcomer in visibility, name recognition, and fundraising capacity. In heavily gerrymandered districts, the incumbent may be complacent and think they have enough support that they don't have to campaign. Your campaign must be about you, your positions and why the voters would be better off if you held the office. This doesn't mean that you can't call out the incumbent for what they have said or done or not done, but that can't be all that you say. You will have to work very hard to get your message out to potential swing voters as well as your core supporters. That is the only way to win.

The South Carolina Democratic Party *Candidate Toolkit* lists qualifications and minimum requirements for various offices and the Filing Fees. Contact the Aiken County Democratic Party for a copy.

I. It is Never Too Early to Begin Planning to Run for Office.

A. Start preparing to be a candidate 6-18 months before announcing that you are a candidate. If you can honestly answer the questions above affirmatively, then you have the basis for a good campaign. (If you can't, you probably aren't yet ready to run for elected office.)

- Start by having a candid conversation with your family and loved ones. Campaigns will demand much of your time and put your family in the limelight in a way they are not accustomed to experiencing. Everyone needs to be prepared for the stress, pressure, and sacrifices that they will encounter. Some non-essential personal activities may have to be put on hold for the duration of the campaign, but you should still make time regularly for quality family time.
- Examine your personal history. People may want to know more about the details of your personal life that you may want to keep private. If there is something strongly negative, be prepared with a response that doesn't come across as defensive if asked about it.
- Take your loved ones' feedback seriously and keep them in the loop. They know you better than anyone.
- Expect the unexpected!

B. Do the Research and Know the District and the Issues

1. DO YOUR HOMEWORK!

- **Learn everything about the district and the issues important to the voters. Among them:**
 - ✓ **What are the major employers, economic drivers?**
 - ✓ **What are the Local or Regional Economic Development Organizations/Chambers of Commerce plans? Are businesses growing or shrinking? Are there new businesses coming in? What major businesses have reduced employment or left?**
 - ✓ **Who are the influencers -- Other Democratic leaders and elected officials, leaders from other parties, business leaders (i.e. plant managers, business owners, CEO's, etc.)/Chamber of Commerce/Economic Development groups, education leaders, clergy and faith leaders, press and social media leaders, non-profit leaders, etc.? The leadership of any organization with a large presence in a community are likely highly visible people who will also be active in the community through various volunteer civic activities such Rotary, Kiwanis, etc.**

- ✓ What government agencies – state or federal (military bases, prisons, universities, SRS, DHEC, etc.) – play a major role in the local/regional economy?
 - ✓ What higher education institutions are in the district and surrounding area, and do they have special programs such as workforce development targeted to critical local needs?
 - ✓ What are the major concerns about local K-12 education?
 - ✓ What are the health care opportunities in the district and surrounding area? Is there a local hospital? Is it growing and viable or not? What medical needs are unmet?
 - ✓ Are there unique environmental issues?
 - ✓ What socio-economic issues are of concern – unusually high unemployment, poverty, or homelessness? What is being done to address them? What else needs to be done?
- Learn everything about the major issues, political leanings, demographic makeup, voting patterns and constituencies of the jurisdiction that you want to represent.
 - Do a listening tour of neighborhoods/precincts or local jurisdictions early on. Know what your voters care about.
 - Get maps of the district that shows the precincts from the County Election Commission or the SC Department of Revenue. Know where the usual polling places are located.
 - Use the resources at your disposal including web sites, the Chamber of Commerce, business publications, local, state, and national print, broadcast and social media to answer the questions above.
 - Stay informed about current events.

2. KNOW THE LOCAL, STATE AND FEDERAL ISSUES THAT IMPACT THE DISTRICT.

- **Frame your campaign issues around the role of the office, and its jurisdiction, that you seek. In other words, if you are running for a state office, focus on state issues and how they affect your local district. For example, for a state office, stay out of issues that are strictly Federal (such as foreign policy) or strictly local (such as zoning).**
- **Your top three or four campaign issues should be based on what your voters are most concerned about that you can address through the legislative process. For example, a district with many retirees may have different interests in school issues than those in a district with many younger families. Be flexible and address issues your audience cares most about.**
- **A candidate at any level of government needs to understand the limitations of that office compared to those at other levels, while still recognizing the overlap between different levels, i.e., the role of state government in funding education vs. the role of local school boards to set policy.**
- **If you don't have a clear grasp of these differences, you will struggle to develop a well-focused message that clearly conveys to the voters that you are knowledgeable about the issues. Stay in your lane but know what is going on around you!**
- Know everything about the positions and/or voting record of the current elected official holding this office if they are an incumbent or outgoing member, and the positions of other candidates running for this office.

