



# Candidate Handbook

Nebraska Democratic Party

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# Nebraska Democratic Party Organization

## Officers

Elected every 4 years at the State Convention, all leadership positions in the party are unpaid, volunteer positions that require travel, fundraising, candidate recruitment and party-building responsibilities. With the exception of DNC Committeepeople, the elections for the executive committee are held during midterm years. The election happens in the summer and the officers start their terms at the first State Central Committee meeting after the November election. DNC Committee People are elected at the State Convention in Presidential Years for a four-year term. The election happens in the summer and the Committeepeople start their terms as soon as the National Convention is over.

### **Chair:**

The Chair serves as a member of the Democratic National Committee (DNC) and the Association of State Democratic Committees (ASDC).

The State Chair directs the actions of the staff and is the face of the party. The chair schedules and facilitates meetings. "The State Chair is the Executive officer of the State Party, and shall be elected by accredited delegates assembled in the State Convention. The State Chair shall carry out all policies and programs of the State Party as determined by the State Convention, the State Central Committee, and/or the State Executive Committee. The State Chair shall also do everything to initiate, to organize and/or promote development of the state Party at every level throughout the State, and shall perform all other such duties as are prescribed elsewhere in this Constitution and/or in the Bylaws of the Nebraska Democratic Party." <sup>1</sup>

### **Vice Chairs:**

"The two Vice Chairs shall be elected by the accredited delegates assembled in the State Convention. The Vice Chair shall be of a different gender identity from that of the State Chair and shall temporarily assume the duties of the State Chair in the event of a vacancy in that office. The Vice Chairs of County Parties shall temporarily assume the

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<sup>1</sup> Nebraska Democratic Party, 2020, Section 5.B.1

duties of the State Chair in the event of a vacancy in both the offices of State Chair and First Associate Chair. Both Vice Chairs shall assist the Chair in carrying out the functions and duties of the Chair's office.”<sup>2</sup>

**Vice Chair:** Ron Kaminski

\*The Vice Chair also serves as a member of the DNC and the ASDC

**DNC Committeewoman:** Charlene Ligon

**DNC Committeeman:** Sean Flowerday

They are elected at the State Convention, in Presidential Years, for a four-year term. The election happens in the summer and the Committee People start their terms as soon as the National Convention is over. They also serve as members of the DNC.

“The National Committeeman and National Committeewoman shall be elected by the accredited delegates assembled in the State Convention each presidential election year for a four-year term. The National Committee representatives shall reflect the State Party philosophy to the National Committee, shall act as liaisons between the State and National Parties, shall use their public visibility to the best advantage and aid of the State Party and in soliciting financial support for it, and shall perform all other duties as are prescribed by the Nebraska Democratic Party, and by the Bylaws and procedures of the Democratic National Committee.”<sup>3</sup>

**Treasurer:** Ted Kessler

“The State Treasurer shall be nominated by the State Chair and be confirmed by the State Central Committee. The State Treasurer shall act as custodian of all party monies and shall be responsible for all federal and state reporting procedures. In conjunction with the Finance Committee, the State Treasurer shall assist the State Chair, State Central Committee, and State Executive Committee in the preparation of an annual

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<sup>2</sup> Nebraska Democratic Party, 2020, Section 5.B.2

<sup>3</sup> Nebraska Democratic Party, 2020, Section 5.B.3

budget, in periodic budget revisions, and to insure the financial stability of the Democratic Party.”<sup>4</sup>

**Secretary:** Stephanie Matejka

“The State Secretary shall be nominated by the State Chair and confirmed by the State Central Committee. The State Secretary shall be responsible for transcribing and disseminating the official record of all Party business, whether before the State Convention, the State Central Committee, or the State Executive Committee.”<sup>5</sup>

**Vice Chair of County Parties:** Ryan Griffin

The Vice Chair of County Parties runs the county chair meetings at the SCC and is elected at the State Convention. The Vice Chair of County Parties is also responsible for helping build new county parties and be a liaison between existing county parties and the State Party.

## Staff

The NDP staff work every single day to help elect Democrats and build the party infrastructure. Our staff, under the current leadership team, formed a union with IBEW. Staff positions are protected under a union contract and are no longer tied to a particular elected party officer.

**Executive Director:** Precious McKesson, [precious@nebraskademocrats.org](mailto:precious@nebraskademocrats.org)

**Communications Director:** Jose Flores Jr., [jose@nebraskademocrats.org](mailto:jose@nebraskademocrats.org)

Manages website, social media and party emails. Handles press releases and media interview requests.

**Finance Director:**

Works closely with the finance committee to raise money for the party.

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<sup>4</sup> Nebraska Democratic Party, 2020, Section 5.B.4

<sup>5</sup> Nebraska Democratic Party, 2020, Section 5.B.5

**Data and Field Director:** Ron Rivera, ronr@nebraskademocrats.org  
VAN access, data and field.

**Outreach Director:** Gina Frank, gina@nebraskademocrats.org  
Volunteers, Block Captains, County Chairs, Grassroots activism and outreach.

**Party Affairs Coordinator: Jack Schiewe**  
SCC, Listservs, Monthly Donors, Office Management, Miscellaneous Tasks.

## **NDP Mission Statement**

Our state's greatest strength is our people: honest, hard-working people from all walks of life. We believe in growing the good life for ALL Nebraskans, not just for a few at the top.

At the Nebraska Democratic Party, we want to do well for ourselves and our families -- and do our part for our communities, state, and country. We respect the dignity of every person--no matter who you are, what you look like or where you come from.

Each of us has something valuable to contribute to our state. When Nebraskans work together, we can accomplish anything. Democrats fight every day to move our state forward and make our government and our economy work for every Nebraskan--not just powerful special interests.

The Nebraska Democratic Party is made up of volunteers and staff to elect Democrats across our state. We are working hard to build our Party and elect Democrats across our great state.

<https://nebraskademocrats.org/party-platform/>

## What the NDP can help you with

- Voter file access
- Voter file training
- Vendor list access
- Candidate training
- Scheduled email blast
- Shared resources access
- Bulk mail permit
- May assist with voter outreach
- May invite you to participate in events
- Coordinated Campaign Updates

## What your County Party might do

- Welcome you to their fair booth
- Make phone calls on your behalf
- May invite you to events or monthly meetings
- Invite you to fundraisers
- Have you speak at a monthly meeting
- Be a great source for volunteers
- May donate to your campaign
- May offer assistance
- May publish a party-specific voter's guide

# Introduction

Congratulations! You've decided to run for office or are considering a run for office. Start by surrounding yourself with people who support you and believe in you, but who also challenge you.

We have provided you with the following information to assist you in organizing your thoughts about all that is involved with running for office. We hope these questions will help you to better frame if and how you would like to run your campaign and what is involved with being a candidate.

## Are You Ready to Run?

It is important to make sure that you have thought everything through before you announce that you have decided to run for political office. We encourage you to write down your answers as you move through the list to help you concentrate on what areas you might need to focus on prior to running.

Here are some considerations:

- **Research the elected office.** Make sure you understand the office and its requirements. Are there residency requirements? Why do you feel that you are qualified to run for this particular office? Do you know how long your term will be and the time commitment involved? How many votes will you need to win this race and what will be involved in garnering those votes?
- **Check the Secretary of State (SoS) or County website for any filing fees.** Make sure you contact your county clerk or secretary of state for proper protocol for running for office. There may be a fee associated with the office and/or paperwork on what needs to be submitted by the filing date. Not following up with this may suspend your campaign or not allow you to run.
- **Research your district.** Gather as much information on the area you will be running in as well as on the voters who live in that area. What is the size of the district in which you will be running? Do you have a clear understanding of the terrain where you will be walking during your campaign? Will you need help canvassing? Will the area be easily walked for canvassing or will you need to transport your workers? Has the population in this area changed within the last decade? How does this area lean politically and who are the important elected officials in that area that can help to influence your campaign? It's also very important to understand how the voters in this area get their information and that



can vary based on access to broadband, rural vs urban, demographics and more. Learn your local media outlets and who your key contacts may be.

