



TDP Candidate Guide: Part 2 – Getting Started

Write a Campaign Plan

- Your campaign plan will take you from Day 1 of your campaign to Election Day. The TDP will be happy to supply you with a sample campaign plan; yours will have several components, including:
 - a. A Strategy Memo, which will detail how you'll win and which voters you'll need to target;
 - b. A Campaign Budget;
 - c. A Fundraising Plan, which will be a detailed roadmap to raising all of the money you'll need to meet your budget;
 - d. An Organizational Chart, which will lay out which staff and volunteers are responsible for which activities during the campaign;
 - e. A Paid Media Plan, which will detail all of your direct mail, television (if applicable), and radio;
 - f. An Earned Media Plan, which will map out your plan to draw press to your events and get your face on the news;
 - g. And finally, a Field Plan, which includes information on your door knocking, phone banking and other face-to-face contact with voters.
- If your budget permits, you should start your campaign by taking a benchmark poll. This early poll provides a measurement of your starting point and will give you a good assessment of where you are, and how far you have to go.

Campaign Logistics

- Obtain a mailing address, a phone number, and an e-mail address that will be specific to your campaign.
 - a. Whether you open a full-fledged campaign headquarters or just have a P.O. Box and a dedicated phone number, your supporters need a way to contact your campaign.
 - b. Hotmail, Google and Yahoo all offer free e-mail addresses; just remember to keep it simple (i.e., bobfortexas@gmail.com).
 - c. Using your home or work address, phone number or e-mail address is a bad idea. It's easy for things to get lost in the shuffle, and can raise compliance issues.
 - d. Make sure someone checks the mail and voicemail frequently.
- Develop a campaign website.
 - a. You can register a domain name relatively inexpensively through websites like www.register.com or www.godaddy.com.
 - b. You'll need to find someone to host your site, and identify someone to be responsible for editing and updating content. Make sure this is a responsible staff person or volunteer whom you trust; many people will "meet" you for the first time on your website.
 - c. Don't forget to include Contribution and Volunteer links.
 - d. The TDP can provide with you information on professional firms to develop and manage your website.**

Compliance

- Make sure you understand the compliance laws that apply to your race **before you begin accepting contributions**. In any race, there are specific laws governing the acceptance and reporting of contributions, and you must understand them before you begin fundraising or developing any candidate communications. Contact your appropriate authority for additional information:
 - **Federal candidates** – Federal Election Commission (FEC) www.fec.gov
 - **Non-Federal candidates** – Texas Ethics Commission (TEC) www.ethics.state.tx.us/index.html
- The TDP can provide you with information on professionals who can handle your compliance or assist you in training compliance staff.
- Compliance violations are costly and embarrassing to your campaign; it is critical that you comply with applicable state, federal and county laws from the first day of your campaign.
- Open a separate bank account, to be used solely for your campaign, and set up procedures for handling transactions. (see “Best Practices: Campaign Finance” for more information).
- **Disclaimers:** Candidates are required by law to include a disclaimer on most campaign communications (i.e. – literature, websites, signs, fundraising letters, tv and radio ads, robo calls, etc.).
 - State candidates have different regulations than Federal candidates.
 - Disclaimers are generally located at the bottom of the page of written communications and at the beginning or end of oral communications.
 - There are additional rules about when and where the campaign address and name of the campaign Treasurer must appear on the communication.
 - Check with your appropriate authority (TEC or FEC) for guidelines on disclosure information and size and placement requirements.
 - If you are doing tv, radio, or automated calls, additional disclaimer requirements may be required by the Federal Communication Commission <http://www.fcc.gov/mb/policy/political/> and the Public Utilities Commission <http://www.puc.state.tx.us>.

Fundraising

- Begin developing a finance plan (see “Best Practices: Campaign Fundraising” for more information).
 - a. Start by soliciting friends, family, and colleagues; you should aggressively solicit your own personal contacts (and you should expect to be able to raise 30% of your overall goal from these contacts) before you turn to other donors.
 - b. Some candidates may want to hire finance consultants; the TDP can provide you with contact information on professionals, or assist you with training your staff to support your fundraising efforts.
 - c. According to Dr. Richard Murray, professor of Public Policy at the University of Houston, “a new candidate’s ‘first primary’ in American politics is raising the money.”

Develop a Communication Strategy and Message

- See “Best Practices: Message” for more details.
- Consider getting professional message training; this will make a big difference in your media appearances during the campaign.
- Write – and practice, practice, practice – your stump speech. You’ll need versions of several different lengths for different events. Make sure your speech conveys the basics of your race: who you are; why you’re running, how you can win; and what you’re going to do when you’re elected.
- Launch your campaign with a message blitz
 - a. Hold a press conference
 - b. Send an introductory e-mail to supporters and potential supporters
 - c. Roll out a list of prominent supporters
 - d. Continue regularly attending Democratic and community events

Campaign Branding

- You should quickly establish a graphic “look” for your campaign. This can center around your campaign logo, which you’ll want to use on yard signs, your direct mail, your website, your stationary, etc. It can be worth investing in a professionally done logo.
- Don’t forget to have some simple candidate photos taken of you and your family for campaign use.
- Print literature
 - a. Always provide a way (preferably multiple ways) for voters to contact your campaign on all of your printed materials.
 - b. Keep it simple. Provide basic info about who you are, why you are running, what you plan to do if elected and how to find out more information about your campaign.
 - c. Unless you are printing literature in house, it is a good idea to make sure you are using an authorized union printer.
- Develop a comprehensive bio for use in the campaign.

Manage Your Data

- Contact the TDP to set up a VAN account. The VAN is the Texas Democratic Party’s online voter file system. VAN includes all registered voters with demographics, phone numbers, voting history and targeting information. You may also use the VAN to track your supporters and volunteers. Go to <http://www.txdemocrats.org/resources/van/> for more information.
- You’ll also need to set up a database to track financial data, including contributions, expenditures, and potential donors. The TDP can provide a list of Democratic vendors who provide this type of software.
- Make sure that information can be easily transferred between these databases so that you always have updated information on your supporters.

Building Your Team

- Get professional help

- a. Volunteers are great, but you will also want to have campaign professionals assisting you with your campaign, particularly when it comes to research, communications, strategy, and fundraising.
 - b. Consultants versus Staff: Consultants may have more experience, but they will likely have multiple clients and their attention may be divided. Talk to potential consultants about this issue up front. It will be up to you to find the right balance of paid staff and consultants on your campaign, but the TDP can provide you with a list of Democratic consultants you may wish to contact.
 - c. You should ask a consultant to provide samples of his or her work, a list of current and former clients, and a proposal with a cost estimate designed specifically for your campaign. You should send RFPs (Requests for Proposal) to several consultants so that you may compare their services and costs. Once you have chosen your preferred consultants and vendors, get signed contracts outlining the services that will be provided.
- Set up a strategy inner circle. **This should be a very small group.** Who will help you vet your mail pieces? Who will participate in poll calls? Who will assist you in making budget decisions?
 - Determine the roles and responsibilities you will need staff to fulfill and then hire accordingly.
 - a. The TDP maintains a Resume Bank of Democratic job seekers.
 - b. Democratic GAIN is another good resource for locating staff. Check them out online at www.democraticgain.org.
 - c. Other Democratic-leaning organizations (particularly those who make endorsements) conduct trainings and place staff on campaigns. If you have been endorsed by an organization, ask if they can help you locate (or even pay for) well-trained staff.
 - d. Check references – Just because someone has an extensive resume doesn't mean they will be the right fit for your campaign. Contact references and former employers before scheduling an interview.