C. Resources – Collect and Read all the Information You Can Get – Know What is Going On:

- Use SCVotes.gov (the SC Election Commission website) as a resource to look at voting patterns in the precincts of your district in previous elections. Contact the Aiken County Democratic Party if you want an analysis of the voting patterns.

- As soon as you have the funds, sign up with the SC Democratic Party for a [VoteBuilder](#) account. There is a sliding scale of fees based on the office you are seeking. This is the Democratic Party's database software that contains the voter registration file for your district. SCDP will provide some training and the County Democratic Party can provide some assistance once you have an account. This is essential for a dynamic Get Out the Vote (GOTV) effort since it provides information on individuals' voting history, and the demographic groups in the district. With it, you can set up call lists for phone banking and turf lists for canvassing. It is very important to add any new information that you collect on voters from campaign events, phone banking and canvassing back into the database to improve the data which will benefit future campaigns (both yours and others) and the County Party. For non-partisan races, contact the County Elections Office for a list of voters in the district.
- Diligently read local press such as *the NA Star*, *Augusta Chronicle*, *The State*, *Post and Courier*, *Aiken Standard* and local TV websites to keep up to date in local and state issues. Pay attention to letters to the editor. Subscribe to national newspapers online and reputable websites to learn about all sides of issues.
- The League of Women Voters SC (LWVSC) website has policy papers on many state issues. The Conservation Voters of SC (CVSC) is a good resource for environmental issues, likewise the Women's Rights and Empowerment Network (WREN) is good for women's issues, and SC Equality for LGBTQ issues. SCDP has various Issues Caucuses (<http://scdp.org/scdp-caucuses/>) that should be consulted.
- The website Daily Kos has a running series "Nuts and Bolts: The Guide to a Democratic Campaign": <https://www.dailykos.com/blogs/Nuts%20and%20Bolts/>. It is comprehensive. Use it.
- Follow legislation in the General Assembly or Congress as is appropriate for the office you seek. Know what bills have been introduced and where they are in the legislative process, and new legislation that is likely to come up in the next session.
- If you are running for a state office, follow the General Assembly website scstatehouse.gov for state legislative information. Many committee hearings as well as the House and Senate sessions are live streamed and archived on the website. Attend County Legislative Delegation meetings. Know what bills are moving and read about pros/cons from various sources, i.e., non-profit advocacy organizations from different viewpoints, newspaper editorials, etc. Visit with members of the legislative delegation.
- Attend the city/county council or school board meetings if you are running for a local office. Read the minutes from the meetings of local governing bodies.
- Know what the council/governing body/office does:
 - ✓ For a city or county, the main issues are budget & taxes, planning and zoning, particularly zoning variances, public utilities, public safety, infrastructure roads and traffic, neighborhood issues, economic development, growth, and other improvement issues. Office holders frequently visit the sites where zoning changes are under consideration to see the area in context of its surroundings.
 - ✓ For the state offices the current major issues are the state budget, taxes, ethics rules, roads/transportation, state pensions, women's rights, LGBT protections, regulation of public utilities, and education.
 - ✓ For Federal offices, the Federal budget and laws affecting the US government.
- Understand how an elected official spends their time: At all levels, the most important legislative issue is creating an annual budget, voting on it, and appropriating the funds. Most governing bodies use committees made up of members, and sometimes community leaders or subject area experts, to initiate the process of producing legislation by holding hearings that take testimony from interested parties, and then having debate of the draft proposals before sending legislation/ordinances to the full

body for a vote. Elected officials also spend time with constituent service and meeting with voters and interested groups. For part-time office holders, the time commitment can be substantial. Elected officials at all levels spend a considerable amount of time reading documents and briefings, frequently prepared by staff, about the issues/legislation under consideration.

- Particularly for state and local offices, study the culture of the elected body. Pay attention to the issues discussed and the interpersonal interactions of the council/delegation members. Who votes together in blocks? Are there any tensions between members? What are the leadership dynamics?
- Pay attention to state and Federal bills that affect the local district/county. For example, in Aiken County, local, state, and Federal candidates must understand the history, current and future missions and issues surrounding SRS since it is a Federal Department of Energy installation with a multi-billion-dollar annual budget and is major employer in the region. What decisions made about SRS at the Federal level have state and local implications? You want the voters who work at SRS to have confidence that you understand their needs and concerns if you are representing them.
- For a county or statewide constitutional office (i.e., agency head), know what that office does and what is working and what isn't with the current leadership in that office. Frame your campaign around the agency's mission and function. Know everything that is on the agency's website.
- For a city or county office, visit the Dept. Heads and ask questions about the workings of their Departments, and their primary needs and priorities. Talk to employees about their view of the Department. Understand where their funding comes from – local taxes, state or federal revenue or grants and contracts.
- If there is an incumbent, they will run on their record. You must show that you are thinking ahead of them. Know the incumbent/opponent's positions and voting record. Study their website, FB pages and other public media. Be able to address their positions and offer your **better** alternatives. Frame your message accordingly. Be forward looking.