- **Discuss your intentions with your family and close friends.** Have you discussed your intentions to run for office with your spouse or partner? How about your closest friends and your employer? What do they think about you running for political office and do they have any concerns that need to be addressed? Do you have confidence that you can balance all of your family and personal responsibilities? Is there potential that the campaign may create conflicts in any area of your personal or professional life?
- **Research the time commitment needed.** Seriously consider how much of a time commitment is required to run an effective campaign. Will you need to take a leave of absence or time off from your job? Will this have any effect on your work or life balance? How many hours per week will you be able to set aside for campaigning such as knocking on doors, making calls and raising funds? Is the political office you're seeking a full or part-time position and have you made time to learn more about the time commitment involved with that elected office?
- **Review your finances.** Are you current with your local, state, and federal taxes because if you are not, it may very well show up on a campaign mailer from your opponent? Do you have any outstanding parking tickets or other types of fines that are owed to the local, state, or federal government? Do you have the ability to spend any of your personal finances on your race, if needed? How much are you willing to spend? Do you know how much was spent by previous candidates for this office? Will you be willing to ask your family, friends and others to donate to your campaign?

## Candidate Checklist

Congratulations on running for office! Now that you have declared, here are some things that you will need to prepare before the election year begins. We are here to help you get through the finish line. We find that candidates who have these pieces in place by Feb. 15, 2024, are set up for success in their campaign:

- Register the campaign with the proper state or county commission
- Register campaign with NADC
- Create logo

- Headshots (straight face to camera, family photo, and action shot)
- Launch campaign website (that includes a campaign email address)
- Launch social media pages (Twitter and Facebook minimum / Instagram and TikTok)
- Set up an internal system for event tracking and file sharing (e.g. Google Drive)
- Set up bank accounts (including a treasurer)
- Set up an ActBlue account
- Sign NDP mou for enhanced VAN/Votebuilder access (with enhanced access you get vote models, scores, voter histories, and a data overview of your state legislative district completed by data experts)
- Printed Palm card
- Printed Biz card
- Name tag
- Campaign Prospectus ([sample here](#))
- Campaign plan that includes at a minimum: win number, targets identified, district overview (NDP has these for candidates using enhanced VAN), canvass monthly goals, mail program outline, and fundraising goals ([sample here](#)) that includes at least 5 hours a week on-call time
- At least 1k doors knocked to get basic info from voters on what they care about and to show they are focused to win
- Kitchen cabinet of trusted advisors/mentors that you can tap into for advice, troubleshooting, support
- Calls to current elected officials, party officials, and major community stakeholders to let them know you are running, ask for contributions, ask for split fundraising email, etc.
- Attend training for ballot campaign messaging
- Attend at least two of the NDP or partner group core trainings

## Getting Started

### Clear out your social media.

Go through all of your social media. Is there anything you might not want out in public that could be used against you or is a private issue for your family? Be sure to do a full sweep of your personal accounts. Then set up new accounts for your campaign. Don't take a selfie for your photo, have a professional or trusted friend take the photo for your sites. Make your personal accounts private. After you set up your campaign accounts,

be sure to get them certified. Social media sites have step-by-step instructions on how to do this. You cannot do any social media ads until you are certified so do not wait until the last minute to do this. It can take a bit of time to be approved.

## **Identify Key Supporters**

Successful candidates have great teams in place to offer support. You need to brainstorm who you know that can assist you in the best way possible. Upon mulling this over, you may think of people who are able to fill more than one role. The more people you have actively involved in your campaign results in less work for you and more time for you to do the two most important things needed which is getting votes and raising money.

- **Day-to-Day Operations:** A big-budget campaign hires a Campaign manager and tasks them with running the day-to-day operations. Smaller campaigns or those with tight budgets usually rely on friends and family members. They may assist with your schedule, help find opportunities for you to attend, seek data on behalf of your campaign, help with correspondence such as thank you notes, run campaign-related errands, and meet with supporters or volunteers on your behalf when you are not available.
- **Finance Chair or Treasurer:** This person should have experience with finances and have the ability to balance a checkbook. This can be a spouse, relative or close friend. It is a bonus if this person is also enthusiastic about fundraising and will lead your finance committee, should you form such a committee. A description of job responsibilities is included in this manual on the Resources page.
- **Finance Committee:** The people on this committee need to have a large network of contacts and have the ability to help you raise money. Every member of this committee should be willing to donate their own money to your campaign and they should be able to reach out to others in their network and ask them to also donate. These members are usually previous candidates, current officeholders, community leaders or business owners.
- **Communications / Social Media:** This person helps you create press releases, email blasts, spell checks what you write, assists you with any speeches and can

help you manage your social media usually through a platform such as HootSuite. Try to find someone in your network that may have communications, marketing or public relations experience. Teachers, non-profit staff and those who have worked in journalism can all be good candidates for this role.

- **Surrogates or Proxies:** Who do you know that can speak about your campaign to others? A surrogate/proxy must have the ability to represent you when you're not around. Select people that are articulate and comfortable talking to voters and would be able to speak to area groups on your behalf, when needed. This is a great opportunity to recruit a retired professional such as a doctor, teacher or well-known community leader and bring them on to your team.
- **Core Volunteers:** Core volunteers are the people who want to be a part of your team and will try to help in any way that they can. Good volunteers will be the foundation for your campaign. They will help make calls, knock doors, attend events, write postcards, hold signs for visibility and a long list of other tasks that will keep your campaign moving forward. Look to your friends, young volunteers and retired seniors to be your best bet for your volunteer base. The importance of these volunteers cannot be overstated.

There is a long list of additional tools that will be helpful in your goal to run a great campaign. Listed below are some of the basics that you can check off your list to make sure things run smoothly.

### **Calculating Your Win Number**

As a candidate, it is a priority to know your "win number." You will be asked that question repeatedly as you move your campaign forward, but more importantly, you need to know this number as part of your strategy to win your race. The most basic way to explain your potential win number is the estimated number of votes that you need to win your election in a two-person race which should be 50% of the votes plus 1.

You owe it to your campaign to take it one step further because you will need to predict the number of votes that will be cast in a future cycle under uncertain conditions. There are several methods you can use, but it cannot be overstressed that doing this correctly is paramount to your campaign success.

The reasoning behind having a clear understanding of your win number is knowing the true size of your election. Will there be 1,000 or 100,000 people voting in your race?

The size of your race will also play a role in how you will run your campaign. Once you have your win number, you can better decide how you will reach your voters, the amount of money you will need to raise for your budget to be effective, what marketing tools you will need and the time commitment that will be needed to win.

**1) Win by turnout** –Using this method requires that you research the past several elections of your race. Look at the turnout percentages and research the total number of registered voters who were eligible to vote plus the number of voters who actually voted in each election.

You should know when using this method that you may have different levels of accuracy in your final numbers. This is because sometimes the data only reflects the entire county and not the specific office. Votebuilder history can often give you stronger data, if there is a voter history on record. With that data combined, you can make good estimates of who turned out in past elections.

Now you have a foundation using the past turnouts and the next step is to figure out if past candidates ran unopposed? What were other circumstances that may have affected voter turnout? Was it a presidential year? Was there a pandemic? Don't do an average of the turnouts because each cycle is different. This is where you must make an educated guess as to your expected turnout. Use percentages instead of specific numbers. Once you figure out what percentage you will need, you will multiply the number of registered voters by this percentage. For example, if the average turnout is 40% and the number of registered voters is 10,000, that means approximately 4,000 people will vote. Many people will tell you 50%+1 but there is much to be said about having a margin of safety. 53% is a good goal for you to strive for.

