

September Meeting Summary: The Blue Army Training Day

9-27-2025 at the IBEW Local 270

Sissy Byram and Darryl Bonner kicked off the day with their experiences as Campaign Managers. Some of their top points were:

- The Campaign Manager is there to keep everything on track and help set priorities. While the candidate is out talking to people the campaign manager is making sure everything stays organized and on track. It works best for the campaign manager to go to events with the candidate to take care of the details while the candidate is making connections with voters.
- Scheduling is an important task to make sure the candidate can focus on the priorities. Not all invitations have a payoff for the candidate and it's important to help them manage their personal energy and capabilities.
- A good campaign manager should have a strong connection with the candidate. It's important to give them honest feedback and advice - and be able to nudge back to protect a budget. The candidate should pick their team, and especially the campaign manager, for their ability to speak honestly.
- The campaign manager should be someone who is OK with learning on the job and adjusting as the situations unfold. They recommend the campaign manager start their work as soon as possible as there are steps in the process that will take more time and require additional work to accomplish. It's also important to begin raising money as early as possible – “it's shocking how much money is needed.”
- The campaign manager, and the candidate, should pick the rest of the team for their varied skills and perspectives. Usually 3-4 people who both respect and value is enough for the core team. An ideal team is the campaign manager, the treasurer, a



social media specialist (which can be outsourced to a professional company), and a volunteer coordinator. Other valuable team members are someone to keep the website fresh and compelling. If the candidate wants to use TikTok there is also a lot of original content that must be produced and will require someone who is good creating content. Instagram and Facebook were good for the demographics Sissy and Darryl were trying to target. A note about Facebook is to start early if they want to run ads – there are extra verification steps that can take a lot of time.

Anne Backus and Ebony Capshaw talked about the Treasurer role.

- Having a treasurer is a requirement of the state and requires paperwork to be filed in order to register as a candidate's treasurer. The primary duties of the treasurer are to take checks, make deposits, and do reports. While that sounds straightforward, there are tracking requirements in order to do the reports, which are exacting.
- When money comes in from events that is not properly attributed, the treasurer is usually the one to track down the contributor and get the rest of the information. The same is true when an individual contributes more than is allowed and the money needs to be returned. Act Blue is very helpful as it tracks the contributions automatically. In-kind donations, for instance of a venue that normally rents out, also needs to be tracked and counts toward the limits. The candidate, on the other hand, can spend whatever they want on their campaign, as long as the money is accurately reported.
- The reports with the state can be done online. With the first financial report the state provides a login and code – Anne and Ebony strongly recommend keeping that information in a place you will remember as you will need it later. All the dates to file reports are available through the Election Commission.
- There are some tricky details to figure out, such as filing reports for Oak Ridge races (with the dual counties) depends on where you actually live. Opening a bank account can also be tricky and usually requires a back-and-forth process between the bank and the state to supply the bank account number to the state and the state number to the bank. They recommend starting the process with the bank. Not all banks can work with candidates; however, TN Bank, Pinnacle, and Truist are familiar with campaign accounts.
- They mentioned that finding a treasurer can sometimes be difficult. It is possible to pay someone to be the treasurer, or the candidate can be their own treasurer. All the materials, including the business cards, flyers, etc. have the treasurer's name, which has given pause to individuals in the past.

- Some treasurers also take on other roles in the team, such as doing fundraisers or managing volunteers. As a note they mentioned that someone who loves doing event planning is a real gift to the campaign.

Anne, Ebony, Sissy, Darryl, and David Miller answered questions and shared other general campaign learning.

- The team together usually figures out what events and activities are needed as a foundation; however, you should expect other opportunities to arise during the campaign. They agreed that house parties have the biggest return for the time and energy investment for the contributions, volunteer recruiting, and making advocates for the candidate. Fundraisers are also critical to bring in money and for name recognition. Community events, where the candidate is out in public with the Tee-shirt is good for building name recognition but takes an enormous amount of time and there is no controlling for the audience who will see the candidate.
- There was a question about the amount of money needed to run. The amount depends largely on the type of race and how competitive it is. For State House a campaign could run from \$60,000-\$100,000. However, for County Commissioner, School Board, City Council the campaign can usually be run for \$10,000 to \$15,000. Direct mail is important but expensive, as are yard signs.
- Tennessee is a non-voting state, and a lot of effort must be put into getting out the vote. Vote Builder is a good tool that can be set-up through the county or through the state directly. The candidate, and their team, can use Vote Builder to identify contacts based on the demographics and voting history they want to target.

Gloria Johnson spoke to us at lunchtime.

She focuses on phone calls, house parties, and knocking doors in her campaigns. She has found that events are a bit of a crapshoot, with a lot of time for possibly no payoff.

She reminded us that it's not about the elected person – rather it is all about their constituents. Her 70,000 constituents are



just as important as the speaker's 70,000 constituents, which helps her persevere in fighting for her people.

Gloria reminded the aspiring candidates in the audience that it is OK to make a mistake – few are unrecoverable – and it's OK to not have all the answers at your fingertips. It is important to get back with people with the answers, however. She has turned people's thinking by following up with a concern or question. If there is a question the canvassers encounter during the day, she likes to get that information asap so she can call the person with the answer still that same day.

Ellen Smith talked with us about her experiences running for City Council. The City Council is non-partisan, and they like it that way – it lets them focus on the city's issues. The Council is much more about potholes and local issues – and not so much about healthcare and social equity. Potholes don't know if they are Republicans or Democrats.

Ellen had specific advice for those running.

- She recommended being clear about why you are running for office, whether it be something you want to change, improve, start, preserve, or stop. Having clarity in yourself helps keep you going through the hard times and helps you stay on course after you get elected. It is also important to have community allies and endorsements are useful.
- It is important to have a good knowledge of what the position does. In a way, you are applying for a job, and just with a job interview you should know what is expected and the scope of your work. She recommends attending meetings, becoming acquainted with others on the Council. It is helpful to have a bit of friendship created before you take office.
- Even if you know you are in the minority on an issue, your presence in government will affect the wording on items and will help others see a different perspective. The Council likes to speak with one voice once the decision is made. It is important to speak up.
- It is important to plan ahead and figure out the overall campaign schedule.
- Name recognition is critical, but it is often hard for people to advertise themselves. Self-promotion is a learned behavior – and oddly most politicians are actually introverts.
- Branding is very important. And when you purchase campaign materials it is good to think of the next election as well as this one so you can design signs and collateral that can be reused for your reelection.

- She doesn't close bank accounts between campaigns. It makes it easier to get going the next time, and she can hold leftover funds in that account as start-up money for the next campaign.

Anne Backus contributed to the previous discussions; however, she had an important message for the candidates in the room. Be open to enjoying the process. She was surprised at the amount of support that poured her direction, in work, money, and emotional support.

David Miller additionally advised the audience to not let the perfect be the enemy of the good. He told us his experience with Vote Builder and beginning with a targeted list. However, when he was in a neighborhood it seemed strange to walk by the houses of potential voters, so he switched to knocking on every door. Sometimes he was pleasantly surprised by the reception.

The party helped David design his materials and sent out postcards on his behalf. Their help was very valuable.

His upcoming campaign against Randy McNally (if he runs again) will likely be well over \$100,000. He asked for our support in fundraising and helping his campaign with their fundraisers. Randy McNally has over \$650,000 in his campaign account for the upcoming campaign – and will be able to transfer that money to the new candidate if he does not run again.