D. Plan for the Campaign:

1. Write a Campaign Plan

The campaign plan focuses on the goals that you will have to achieve to win the election. At the least, it must include the following:

- The Win Number – the number of votes expected to be needed to win the election based on predicted turnout. Look at results of previous elections to see what the turnout might be (scvotes.org). Turnout for state/local elections in off years is always much lower than for general Presidential and Gubernatorial election years. That can be an advantage if your voters turn out in greater numbers than predicted. Try to get your voters in unfriendly precincts to over perform. (See attached questions for guidance.)
- The campaign budget – Using resources such as the South Carolina Ethics Commission database of previous elections, set a budget of how much money you will need to raise to run an effective campaign. (See the Fundraising section below.)
- Identify how you will structure your campaign to address different communities in the district. Do an analysis of the voting patterns in the precincts in the jurisdiction. Know where your support is strongest. Lock down your base early so that you can then focus on potential swing voters and inconsistent voters. Segment the voters into identifiable groups – by party, age, interests, etc. Know who to talk to and when to talk to them to get them out to vote. Write the plan that is realistic for your campaign capacity for emails, direct mail, social media, phone calls (live and recorded), and in person contact. It may take more than one "touch" (contact) to convince someone to vote for you.

- Pay attention to upcoming issues such as how the jurisdiction will deal with growth from new industries or loss of jobs from a major employer shutting down, etc.
- Talk to people in the know – business leaders, citizen activists, issue-based non-profit leaders, clergy and other influential leaders. Get their take on the issues and obstacles that you might face.
- Write an introductory speech. Make it concise but talk enough about your background, your strengths and what is motivating you to seek office so that the voters learn something about you. While mentioning your immediate family is important, it is not necessary to provide extensive details about them such as a grown child’s occupation. Organize the speech so it makes sense. Memorize it so that you can give it without notes. **Speak with conviction.**
- **Focus your message on substantial issues that the voters care about and your vision for addressing them.**
 - ✓ **Avoid using clichés, platitudes, generic, and superficial talking points. You may be for good education, a clean environment, and good jobs, but you must tie these to tangible concerns that affect your voters.**
 - ✓ **The same applies to esoteric arguments about being a “moderate” or “progressive”. These terms don’t have fixed definitions and may vary depending on the issue.**
 - ✓ **Avoid using phrases such as “When I get to Washington (or Columbia), I will fight for... As a first term legislator, you will be learning how to be an elected official, learning the rules and culture, and will be taking direction from the leadership. Learn the ropes and how to wield power through the process of introducing bills, serving on committees and persuasion. That takes a while.**
- A well-prepared candidate will also be a well-prepared elected official.
- Be flexible with your messaging plan so that you can make adjustments if you see that the circumstances have changed.

II. It Is Time to File and Make it Official, Now What?

A. Filing for Office

- Know the important deadlines such as filing dates – March of even years for general elections, but it varies for special elections and local municipal and non-partisan elections. Check with the county election commission for details.
- Know what the filing fees are for the office you seek.
- File a Statement of Intention of Candidacy/Party Pledge Form (SiCPP) form with the appropriate county or state election office during the filing period.
- File a Statement of Economic Interest (SEI) form with the State Ethics Commission electronically on the State Ethics Commission website (ethics.sc.gov).
- File all Campaign Disclosure reports on or before the appropriate deadlines.

B. Legal Filing Requirements

- In South Carolina, there are several legal matters that must get attention immediately. The South Carolina Ethics Commission has a series of user guides at <https://ethics.sc.gov/user-guides>. Read them Carefully!
- You will need the Electronic Filing Registration User Guide to open an account with the SC Ethics Commission and then use the Statement of Economic Interest User Guide to file your Statement of

Economic Interest (SEI) as soon as possible after filing. This link, <https://ethics.sc.gov/statement-economic-interests> will give you the information you need to fill it out.

- The Ethics Commission Candidate Newsletter provides a summary to help get you started. It outlines key requirements and dates. <https://ethics.sc.gov/sites/default/files/.../Candidate%20Newsletter.pdf>
- The information that you provide on the filing form will be posted at the SC Ethics Commission or Federal Elections Commission (if you are running for a Federal office) website and becomes public. For this reason, you should use the campaign email, phone number, and address if you have them set up to protect your personal contact information. The same goes for the information that you publish in your campaign literature.
- Be aware that there are many political consultants who try to sell their services to campaigns. They are usually very expensive, and probably not necessary for local or Statehouse races, although they can be valuable for statewide or Federal races. It is fine to ignore their offers or to have a candid discussion of your plans before accepting their advice.