**2) Win by results** –Using this method starts with researching the results of the past elections in your specific race. How many people voted in your race? As is discussed in the turnout calculation, you need to look at the individual circumstances of each race in order to figure out if you can successfully predict your win number. A great way to really

firm up your numbers is to use method #1 and compare your numbers with method #2. If they are far apart, why is that so?

## **Past Elections**

You can gain important information when you take a hard look at the available information from past elections. Do you have the ability to reach out to previous candidates? What were the results of their campaign for office? How many voters turned out when they ran? When you combine this information with your “win number” formula, you can easily predict your turnout for your campaign. As you plan your strategy, this information will help you figure out what worked for previous campaigns and what you will need to do differently for the best results leading up to election day.

## **Your Voters**

Canvassing can be overwhelming and it can be hard to know where to start.

The best way to start is to break down your voters into manageable groups. It's like eating an elephant. You will do it one bite at a time. You start with an accurate list of possible voters in your area and you can do this through your Votebuilder. You will likely have others reach out to you with lists they feel will work better for you, but Votebuilder has all of the information you will need to run solid lists that are accurate. As you run your lists, the questions you will want to ask yourself is what political parties will need to be tapped? What is the demographic composition of those voters? You can track everything from income, education, professions, ethnicity, religion, age, gender and voting record. Become familiar with where your voters shop, work and play. If a big election, what percentage of your voters live in urban areas vs rural areas? Do you have mostly single-family homes or apartments as you will likely need to tweak your strategy if the apartments don't allow canvassing. When dealing with older voters, their priorities when it comes to issues such as school funding will likely be different than young families with children. By determining the answers to these questions, you can better target your messaging to your voters for campaign success.

## **Campaign Resources**

It would be fantastic if you could shake the hand of every single voter in your district and hand them a palm card. It is not an awesome approach for your campaign budget. This is why it will be so important to identify a smaller target audience to whom you can better share your message. You can do this by deciding how many you will need to communicate with to win your race. This gives you not only more time to concentrate on

what is important, but allows you to conserve your financial resources as well as your energy. This will also allow you the opportunity to reach out to your voters three times which is the magic contact number in order for you to win your campaign.

## **Drafting Your Budget**

Setting a campaign budget can often be one of the least favorite tasks candidates choose to tackle, but it is one of the most important tasks that must be accomplished in order to be successful in your endeavors. The basics are actually much easier than you might think. When you create your campaign budget you will first need to put together an outline of expenses that you believe will be incurred to run an effective campaign. Keep in mind what you believe you can realistically raise in donations. Your outline will include how much you will need for voter contact, overhead costs and marketing. You've got to map out your expenses in order to know how much money you must raise for your campaign.

If you are able to break your budget sheet into weekly segments, you can best track your progress and easily know where you stand financially when asked during your fundraising efforts how much cash on hand you have at that moment. NOTE: A template for your proposed budget is included on the resources page.

Properly setting your campaign budget is an important factor in any successful campaign. It is not unusual for campaigns to plan poorly and find they are without funds when it is crunch time. It is important that you make every effort to plan accordingly and not let small expenditures that are unnecessary eat away at your campaign funds. You or your treasurer/finance director must make sure to properly track all of your funds and manage your budget accordingly. Don't be the candidate who is scrambling after an election to try and pay any remaining bills because they did not properly plan or track finances.

You may be asking yourself, "where do I start?" A good number to keep in mind as you plan on how much you will budget is 70%. 70% of your entire budget needs to go to voter contact. This is not negotiable. That 70% will be used for phone banking, canvassing, mail, social media, etc. Not more than 15% of your budget should be used on staff. That does not include any phonebankers or canvasser you may hire as that is considered voter outreach. This will leave you with 15% for incidental expenses. Remember that the vast majority of the monies you raise should be used in the last 90

days of your campaign cycles. You will find voters are most receptive as the election nears.

### **How Much Will My Campaign Cost?**

Expenses can vary for any campaign depending on the size of the race, resources required, your efforts and staffing. If you are savvy and have the time and energy you will have the ability to save thousands of dollars doing things yourself. From building your own website and doing your own social media to research and fundraising, if you have the skills and time to get things done don't waste campaign funds.

- Federal races in Nebraska average between one million and five million per cycle depending on the area and competition.
- City Council races depend on the size of your community. \$5,000 and under for communities with populations of 50,000 or less is doable but many have spent up to \$25,000 or more. Larger city council races will require \$25,000 and more.
- Mayoral races, like City Council races, depend on the size of your community. \$25,000 for populations less than 50,000 is a doable number but many spend more. 50,000+ population is \$25,000 to \$45,000. Needless to say, the more voters you have the more the costs go up and it is not unusual for larger races to spend \$250,000 to \$500,000 or more.
- County Board races depend on the size of your county. Larger races will cost \$25,000 to \$50,000 on average. The more votes needed, the higher the cost. Smaller board races can easily be run on a budget of \$5,000 or less.
- Legislative races have become more burdensome because of opposition spending. You can run a great campaign on \$50,000 unless dark money comes in to try and get you off track. Recently, legislative races have meant spending \$100,000 to \$150,000 to run a solid campaign. There are many examples of campaigns spending less, but you should be ready to raise solid funds should you be up against a candidate with special interest monies behind their campaigns.
- County Attorney, Sheriff, Treasurer, etc. are all county-wide races and will likely be 40 to 50% more than a candidate running for the county board.

You can get a much stronger grasp on what funds will be required if you include this information in your initial research of prior campaigns. This data is public information that you can find on the NADC website. Be sure to compare multiple years and look to



see if the candidate was an incumbent, running against an incumbent or the candidate(s) were all new to the race.

You need to have a strong understanding of the funds needed. Should you have a great strategy and come out of the gate strong, your campaign may lose steam when you find you don't have the funds to move it forward. It's a balance of research, strategy and implementation.

### **Your Issue Profile**

Why are you running for office? This is a simple question but not terribly easy to answer if you haven't thought it through. A stunningly high number of candidates can't answer this question even as the actual election nears. Be sure to have a brief pitch ready. Don't forget to develop a stump speech based on your candidate profile so you stay on message. You must be able to effectively deliver your message to any voter in less than one minute. If you are unable to do so, you will lose their attention. Keep it memorable and impactful. It is also important to remember that problems are not issues. An issue can be a solution or part of a solution to a problem but a problem is actually a condition that must be addressed. A problem such as school funding issues can be addressed with investing in education as an issue.

### **Messaging**

When you craft your message, remember that it must be persuasive, truthful and credible. Think about your values and what policy is important to you. Dig into your personal history to keep it intimate. Voters will believe what you say if you are able to back it up with a knowledge of your personal past. If you state that you have an understanding of a problem and are unable to demonstrate how you understand the problem, you are wasting your efforts.

Do you know what topics are important to the voters you will represent? Many political races tend to be about what happens in their daily life. How will they be able to pay for college for their child? Will taxes be raised on their groceries? This is the time to set yourself apart from your opponent(s). Do you believe in tuition assistance? Does your opponent want to push for a consumption tax raising the cost of groceries and medications? What's important to your voters, should be important to you.

Once you craft this message, circle back and be sure that it shows a contrast between you and the other candidates. Give the voters a clear choice and not a safe cookie cutter approach. If you both mirror the same ideals, what will happen when it is time to vote? It's likely they will vote for the candidate they feel understands their issues. Your only goal is to win your election and this is key in doing so.

You've set yourself apart from your opponent and now you must be sure you've targeted your audience. There is an old expression amongst campaigners that states, "if your message speaks to everyone, it likely speaks to no one." Those who want to support you likely have very different concerns than those who are unlikely to support you. Remember your audience whenever you participate in any voter outreach activity. Stay on message but tweak how you express that message to gain the attention of your audience.

Lastly, keep your language simple. You don't need to impress your voters with grandiose language to prove how smart you may be. If you use technical language or acronyms instead of actual words, you may lose your audience.

Once you have a solid message, you will be repeating it at every opportunity provided to your campaign. Hearing a message only once is not enough for most voters. Stay on message, repeat that message and keep it clear and to the point. Your message will need to be heard multiple times through more than one vehicle.