C. Financial Reporting

- Open a campaign bank account as soon as possible after filing to accept donations. **All** expenses paid on behalf of the candidate must be drawn from the campaign account, and **all** contributions made to a candidate must be deposited in the campaign account within 10 days of receipt.
- When \$500 is raised or spent by a campaign, an Initial Campaign Disclosure must be filed at the Ethics Commission website. After that a Campaign Disclosure must be filed every quarter. Fifteen days before the election, a pre-election campaign report showing contributions of more than \$100 and all expenditures must be filed. The filing deadlines are April 10, July 10, October 10, January 10 of the next year (for Nov. elections).
- ActBlue is the Democratic Party's online fundraising tool. It is a secure way for donors to make donations online with a credit card. Set up an ActBlue account early and post the link on your website and social media pages. Click here, <https://support.actblue.com/campaigns/merchant-accounts/requirements-and-setup/>, for information on setting up an account.
- A Federal Tax ID Number (EIN) is required to set up an ActBlue account. Click here to apply for an EIN, <https://www.irs.gov/businesses/small-businesses-self-employed/employer-id-numbers>.
- Develop a budget for the campaign. Look at the ethics reports of previous candidates for that race or ones similar to it to get an idea of how much money you will need to raise. If you have to compete in a primary and a general election, include both in your plan.
- The primary focus of your campaign expenditures should be on communicating with your prospective voters. Your spending will increase as the election gets closer. Be sure to save enough for an effective GOTV effort during the final weeks.

D. Fundraising

- Your first donors will likely be your family and close friends. Other than start-up funds, try not to self-fund your campaign. It may discourage donors.
- Talk to former candidates for your office and elected officials of other offices in your area for suggestions of names of potential larger donors. The County Party may be able to suggest people.
- Talk to potential large donors before launching campaign. Fundraising has to start early. Calling and asking for money is hard, but as the candidate, you must make these calls, every day for several hours.

You should have a plan of those you are going call, and how many calls you plan to make **each** day. This is your job!

- Current individual donation limits for state and Federal offices are provided at the end of this document.
- Print up donation cards or print stick on labels to put on envelopes to collect donations that meet the legal requirements – Name, Address, Phone, Email and **Occupation**. (It is ok for retired people to say so). You must list all donors for ethics reports – cash, check or online. This is a good way to build a list of supporters. You also must report expenses.
- Cash donations **must** be attributed to an individual, so they should go in a labeled envelope. Don't just "pass the hat". No contributions may be anonymous.
- Get endorsement commitments early from business leaders, public opinion leaders, and high-profile people. Ask their permission to use them as an endorsement.
- Don't be afraid to ask for money. Have a donation request speech memorized that explains why the donor should support you. **NO ONE WILL GIVE UNLESS YOU ASK!**
- Always ask people for financial support at all public and private events. Have someone with you who can hand out donation cards/envelopes and collect donations.
- Once you have launched your campaign, have friends and family help you fundraise. Ask them to send postcards to their networks asking for support.
- Have signup sheets at each event. Try to collect the name, home address, phone number, and email address for each person who attends, whether they donate or not. These are valuable for updating the Vote Builder database with current information. People may have changed their phone numbers (landline to cell) since registering to vote. The voter file does not include email addresses unless they are manually added since they are not requested on the voter registration form. Since email addresses can only be obtained this way, the Aiken Democratic Party requests that you share email addresses and phone numbers with the Party so that the Party has an accurate database for future campaigns.
- Do a direct mail campaign to all likely donors early in the campaign as soon as funds are available for printing and postage.
- Do not depend on political parties for financial support. Political parties cannot contribute to Federal candidates and are limited by law and available funds for contributions to state/local candidates.
- **MAKE SURE THAT WRITTEN THANK YOU NOTES ARE PROMPTLY SENT TO EVERY DONOR.**

III. The Campaign

A. Assemble a Campaign Staff

- Find a **Campaign Manager** who knows how to run a campaign. Their job is to schedule events, interviews, promotional activities and organizing phone banking and canvassing. The Manager may delegate specific tasks to others but it is their job to keep everything running smoothly and according to schedule. Their primary responsibility is to make the candidate look good. The candidate should not be their own campaign manager. It takes too much time and is a distraction from communicating with the voters.
- The **Treasurer** needs to know and follow the Ethics Commission reporting laws.
- Have a **Communications Director** who knows social media and traditional media marketing. Use the all the tools available.
- Get as many volunteers as possible for phone banking and canvassing. Don't be intimidated or discouraged by hang-ups or slammed doors. It happens to every candidate.