In a nutshell, speak to the people in your audience, about things that are important to them and real situations that help you to describe your priorities.

There is a final caveat. A strong message is not what you will do once elected nor a long list of issues you want to address. It is also not your campaign slogan. These things will definitely be part of your campaign message but are not your message. Your message is a simple statement that you will use repeatedly to persuade your audience. You should definitely respond to any negativity, but don't let it take you away from your message. Always divert your best efforts back in the right direction, the direction of your great campaign message.

## **Speech Writing**

You may be invited to speak to various groups where your stump speech is simply not appropriate for the event. Although the messaging should be included if this is a

candidates event, you may have to take time to write a speech that is specific to that audience. The most important thing you can do is to be personable. You want your audience to like you and pay attention to the words that you say. If you have appropriate anecdotes you are likely sharing a story that others can relate to. Did your dad work two jobs so your family could have health insurance and the kids could go to college? Did you decide to run for the legislature the day you took your 4th grade tour? What stories are entertaining or interesting that you can add to your speech and will resonate with your audience. Paint a picture with words. Don't tell people what is wrong that may need to be fixed, express to them how you came into work yesterday and found yourself slowing down through major intersections where school children were crossing the street and you kept thinking how important that child was to their families and how crossing lights could mean the difference between a happy homecoming and a police officer knocking on that child's door. Be honest even when you feel uncomfortable.

### **Stay On Message**

Once you have a strong message that truly speaks to your audience, you must do all of your hard work justice by ALWAYS staying on message. You must never deviate from your message or else you will lose the power of the earworm you are trying to create through repeating your message. It is not unusual for an opponent to try and get your campaign to respond to negativity. This is usually done purposely to try and get you off your message.

Campaigns often make the mistake of not staying on message by including the message with way too much information. Don't assume after you've made contact with your constituents that they want to be bombarded with more information. The average voter does not want or need more information. If you run across voters that you are still trying to persuade, you should consider creating a position paper or palmcards that are visually appealing and pound your message into the brains of the reader without overwhelming them. Keep it simple and memorable.

### **Identify Your Movement**

As a candidate who understands the importance of messaging, you may want to consider a slogan that you can use for hashtags, swag and taglines on documents, websites, emails, etc. Keep it simple, keep it memorable and keep it clear. There is power in having a good slogan. Don't make the mistake that many organizations and candidates have done in the past by making it about messaging that only that circle

understands. Simple messages like “Joe cares about kids, Sue works For all Nebraskans, etc.” that mirror whatever your initial messaging happens to be in your stump speech and elevator speech.

## **Campaign Signs**

You will rightly hear that signs don't vote. This is true, but campaign signs do play an important role in your campaign. Understanding the role that they play is important to your overall strategy.

Campaign signs in the yards of your voters have approximately a 1.7 to 2% effectiveness rating. That is much the same as a mail campaign when it comes to voter persuasion. The takeaway is that every vote counts especially in close races. This is another brick in your foundation to build a strong campaign.

A good campaign sign will help with your visibility and help to brand your name. Keep this in mind as you design your sign. Many make the mistake of having too much text on a sign when the one thing that is most important is their last name. A good sign encourages people to research you because they want to learn more about your campaign.

Campaign signs can also be a great way to collect data. Every sign location is the location of a supporter. Somebody who is invested in the ultimate success of your campaign is also a likely candidate for continued support, donations and possible volunteer help.

Campaign signs allow for peer-to-peer communication. If the recipient of your yard sign is a respected member of a neighborhood or community, many will take the opportunity to discuss the candidate sign(s) placed on their property. This is an opportunity for your campaign.

Signs can also be used as one of your data points. There is research that shows that approximately 75% of the candidates who won their elections had the most signs. This should not be your only data point, but it is one that can shore up your information as you measure your campaign success.

When you design your sign, you must remember that the purpose is to brand your name/campaign. Readability is paramount for any campaign sign. You should know that when a driver passes your sign, it takes approximately one second to identify that there is a sign and another two to three seconds for the driver's visual memory to store the information. This means the bigger the sign, the easier it is for the driver to read and remember the text.

The type of sign you order and the stakes used are very important. Nebraska is a windy state and it is not unusual to see insert signs which are the type where you are folding vinyl over your stakes to blow away. The thinner the sign stakes, the more likely they are to break and disappear as well. Corrugated signs with firm posts are best, if you have the funds. Make sure they are well placed into the ground and this is easily accomplished because the stronger posts will allow you to use your foot to help place it in the ground. They can also be used multiple times for both the primary and general elections and re-election campaigns in the future.

Votebuilder allows you to create a sign request as part of your survey questions. You can take that data and create maps for sign distribution so you are sure that you are making the best use of your time. Sign distribution is a great way for your older volunteers to get involved. Give them the map and instructions and a trunk full of signs. Once placed, your campaign can add this to your Votebuilder. This same list will be used the day after election day for picking up the signs so you can store them for future races. If you do not win your election, you have two choices. Contact everyone who displayed a sign and thank them for their support and ask them to go ahead and dispose of the sign or contact everyone and thank them for their support and ask them to leave it in the yard because you will pick it up that day. Either way, reach out to your supporters. It's a good way to solidify those relationships should you choose to run in the future.

### **Know Your Personal Strengths**

Understanding your true strengths and weaknesses can give you a competitive advantage. There is great value when you are asking your family, friends and colleagues these questions as well. Knowing your weaknesses in advance of launching your efforts may help you to better understand what type of help you may need in your campaign. Having a good grasp on your strengths allows you to better frame your message and strategy.

## **Build Your Credibility**

This is a topic that is truly a double edged sword. We say this because based on what is happening in your campaign is the key to how you will address what methods might work best. For example, if you have strong polling numbers, this is an opportunity to raise your personal credibility. Using your social media as a tool to raise your level of credibility is key to framing that you are authentic, capable and approachable as a candidate. If you are struggling to gather supporters, you not only need to raise your credibility but find a productive way to lower your opponents credibility because you have nothing to lose at that point when you are already behind in the polls.

## **Identify Your Local Leaders**

Never underestimate how building relationships with local leaders can help you with your campaign. From advice to resources, many have knowledge that they will happily share with you. This will also help you to bring in potential donors, volunteers or proxies that can help to move your campaign forward.

- Party officials
  - County/State party chairs
  - State Executive Committee (SEC)
    - <https://nebraskademocrats.org/officers/>
  - State Central Committee (SCC) members
    - <https://nebraskademocrats.org/scc-members-2022-24/>
  - State Caucus and Councils
  - Block captains
- Elected/appointed officials
  - State Senator
  - Municipality/City Clerk
  - Municipality/Mayor
  - Municipality/City Administrator
  - Municipality/State School Board Members
  - County/Board members
  - County or Municipality/First Responders

## Opposition

After you have determined your own strengths and weaknesses, you must address the same issues for your opponent(s). If you have multiple opponents, it is important to figure out which will be your strongest competitors. You will have to research this because it is unlikely that you can gather that information from your opponents. It will be necessary for you to research the reasons that your voters may not want to vote for your opponents but would alternately support you instead. Opposition research is not about looking for scandals. If anything has been made clear this last decade it's that voters have very short memories and really don't seem to care as much about these issues as they have in the past. Your time will be better spent looking for patterns of behavior. For example, did your opponent vote for a big tax increase? Have they missed multiple meetings on the particular board where they serve? Perhaps they own a piece of property that is behind on property taxes by a substantial amount? You are looking for contrast between yourself and your opponents. What is your competitive advantage?

You should not start your campaign assuming that you will be running negative campaigns against your opponents. With that said, you should still be prepared should you need to run a negative campaign. Researching your competition and running a negative campaign are very different things. When you don't make time to do your opposition research, you lose the ability to be prepared. You also lose the ability to be able to build a strong competitive advantage over your opponent. Keep your research organized and be sure to list your sources. Keep it in a database or binder where you can easily refer to it should you need to reference anything. Staying organized now when you have the time to do so will serve you well as your time becomes more limited.

# Campaign Infrastructure

Before you announce that you are running for office, you must be prepared for a successful campaign. You need to have your infrastructure in place to have the ability to answer questions, deliver your message, recruit volunteers, and to accept donations. The following items are your campaign basics that all campaigns will need regardless of the race.

- **Website:** A basic campaign website is not hard nor expensive. Every campaign needs a website and it's a priority to have a secure portal for donations on your site.
- **Donations:** You will have a tough time reaching voters unless you spend money on marketing, campaign infrastructure, and staff should you be able to afford the help. Donations will fund those activities and you need to make it as easy as possible for your supporters to donate through a multitude of choices.
- **Database:** Maintaining a great database is paramount to your campaigns success. Utilizing Votebuilder/VAN is an important step in creating your database. This will give you the ability to send emails to your constituents, donors and supporters. If you aren't sure how to accomplish this task, you may want to consider utilizing a third-party email provider to help you get started. Reach out to the NDP Data and Field Director for setting up access and obtaining the contract.
- **Social Media:** All successful campaigns use some sort of social media to reach their voters, recruit volunteers or to ask for donations. There are some challenges you should consider.
  - When using more than one platform, how will you display your message through each venue? Will you need to use a dashboard to maintain your social media? What will that look like?
  - You will need to find ways to post your content when your audience is most receptive. If you are up at 5 a.m. and posting content, who will actually be up in that window of time and should you find a more effective way to post to your audience? What tools will you use to schedule your posts?
  - When you create your campaign calendar, how can you make sure that invitations, posts or other important notifications are reaching your audience? Who will be responsible for this task? How will you monitor the



calendar to ensure that not only is it updated on a regular basis, but that information is shared as needed?

- **Campaign Marketing:** The great thing about digital marketing is its ease of use! While it is very simple for anyone to boost a post on Facebook or create a Google AdWords campaign, it can be difficult to get the results you want unless you really do your homework on your proposed audience.
- **Campaign Bank Account:** Setting up a bank account for your campaign is very important. Setting up this account is first in a chain of things you must do in order to receive donations. Look for banks that will not charge you outrageous fees, if any. Often that is not your personal bank but a local bank. Call or stop in to chat with customer service before you select which bank is best for your campaign. Be sure to order checks and if you feel one is necessary, a debit card. You will need an EIN that is specific to your campaign and can easily be assigned on the following website for free: [Apply for an Employer Identification Number \(EIN\) Online | Internal Revenue Service \(irs.gov\)](https://www.irs.gov/efile) Only utilize the IRS website to fill out your form and recoup your number. If you reach a page that says you must pay to garner your number, it's not the IRS. This is a free service and many outside organizations take advantage of a new candidate's lack of knowledge.
- **Donation Processor:** There are a lot of products available that allow you to accept donations at fundraising events and online. As always, do your research and find the one that best fits your needs. If the overhead costs are excessive, look for a different product. If running a federal campaign, do not use generic donation processors as they will not comply with federal election commission requirements. Many will not comply with the Nebraska requirements as well. When in doubt, ask candidate services or the executive director of NDP for guidance.
- **Donor Page:** As is discussed elsewhere in this handbook, you need a donor page on your website. A portal where you can send donors via links, messaging and other communications. SSL security is not optional and there should be a terms of use that should be clearly stated on your page.

## Fundraising

Every campaign needs to find ways to raise money. Fundraising successfully tends to be a testament to any candidate's credibility. The more funds you are able to raise, the

more campaigning you are able to support. Your fundraising efforts also help to enable your supporters to be more involved with your campaign.

Fundraising basics are a constant. How you will raise your campaign funds needs to best address your audience. For example, during a pandemic or inclement weather, you may depend more on social media. You must be flexible and find a variety of ways to raise money for your campaign. Listed below are just a few of the opportunities you can utilize.

1. Dialing for Dollars- This is an ongoing task that will likely be your most fruitful way to raise funds. Start with people you know, family and friends. Then move to organizations such as PACS (Political Action Committees). Donation requests via phone call are very effective. That's because it's harder to say no when you're speaking verbally with a real person and it provides a human connection. Keep in mind that you want to be likable and memorable when you make these calls. You should utilize a basic script for your calls so you can stay on task, but be sure to personalize it for each call. Always end the call with payment information such as directing them to your online donation form or your committee name and address where the payment can be mailed.
2. Online Donation Page- Having an optimized donation page on your campaign website is the foundation of any strong political fundraising effort. This easy option allows your supporters to immediately become invested in your campaign. When designing your campaign page, make sure it is also mobile-friendly so as to not exclude those who will use their cell phones. Keep the text and process on your donation page short and sweet to prevent form abandonment. Remember to link your donation page to all of your social media and any email blasts.
3. Events and Rallies- These are great opportunities to bring your base together. During your events you should always make a fundraising ask. You can do this when attendees check-in at the door by having envelopes, pens and a computer available so people can easily donate. Be sure to also have a sign-in sheet in hopes of building your supporter base and allowing opportunities where they can check a box for yard signs, make calls, host an event and more. You can also use this as an opportunity to send out requests via text or use opt-ins such as conversational texting to those attending.

4. Text to Give- Mobile fundraising efforts have become more popular since the recent pandemic. Your supporters will text a predetermined keyword such as DONATE or CANDIDATE NAME to your dedicated mobile giving number. Your donor then receives an automated text response that includes a link to a mobile-friendly donation page to complete and confirm the donation. This is also a great way for your donors to repeat gifts to your campaign on a regular basis.
5. Direct Mail Letters-Although low-tech, a good fundraising letter can still be effective in your efforts to raise campaign funds. Always include a pre-addressed reply envelope with your letter to make it a no-brainer for your donor. Include detailed instructions for online donations in your letter because many will opt to use technology instead of writing a check.
6. Dinner Parties/Luncheons/Breakfast- Hosting a meal for a campaign fundraiser can bring huge success, especially when you invite supporters to help host. You can ask your hosts to donate as “sponsors” or to actually facilitate the event on your behalf. You can use a flat fee per person or use a sliding-scale for sponsorships or levels of participation. This is one type of fundraiser where you must have RSVPs in order to make sure a profit is made. Also note that in-kind donations such as the food, must be reported on your report to the NADC.
7. Change Drive- This is a drive, which has also been called a penny or coin drive. This is a great way to earn additional funds for your campaign in a very passive way. Change adds up very quickly when saved daily, and, despite the name, you will likely collect some paper bills as well. Set a window of time, put out the plea and arrange a pick up or drop off time or event. Remember, you need to know who donated the change and how much for reporting purposes. Banks usually have change counting machines which can make your counting more accurate.
8. Benefit Concerts- Do you have friends or family who are musically talented? If so, a Benefit Concert may be your next campaign fundraiser. You need to find a local artist(s) who are willing to donate their time and talent to support your campaign. Try to find a low cost or free venue for your event. If you have a friend with a large property or farm, all you will need is ample parking and a few porta-potties. You can take donations at the door, online with a set fee or recruit

sponsors and have the concert be free using it as an opportunity to speak on important issues.

9. Campaign Swag- From custom t-shirts to stickers and buttons, this is an opportunity to provide useful items to your supporters that they can wear on a consistent basis hopefully promoting you and your campaign. If you have a fun campaign slogan, attractive logo or important causes that you support, you've got a platform that is ready for the production and sale of your unique swag. Just remember that pre-orders are best or if you do order and choose to sell from that stock that you let your supporters know that they are limited editions. Be sure to contact the NADC for guidelines on how to sell and report these items.
  