- Always take someone with you to events to take notes and help with campaign literature displays and collecting names (signup sheets) and donations when you make public appearances. Always have donation envelopes available. Use this person to introduce you to people at events, whether they know them or not. It is easier to walk up to a stranger when you are introduced by someone else.
- Have someone drive you to events so that you can make fundraising calls or polish your speech in the car.

B. Campaigning:

The Aiken Democratic Party can't run your campaign but can help finding volunteers for phone banking and canvassing as well as providing Election Day poll watchers and voter protection. The party can provide space when the headquarters is available for phone banks and staging canvassers. Use the party officers as resources to answer questions.

1. Issues

- Run campaign on 3-5 priority issues that you know people care about that you can address as an elected official. Stay away from fringe issues that appeal only to a few people, are "wonky" inside game matters, or things that are just not going to happen in the foreseeable future.
- [Have an "Elevator speech" for your key points – 27-9-3. 27 words in 9 seconds making 3 points.](#)
- Frame your message so it is geared to the people voting in that race. Different communities may need slightly different versions, i.e. how you address education with young families will be different than with retirees.
- Your campaign will focus on three areas. Keep them in balance:
 - ✓ Getting to know you. Tell the voters about your background and history, and why it has led you to decide to run for this office.
 - ✓ Discuss the issues that are important to the voters and how you will address them if elected. Be specific and realistic. You will be just one person in a legislative body and your power will be limited.
 - ✓ Offer criticism of the incumbent/opponent but keep it above board. Criticize votes, positions, and actions. Don't make personal attacks on the opponent or their family.
- Plan a strong GOTV operation focusing on early absentee voting, helping people get to the polls, phone bank reminders to vote right before and on Election Day. Get lots of volunteers to help. In close elections, turnout on Election Day may affect the outcome. Have volunteers available to canvass and phone bank on Election Day.

2. Public Speaking

- Practice speaking in front of a mirror.
 - ✓ Record your practices and listen to them. Both will help you present yourself well and become a poised speaker.
 - ✓ Speak in a voice that is loud enough to be heard by all but don't yell or screech.
 - ✓ Don't mumble or swallow words.
 - ✓ Pace yourself so that you don't talk too fast or too slow.
 - ✓ If you are comfortable speaking, you will be less likely to show nervous behavior such as saying "um", not making eye contact or using distracting gestures.
 - ✓ To convince voters that you are serious, you must show passion for what you are doing. You have to sell a product – yourself!

- Never say everything that you know about an issue. Leave people wanting to hear more from you.
- Be very careful using jokes in your speeches. You don't want something that is supposed to be funny to backfire because it was taken the wrong way or is considered offensive by some.
- Use religious references sparingly. It is fine to say that you are a person of faith but remember that you will be seeking the vote of people from various traditions and belief systems. Don't turn off potential voters who don't share your views. Know your audience.
- Use slogans sparingly. Don't create a slogan until you've defined the issues that you are running on. You want people to remember your name, not your slogan since your name is what is on the ballot.
- **KNOW WHAT YOU ARE TALKING ABOUT. Learn to speak convincingly without notes on your key campaign issues. If you are in a situation where you have to give an impromptu speech or are in a forum or debate with your opponent, you don't want to embarrass yourself if you can't think on your feet.**
- **In a forum where you have a time limit, be prepared to use the entire time allotted for each question to get as much public exposure as you can, but think before you speak so you don't ramble or get off topic. If you've said all you can on the question asked, pivot back to an earlier question if you have more to say about it or to one of your other key issues. Be passionate and convincing when you are talking.**
- **If you have an opponent, particularly a long-serving incumbent, do not use their name. That just gives them free advertising at your expense. When you refer to them say "my opponent" or "the incumbent". Keep the focus on you.**