10. Pledge Campaigns- This is a unique type of fundraiser in which you attempt to collect promises of future donations to be collected at a later date. First you will set your financial goal for the campaign. Next you will contact potential supporters and ask if they would be willing to pledge support for your campaign. Once they agree, you will have a short online form that requests their name and contact information. Once you have met your goal, you will follow up with each individual using the contact information given during your initial call to collect the donation promised.
  
11. Social Media Fundraising- Social media fundraising can be a great way not only to raise money but also bring awareness to your campaign's messaging. When others see their family and friends supporting your campaign, it is more likely they will do so as well. Some platforms such as Facebook have built-in widgets that allow for easy fundraising capabilities. Other platforms are great for promoting your message and allowing for links to the donor page on your website.
  
12. Email donation requests- Email donation requests are a simple way to collect donations from your supporters. With an effective strategy you can automate messages to send to a large group of recipients simultaneously. Be sure to end each email with a highly visible call-to-action directing the readers to your online donation page to give. You will have a higher response rate if you personalize your messages to each recipient.

Writing thank you notes should be a priority for your campaign. No matter how small the donation, you should always acknowledge the donor in a personal note. Take time to write your note by hand. It does make a difference.

The aforementioned ways to raise campaign funds are only a small handful of what is available to your campaign. Find the ideas that best meet the needs of your audience and the resources available to your campaign and then hit the ground running. The more effective you are at fundraising, the more time you will have to knock on those doors and make your calls to constituents.

Once you start raising funds, it is very important to understand the type of reporting that is required for your campaign.

Candidates for state and local office are subject to the campaign finance provisions of the Nebraska Political Accountability and Disclosure Act (NPADA). If you are seeking election to a federal office you are not subject to the NPADA. Once a candidate committee raises, receives or spends \$5,000 or more in a calendar year, they are required to register the committee with the Commission by filing a Statement of Organization and paying a required filing fee of \$100. This filing must be made within 10 days after this \$5,000 threshold is met. If this threshold is reached in the 30 days immediately prior to the primary or general election, a Statement of Organization must be filed within 2 days. Your filing fee should be made payable to the State of Nebraska.

Once the candidate committee is formed, the committee must file periodic campaign statements. This is not optional and the type of report that is required is based on where you are at in your campaign cycle.

### **Types of filings by candidates**

1. **Statement of Organization** - This document registers the Committee with the NADC. This form discloses the name of the candidate committee, the name of the candidate, the office being sought and the name and address of the treasurer. This form also identifies the financial institution located in Nebraska where the committee has its official depository. Once completed, you will be placed on the NADC mailing list and allows the NADC to contact your committee with any questions, information or filing requirements that need to be met. The Statement of Organization (Form

A-1) can be downloaded from the NADC website. You can also call or email the NADC to have a hard copy sent to you.

2. **Campaign Statement** - this document will be required at different intervals during your campaign and it provides a summary of the financial activity of your committee. It discloses the names of contributors of more than \$250 and the amounts of the contributions. It discloses expenditures of more than \$250. This is also the reason many people will donate up to \$250 as they don't want to show up on the expenditure report as a donor.
3. **Report of Late Contributions** - this document discloses contributions of \$1,000 or more received by the committee during 14 days immediately preceding the election. Information reported as late contributions are also reported on subsequent campaign statements.
4. **Statement of Financial Interests** (Form C-1) this document is for candidates for certain offices. It requires you to file a State of Financial Interest. (see list below) A Statement of Financial Interests discloses information about a candidate's personal financial situation and includes sources of income, financial holdings, and any business associations. You are not required to disclose dollar amounts of your income or the dollar value of your holdings. NOTE: If you do not file this form, your name will not appear on the ballot. You must file in December prior to the year you will appear on the ballot. For example, if you file in December of 2021 to appear on the 2022 ballot, you must file a State of Financial Interests covering calendar year 2020. You must file a new Statement of Financial Interests covering calendar year 2021 on or before March 2, 2022. If you file to be on the 2022 ballot on or after January 1, 2022, you must file a Statement of Financial Interest covering calendar year 2021 on or before March 2, 2022. The Statement of Financial Interests (Form C-1) can be downloaded from the NADC website. You can also call or email the NADC to have a hard copy sent to you.
5. **Deadline Filing - You will need to check the SOS website to see what paperwork you would need to fill out and by when.**

- <https://sos.nebraska.gov/elections/information-candidates>

The following candidates are required to file a Statement of Financial Interest:

1. Member of the Legislature

2. Any county elected office
3. Member of the State Board of Education, member of the Board of Regents of the University of Nebraska and member of the Public Service Commission
4. Member of the board of directors of a district organized under Chapter 70 of the Nebraska State Statutes including rural public power districts, public power districts, and public power and irrigation districts

All of this information and more is available to download for free on the NADC website or you can request a hard copy. You will need to download the most recent Candidate Brochure and Candidate Committee Treasurer's Guide. You will find these on the Publications page. You will also see handy reminders on their site that clearly lay out the dates reports are due during your campaign cycle.

### **Nebraska Accountability and Disclosure Commission**

PO Box 95086

Lincoln, NE 68509

(402) 471-2522

[www.nadc.nebraska.gov](http://www.nadc.nebraska.gov)

Location of Office: 1225 "L" Street, Suite 400 in Lincoln (Do not use for US Mail)

## **Organizational Tips**

Here are some organizational tips that will help you better structure your campaign :

- Collect and store logins for all campaign-related online accounts. Consider having both an online list and a physical list. **NEVER** allow any one person to have exclusive access to your accounts as campaign staff may come and go and you could be left without access.
- Compile and secure contact phone numbers and email addresses in your database. This is a tool you will use on a regular basis for fundraising purposes, events and more.
- Prepare a draft campaign budget (example located in resources).
- Set your preliminary fundraising goals for your campaign based on the budget you drafted.

- Create a campaign calendar that includes parades, special events, deadlines for report filing to the NADC and any other item of importance to your campaign.

## **Voter File (VAN)**

This is made available through the Democratic party of Nebraska to every candidate upon request. It allows the candidate to print out walking, phone, or mailing lists. The voter file can be sorted by precinct, party, age, sex, voting frequency, and many other options. The voter file is known as votebuilder or VAN and is web-based, meaning that with a username and password you can log on from any computer with internet access. The State Party offers training to anyone who asks. We highly encourage you to learn to use Votebuilder/VAN and miniVAN so you can pull lists whenever you want.

When you incorporate the voter file into your strategy, it helps the state party know what campaigns are active across the state and how they are functioning. It also helps you retain the information you gathered during your election so you can use it for future races.

### **Voter Contact**

There are three basic types of voter contact. These types are voter persuasion, identifying your supporters and getting out the vote (GOTV). As you plan campaign strategy, you must always keep your voter contact goals in the forefront of your planning. When you have a strong strategy, you should be able to accomplish all three tasks. You will use the clear message you have created and continually repeat the message because it needs to be heard multiple times in order for it to register with your voters.

Towards the end of your campaign, it is no longer your job to persuade voters but it is now time for GOTV. You've already identified who is supporting your campaign and now you must reach out to them in a very small window of time to make sure they have a plan to vote either by mail, in person or on election day.

As you plan what efforts you will need to make your voter contacts, there are many options that can be used based on what you feel will be the most productive. There is



no single one-way to make voter contact, but there are many tried and true ways that have been used over decades that consistently bring in the vote.

Always ask yourself these basic questions as you decide what the best methods may be for your campaign. First and most importantly, what will be the cost not only financially but also timewise and volunteer-wise. What voters will be reached through the methods you've selected? Will your voters be persuaded to vote for you with these methods?

### **Canvassing/Lit Drops**

Canvassing is when the candidate, staff or volunteers go door-to-door and knock on each door to briefly speak on the candidate. A palm card or item of literature should be left at each home. This is a numbers game and it is great when you make friends along the way. However, if you are spending more than 10 to 15 minutes at any door, that is too long. You will likely have hundreds, if not thousands of doors to knock on. That is a lot of people you must meet. You will upload this information into your minivan on your cellphone or if you are using a paper list, you can input the information by hand into votebuilder on your home or campaign computer. If the resident is not home, your contact becomes a lit drop.

### **Campaign Mailings**

Research continues to show that campaign mailings are losing the impact they had decades ago, especially in urban areas. Mailings can be good for name recognition, but studies show they have little impact when it comes to actually persuading people to vote for you. Using mail is something you need to research to make sure it is effective at delivering your message. This will depend on the type of list you utilize for the mailing(s) and if you've made contact with the voters in person. Mail does not win elections, personal contact wins elections.

Mail is helpful for ballot chases to make sure your message stays in the forefront and it has a greater effect if you are diligent about what audience it will best reach such as your senior citizens. This is another reason research is so important as you plan your strategy.

## **Ballot Chase**

The key to running a successful campaign in Nebraska is making sure you've included a Ballot Chase plan. Chasing Vote By Mail (VBM) ballots wins elections because you know that the constituent has a ballot in hand and is likely ready to vote. You want them to vote for you and mail it back or take it to a dropbox ASAP so it doesn't get lost in a pile of mail on their kitchen counter. For more information on how to apply for a VBM with the new Voter ID law, you can visit: <https://sos.nebraska.gov/elections/voter-id>.

You will be able to download lists from your Votebuilder account of those that have requested ballots and you can refine it daily to see who has already returned their ballots. This will be an ongoing process and one that you must keep in the forefront as you near both the Primary and General Elections. If you need assistance with your lists, there is staff available at NDP to assist you with the process.

This is where using mail can be productive. An effective mail program to your early voters will give you a competitive advantage over your competition. The mailings should be simple and easy to read. Let the voters know why you are running for office and what you want to do in office. Use your messaging. Remember, perception is reality. The more you repeat your messaging with every contact the more it becomes reality to the voters.

Once you have identified who will be receiving ballots, you must start before they are mailed out. This is important because the first group of ballots mailed out is usually a very large list and you have an extremely small window of time to contact those voters. You can have volunteers or paid phone bankers start calling and letting folks know that they will soon have a ballot mailed to them and to vote for you. Also let them know that if they do not receive the ballot within a certain time frame that they should check with their local election office. Be sure to have that contact information readily available throughout your campaign.

You will run your lists over and over being sure to exclude those who have already returned their ballots or perhaps voted in person. You are always chasing the newest list once the previous list has been called. You will also have to call some voters more than once should you note that they have not turned in their ballots but still have it in hand.

Outside of your mailer, you will chase by walking and calling those voters to remind them to turn in their ballots. Leave no vote on the table because every vote really does count and there are many examples where races were won by only a handful of votes.

Then you repeat. Run your list and garner your votes until election day. Make sure to always put that information in your votebuilder account. This will prevent duplicate efforts and also give you a solid foundation for campaign success and an excellent precursor as to if you will win your election. Remember, numbers never lie. Keeping good data prevents you from being surprised on election day. If you have campaign workers helping you with your data, please take ownership of the daily or weekly results. As the candidate, you should know if your efforts are effective so you aren't surprised on election day.

A few days before election day, it is a good idea to start telling voters they can no longer mail their ballots and must take them to the election office or area dropboxes. Be sure to give any necessary information in reference to the window of time involved with this task. Always make sure your phonebankers and canvassers are also aware of this. It's a benefit when your entire team is all functioning on the same information.

It is not unusual to have a voter tell you that they have misplaced their ballot. Don't panic, there is usually a solution. Be sure to provide your phonebankers and canvassers information to resolve this problem. Check with your local election office and ask what the procedure is to help people who have lost their ballots. Include that in your initial research and share it with your campaign workers. This will make it much easier when they are on the phone as opposed to having to call the voter back.

## **Communications**

First impressions are paramount to the success of your campaign. Before you officially announce your campaign, be sure your communications strategy is ready to go.

- Create a press list of the area media you would like to reach. If you are not sure where to begin, reach out to your county or state party leaders as they may already have one available. A current list has been provided on the resources page of this manual. If you have personal contacts at any particular media source, be sure to add that contact information to your spreadsheet.

- Finalize your campaign branding, marketing goals and messaging and remember to always stay on message. Never stray or you will be unhappy with the results as it makes you a target for criticism.
- Make sure you practice your stump speech and that you are able to easily share it with others. Strive to keep it to 1 ½ to 3 minutes and no longer. The shorter and more concise the better and more memorable it will be.
- Get your initial campaign palm card or other proposed marketing printed so you are ready for your campaign kick-off. If money is tight, it is ok to use an 8 ½ x 11 piece of paper. Black ink on colored paper can be as memorable as a palm card, if the messaging is good.
- Write your announcement press release, email announcement, social media announcement and any letters to the editor and send them out.
- Organize your campaign kick-off and make it memorable!

### **Sign-In Sheets**

It is important to always use a blank sign-in sheet for any events that you facilitate. You can easily find templates in Word or Excel that can be used. Always be sure to collect names and emails at a minimum. The sign-in sheet is usually made available on the check-in table at your events. You should consider having more than one available so everyone is given the opportunity to share their information should the check-in table be busy. Additional information such as their street address and phone number plus what areas of interest they may have when it comes to being a volunteer should be included. Would they be willing to have a yard sign on their property? Make phone calls on your behalf? Help you to canvas? You won't know if you don't ask.

### **Email**

Consider using a tool to help you with your email blasts such as the free version of Mailchimp or Action Network. This will help you manage your time better and make any email notifications more efficient as you use this tool to win your campaign. Just remember the following basics when you implement your programming.

- Make sure you are using the right list for your messaging to make your message as impactful as possible. You want your messages to reach the right audience each time, otherwise you will lose your voice by constantly blasting the same group over and over, again.

- Make sure the “from” name and email address is titled “your name” and “your campaign” so the recipient knows it is from you.
- Never use default content as it can be identified as spam by your recipient's email and end up in the spam folder, never being read.
- Make sure your subject line makes the reader curious or intrigued so they actually read the email. If using a tool like Mailchimp, you can easily see who actually opens the email to read it.
- Your email message needs to be concise and to the point.
- Your email message needs to have a call to action such as donations, volunteer opportunities, and GOTV.
- If you have any hyperlinks, be sure they are active before you push send. It is unproductive having a dead link if you are trying to send folks to donate or sign up for an event.
- Always check your grammar and spelling. Have someone help you if this is an area of weakness.
- Be sure your messaging is compatible with mobile devices. More than ¾ of the population have smartphones and many will use that to read your messages.
- Send yourself a test email first so you can verify that you've done everything needed for great messaging. This gives you the opportunity to make sure it's right before you press “send.”

## **Social Media Support**

Social Media and Campaigns are much stronger partners in today's campaigns than in the past. Learning best practices now can help you shore up your strategy and also guide your campaign workers to help you meet your campaign goals. Consider the following easily implemented ideas and help to brand your message and boost your personal reputation as a candidate.

1. Video is King: Good video content, especially live, can be great for your campaign for many reasons. If used on your social media sites or website, it increases the amount of time voters will spend on your sites. That's a benefit because it improves your bounce rate. Search engines identify your improved bounce rate and boost your post making it easier to find you in the search engines.

Video is also a great way to personalize your campaign. You can have meaningful conversations with your audience in real-time, announce important

issues to your supporters before they hear it from the media or other sources, and you can continue to brand yourself and your reputation when done correctly.