3. Get Out and Talk to People -- Public engagement with voters is critical.

- Be prepared to spend long hours campaigning.
- Go to the places that people congregate – coffee shops, restaurants, churches, grocery stores, barber and beauty shops – and talk to people one-on-one and **listen** to their concerns.
- Consider hiring a company to do blind focus groups on issues and messaging that works if you have the money.
- Put together a campaign schedule and plan so that it ramps up activities as the campaign progresses. Many people don't pay much attention to elections until the last few weeks. Plan the schedule accordingly. Earlier events should be used to raise money and solidify your base.
- Campaign in all parts of the jurisdiction. As a Democrat try to appeal to a broad base of voters including the Democratic base, persuadable independents, and disaffected Republicans. This gives you the best chance to win. Because of the partisan distribution in many districts, there may not be enough votes if you focus only on the likely Democratic voters.
- Be prepared to answer questions with concise, well thought out answers. Some people will ask rambling questions that don't make sense. Be respectful and try to answer them or give an answer to a related issue that people will understand. Don't take the bait if someone tries to antagonize you.
- Always stay positive. If you criticize another candidate, do it from a position that you have a better idea, or you can be a more effective leader.
- As a candidate, ALWAYS be prepared to be "on". Even if you are doing routine errands or out with your family you may be recognized and must be prepared. Make the effort to engage with potential voters whenever you are out in public. You need their votes, and they need to see that you are authentic and genuine.
- Engage with independent groups and ask for their assistance on GOTV such as Indivisible, Resist, Our Revolution and Just Democrats but be sure they understand that you control your message.

- Try to get invitations to address civic groups, women’s clubs, and interest organizations that have regular meetings with guest speakers. Use the newspaper and public service announcements to identify them and when they meet.

4. Events

- Plan lots of events, or have others plan them (such as house parties) on your behalf, so that you can meet the voters and they can get to know you. Don’t limit events to the strongest precincts. Ask your friends and neighbors to host House Parties for you.
- Keep the event budget in check. Don’t spend more than 10% of what you expect to raise. Refreshments can be simple snacks. It is not necessary for the host to serve alcohol.
- In your opening remarks, be sure to thank the host for having the event. You might want to mention how you know each other if it isn’t obvious, i.e. work, civic group, faith community, volunteer activity, etc. That can be a good ice breaker.
- If you attend public events where you don’t know many people, take someone with you whose job is to introduce you to potential voters. It is easier to break the ice if that person walks up to a stranger and says “Have you met (*candidate name*) who is running for...? Then let them introduce you, shake hands, smile and give your “elevator speech”.

5. Phone Banking

- The County Party will be happy to offer training sessions for your volunteers.
- Prepare your phone banking scripts so that the call is brief and specific. Ask the voter if they plan to vote and if they will support you as a candidate. Since most people now screen calls, have a 10-15 sec. answering machine version. That answering machine message may be your only “touch” with that voter. Make it count.
- If you can afford it, use recorded messages near election day to remind voters to vote for you.
- Use phone banking to ask if the voter needs a ride, inform them of early absentee voting, new location of a polling place, upcoming candidate events.

6. Canvassing

- Get canvassers out starting in September for a November election once the weather cools a bit. Use Saturday and Sunday afternoons as much as possible. Canvassers should plan to knock on every door on their list. Don’t let a lack of cars in the driveway, fences or front decorative gates discourage knocking on the door to try to make a connection.
- When you or a canvasser talks to a potential voter, make sure that the campaign message comes through loud and clear. Hand them the palm card/door hanger as you or your canvassers talk about your campaign message. This gives the voter something to remind them about you.
- Canvassers needs to be very enthusiastic in presenting the information in their script. More than one talking point from the candidate’s platform should be available on the script if needed. The canvassers should pay attention to the voter’s interest. If one topic doesn’t seem to engage them, try another.
- Leave a door hanger if no one answers.
- When canvassing, have extra literature and yard signs in the car to give to interested voters.
- Canvassing Safety Tips:
 - ✓ Always canvass in pairs, never go alone. Even if you and your team member split up and take opposite sides of the street, always remain within sight and earshot.

- ✓ Wear prominent candidate ID. The resident needs to see why you are there before they open the door.
- ✓ Don't canvass after dark.
- ✓ Always stay at the door. Never go inside, even if you know the person. This is a business call.
- ✓ Skip houses that look unsafe or suspicious. Skip houses if there is a "No Trespassing" sign or a "Beware of Dog" sign, take the signs seriously.
- ✓ If you feel unsafe, leave immediately.
- ✓ Don't get into arguments with opponents. If they don't agree with you, thank them for their time and move on.
- ✓ Have Voter Registration forms, candidate literature, signup sheets in hand, preferably on clipboards. Don't fumble to find them.
- ✓ Take advantage of technology: If a house has a doorbell camera, use it to your advantage. Once you ring the bell, stand smiling facing the camera with your literature clearly visible. If no one answers after a few seconds, use your 27/9/3 speech to engage the voter who may not be home or is unwilling to open the door.

7. Media/Communications

Setting up your media requires careful thought and planning so that you get maximum name recognition.

- When you create campaign materials, websites, social media pages, email address, etc., use your name **EXACTLY** as you listed it as the Ballot Name on the Candidate Filing form. You want voters to be able to find your name on their ballot. You do not want to confuse them.
- Keep your campaign "name" simple so that voters remember you. Ex. "Jane Smith for City Council 3".
- Unless there would be confusion on the ballot with a candidate with a similar name, avoid middle names or nicknames unless your name is listed that way on the ballot.
- Launch a website and a social media site such as Facebook, Twitter or other platforms before the formal announcement, if possible, so you can get people to view it right away. During the campaign, it is advisable that your personal social media is private or locked down so that there is no confusion between your personal and official campaign social media presence.
- A campaign messaging strategy is a must. Have substance in your message with clear position statements/platform posted on your website and social media.
- Avoid using generic clichés, platitudes and superficial talking points. Stay focused on your issues and positions.
- Put together an easy-to-read palm card/door hanger with a brief bio and picture on one side and bullet points of your main issues on the other side.
 - ✓ Have a graphic artist help design your logo, yard signs and palm cards that are easy to read and eye catching.
 - ✓ Avoid distracting backgrounds or poor contrast between the background and text content in your literature. Get them printed as soon as you have money.
 - ✓ Your bio tells the voters who you are and lists relevant experiences. Try to tie your life/work experiences to your campaign platform, Ex.: a teacher focusing on education or a health care professional focusing on Medicaid Expansion.
 - ✓ Little things and details matter. For example, if you wear glasses, the picture should not have glare reflecting from your glasses that hides your eyes.

- Develop a good relationship with the press – Newspapers, radio/TV. Get to know local reporters that you can trust.
- Take advantage of free (earned) media – newspaper and radio interviews, coverage of campaign events.
- Send press releases to papers and TV on a regular basis on major issues. Get exposure but don't overdo it.
- Keep press releases concise and focused with one issue per release.
- Use endorsements from high profile supporters in ads and other media.
- Have friends and family prepared to write letters to the editor to all local print media.
- Develop a strong social media presence.
- Use personal and social media networks to get your name out. Name recognition early on is very important.
- Use paid social media such as Facebook ads which are frequently less expensive than traditional media and may have a wider reach.

8. If You Are Elected...

- Be prepared to put in long hours reading documents for meetings, visiting the district, attending events, and hearing from constituents.
- Expect to get calls at all hours from constituents
- Expect to receive criticism for every decision and vote, no matter how important the issue is or how much consensus there is among elected officials. There are some people who will criticize everything! CAVE people! (Citizens Against Virtually Everything)
- Be willing to work constructively with the other elected officials without sacrificing Democratic values and principles.
- Communicate with your constituents frequently through an email newsletter, social media, and in person.
- When talking to the press, carefully think through what you want to say. You will be misquoted sometimes, so try to be clear and concise. Don't treat the press as an enemy.
- Earn the trust of the people who elected you so that they will vote for you next time.

IV. Aiken City and County Sign Ordinances:

A. Aiken City Political Sign Rules for Candidates:

1. Political Yard Signs may not be placed inside the public street right-of-way.
2. Political Signs may not exceed three square feet in Residential, Planned Residential, Limited Business or Limited Professional zoning districts.
3. Political Signs may not exceed 32 square feet in other areas of the city.
4. There is not a restriction on when Political Signs may be erected, but they must be removed within 15 days after the election.
5. If left up, or put within the street right-of-way, the City will remove them and place them behind the Department of Public Safety for the candidate or their representative to reclaim.
6. The right-of-way can usually be defined as being outside a line defined by water meters. Also, a line of utility poles is often a good marker, but less accurate than water meters.
7. In cases where the right-of-way abuts a private wall, fence, or hedge, any political sign must be placed flat against such wall, fence, or hedge.

B. Aiken County Sign Ordinance:

No sign shall be allowed in the public right-of-way, except for the following:

1. Public signs erected by or on behalf of a governmental body;
2. Informational signs of a public agency or utility;
3. Church signs, in accord with State and Federal law;
4. Historical signs and markers in accord with State and Federal law;
5. Emergency signs; and/or
6. Directional signs of a temporary nature not to exceed three (3) square feet in area and twenty-four (24) hours in duration for such events as yard sales, auctions, public gatherings, etc.; provided they are located no closer than five hundred (500) feet apart. (Ord. Na A7-6-12. S 5 6-5 07)

Sign Type	Display Period	Display Intervals	Dimensions	Conditions (Notes)
A-Frame	hours of operation only	off-hours	12 sq. ft.	A
Banner	30 days	6 months	None	B
Posters	30 days	>None	6 sq. ft.	C
Portable	30 days	4 months	32 sq. ft.	D
Inflatable	30 days	1 year	None	E
Pennants	30 days	6 months	None	B
Identification	90 days, or project completion	None	100 sq. ft.	F
Political	30 days prior to election	Not Applicable	32 sq. ft.	C/G
Real Estate "For Sale"	N/A	N/A	32 sq ft	H

C. Temporary Sign Regulations:

- A. A-Frame signs, where located on sidewalks, shall be located in such a manner as not to obstruct pedestrian movement.
- B. Banners and pennants shall be properly secured and maintained at all times, and shall not interfere with pedestrian or vehicular movement.
- C. Posters shall not be allowed on any telephone or power poles or any street right-of-way, and shall be placed no closer than five (5) feet from a street or curb.
- D. Portable signs shall be limited to one per establishment, shall have no colored or flashing lights, shall not be wired so as to obstruct or hinder pedestrian or vehicular traffic or pose any potential for such hindrance (i.e. exposed drop cord), shall not exceed six (6) feet in height, shall be anchored in accord with the Building Code, and shall not be converted to a permanent sign.
- E. Inflatable signs shall be properly anchored and shall not interfere with airport traffic. F- Temporary subdivision and work-under-construction identification signs shall adhere to the development standards of section 24-6.8.
- F. Political signs shall be removed within seven (7) days following the election.
- G. One "For Sale" sign is allowed on each road frontage of the property for sale.

V. From the South Carolina Democratic Party Candidate Toolkit, the questions below are designed to help you write your campaign plan.

- What is the type of election and what are the rules?
- What are the characteristics of the district?

- What are the characteristics of the voters?
- How many people (not just voters) live in your district?
- How many of these people are registered to vote in this election?
- What has happened in past elections?
- What percentage of these voters do you expect to vote in this election?
- How many expected voters is this in real numbers?
- How many candidates will be running for this position?
- How many of these candidates could be considered serious?
- If the election were held today, what percentage of the vote do you think each candidate would receive?
- What percentage of the votes cast will be needed to win?
- How many votes cast in real numbers are needed to win?
- On average, how many voters live in one household?
- Do these voters living in the same household all tend to vote for the same candidate?
- If they do tend to vote for the same candidate, how many households will you need to receive the support from to guarantee victory?
- If you talk to ten average voters, how many can you persuade to vote for you?
- How many households will you need to communicate with for your message to reach enough voters to achieve victory?
- What are the main factors affecting this election?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of you as a candidate?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of all the viable opponents?

VI. Candidate Qualifications – See the SCDP Candidate Toolkit for specific offices:

Each elected office in South Carolina has specific statutory qualifications that a candidate must meet to be eligible to run. It is worth understanding that there are many types of offices you can run for as a citizen of South Carolina. These range from local offices, including school boards, municipal offices, and county offices, to federal offices such as the United States Senate.

The specific qualifications for each can vary widely. Qualifications for municipal offices may vary by ordinance. Check with your municipal or county election commission for specific qualifications. County governments also vary widely by county. Not all counties elect all the typical positions within county government. Be sure to check the local details for your municipality or county if you're thinking around running for a local office.

The qualifications for state office holders specify that no person may be popularly elected to and serve in any office in the State unless **he/she is registered to vote** in the geographical area represented by the office (S.C. Constitution, Article VI, Section 1). Also for state offices, a person convicted of **a felony or an offense against the election laws is not qualified** to file for or hold office, unless it has been fifteen years since the completion of the sentence for the crime or unless the person has been pardoned (S.C. Constitution, Article VI, Section 1). This does not apply to federal offices.

Qualifications for federal office are determined by the United States Constitution. Some individuals may be restricted from running for public office by the federal Hatch Act. The Act applies to federal employees and others receiving federal funds and restricts their participation in campaigns for partisan offices. For detailed information regarding the Hatch Act, visit the website of the U.S. Office of Special Counsel.

Candidate qualifications for all offices are determined at the time of the election and not at the time of filing or nomination. A candidate for the state Senate or House **must be a resident** of the district at the time of filing.

VII. Contribution Limits

A. Contribution Limits for State Candidates:

Candidates may not accept more than the following amounts from individuals during an election cycle: \$3,500 for statewide candidates or \$1,000 for state or local candidates. These figures are based on a cumulative total for the election cycle.

B. Contribution Limits for Federal Candidates:

For an individual the 2022 limit is \$2900. The limits are cumulative for an election cycle, though they apply separately to primary and general election campaigns only if a candidate has opposition in a primary campaign. For clarification, here is the language directly from the South Carolina Ethics Commission: “[T]he contribution limits under Sections 8-13-1314 and 8-13-1316 apply only to elections for each primary, runoff, or special election in which a candidate has opposition and for each general election. If the candidate remains unopposed during an election cycle, one contribution limit shall apply.”