2. Not everyone loves politics: The divisiveness in our country is clear whenever we look at social media. Remember that when you schedule your posts for the week. What fun things may be happening in your community? Have there been any special individuals who have made a difference in your community that deserve a “shout out?” Perhaps it’s a special holiday like “say thanks to your neighbor day?” There is much that can be said that is interesting outside of politics.
3. It’s not a free-for-all: There are serious consequences when you post inaccurate information that has not been vetted. Make sure you or your campaign staff have taken all the necessary steps needed to research any important issues you may post. It reflects poorly on you and your campaign if you post information that is false or misleading. It’s pretty much a guarantee that anything controversial will take on a life of its own in social media. Think hard before you post.
4. Consider all platforms: Chances are pretty good that you have varying degrees of social media demographics. Knowing this, don’t rule out newer types of social media as mastering these resources can bring extra visibility to any campaign. You can keep it simple and cross-post your content or set a campaign directive to have age specific posts where the content will be more likely to be viewed. Here is a short list of some sources you may want to consider:

<input type="checkbox"/> Facebook	<input type="checkbox"/> Reddit
<input type="checkbox"/> YouTube	<input type="checkbox"/> Pinterest
<input type="checkbox"/> Instagram	<input type="checkbox"/> Tumblr
<input type="checkbox"/> Threads	<input type="checkbox"/> Flickr
<input type="checkbox"/> Twitter	<input type="checkbox"/> LinkedIn
5. Questions boost engagement: When you ask questions on your social media, you invite interactions from your followers. If you pose a topical question, it gives you an opportunity to have a back-and-forth with those who are interested in not only being heard but hearing your opinions as well. Many will be surprised when it is actually you and not a volunteer or staff member responding to their concerns. You have a lot to do as a candidate, but it can be very impactful when others see that you care enough to respond.
6. Try to include visuals: You don’t have to be a pro to include videos on your posts. You can use a simple and free platform like Canva. There is nothing that prevents you from using your cell phone for a quick selfie or short video. It

doesn't have to be professional, but you will definitely have more "shares" when it comes to your content which means more eyes will see that content and that is great for your campaign message.

7. Posting daily is important: It is important to have daily updates queued up and ready to go. You can do this with a social media dashboard or utilize the widgets available on platforms such as Facebook. It allows you to stay in the forefront of followers' information threads. Remember to include donation asks in the mix. Remember ABC-Always Be Campaigning!
8. Fundraising, fundraising, fundraising!: Raising funds for your campaign should and is always in the forefront of everything you do. Try to find creative ways to include secure links in all you do. Don't spam your asks, but attempt to include them periodically throughout your posts.
9. Trolls come and go: Dealing with trolls is the least fun thing about participating in social media. The sooner you master this task, the easier it will be for you to keep the trolls out of your headspace. First and foremost, know that once you are a public official, you are unable to block your constituents. During your campaign, it is important to remember that you should never feed the trolls. Don't engage in an argument you can't win. Instead, find ways to encourage community. Call out name-calling and ask others to stick to the point of the post. If you are able, bring the discussion back to the point of the original post. Lastly, try to remember that the trolls are few and frequently not even people who can vote for you. They are just trying to stoke the fire and create chaos. Don't take the bait.

## Press Relations

A good relationship with the news organizations in your county is vital. You cannot expect them to agree with you on every issue, and some of them may be very much opposed to your beliefs. Most will be willing to accept meeting notices and information about events, particularly if you have some rapport with them.

The key to gaining rapport with reporters is to remember that they are people. Be nice -- after all, you want them to do something for you.

Make sure you get notices to the newspaper and radio stations so they can be used in a timely manner. The notices have to be clear, with date, time and address for meetings.

Each newspaper will have its own guidelines for submitting calendar and press releases. It is important that you bring forward items that are actually newsworthy as much as possible. You make their job easier when you bring them great, local stories. If using a press release, remember to keep it brief. Most news outlets receive hundreds of press releases each day. If they have to struggle to read the information in your release, they will less likely take an interest in your story. An example of a press release is included in your resources.

Never forget: your job and their jobs are different, and there will be times when your jobs and theirs collide. Do not tell a news reporter anything you do not want to see in the paper, online or broadcast on radio or TV. Reporters aren't your friends, but you should be friendly and likable. Never assume anything is off the record and that just because the camera is not pointing at you that it isn't still recording what you are saying.

If you feel your position wasn't represented well in a story, you should tell them but don't be defensive or confrontational. The best way to handle reporters is to be moderate whether you're pleased or displeased with the story.

When given the ability to do your interviews over the phone or Zoom, give yourself an opportunity to gather your data prior to the contact. For example, a reporter calls you and says they'd like to see where you stand on electric cars. Ask if you can call them back in 5-10 minutes (the answer is usually yes). Gather your data and write out what message you'd like to share selecting 2-3 major points. If the interview is based on a press release, be sure to have it available. Do not stray from your messaging and make sure you continue to hit your pre-planned points consistently. You will be more likely to have the story meet your expectations and it is actually very helpful for the reporter when you stay on task for the interview. Don't stray because nothing you say is ever "off-record."

### **Hiring Your Campaign Staff**

If you have the funds to hire campaign staff to assist you in winning your campaign, it is important that you understand that hiring that staff can make the difference between a smooth and well-run campaign vs a stressful and poorly run campaign. Once word gets out that you are looking for help, there will be many people who respond who want to be your campaign managers or campaign consultants. There will be many wanting to tap into your budget with promises of success. Do your due diligence when you hire staff



because once you spend that money and find it was a bad investment, you can never get that money you worked so hard for back. Your staff should be your campaign's foundation and will touch every aspect of your strategy. There are specific skills and characteristics you should look for when hiring.

1. Are they engaging?: Relationships are important to all campaigns. Your staff will often be your voice when speaking to area groups, and donors, while canvassing, making calls, working with other volunteers or other staff and sometimes the media. Your staff must possess the ability to manage and communicate well with others.
2. Are they tenacious?: This is a trait that you need to look for when hiring staff regardless of their experience. Can they think fast on their feet? Do they have the drive to plow through when things get tough? Campaigns are like rollercoaster rides, some days you'll be on top of the world, and other days spiraling out of control. You need staff who will keep their eye on the prize and continue to push your strategy forward.
3. Are they trustworthy?: One of the most powerful ways to blow a good campaign out of the water is when staff participates in gossip and worst-case scenarios with people outside of your campaign. Ultimately, those negative vibes come back to you and your staff and it can be hard to pull out of that black hole of negativity. You need to make it clear to staff that gossip is not part of your strategy, that all that is said within the campaign stays within your campaign and that it is your expectation that no energy is ever wasted on rumors, gossip or negativity. Make sure your hires understand that your campaign is a no-drama zone.
4. Are they strategic?: Change can be very hard for people. It's important for your staff to understand that strategies are fluid and may need periodic tweaking in order to meet your ultimate goals of campaign success. Change can be hard for people and if you have staff resistant to change, that creates a headache that you don't have time for. Remember that a strategy without a good process is only a wish list. You need staff willing to make calculated risks based on the guidelines set before them.
5. Are they solid leaders?: Saying you are a leader and acting like a leader are not necessarily the same thing. There are a lot of moving parts in any campaign. You will have volunteers, paid staff, donors, media, organizations and more to contend with. Strong leaders will help you to herd your cats (campaign workers) so you can concentrate on what is important. You don't have time to babysit anyone, your priority is winning your race.

6. Are they organized?: Any staff working on the campaign must have the ability to track your campaigns successes and failures. This tracking will be generated in updates or reports to the candidate to keep the campaign strategy moving forward. This is mandatory towards keeping things moving forward and regardless of how busy your campaign may get, data is an important tool to knowing how your campaign is doing. This reflects back to why a no drama campaign is important. Your staff has daily tasks that must be completed that shore up your long-term goals. Organization is key and being able to complete those tasks are a priority.

Additional things to consider is to check any candidates' references. Have they worked on other campaigns or had jobs that lend beneficial skills to your overall campaign strategy? You need to hear from others who have worked with the staff candidate. Make sure they are solid references and not a close friend of your potential hire that is doing a favor for their friend by providing a good referral. Trust your gut on these references.

Last but certainly not least, are considerations that pertain to diversity. This is especially important if you are representing a diverse area. Diversity is about more than race. Diversity is also about gender and economic diversification. Creating a team that can come from different walks of life can bring a variety of viewpoints to your campaign.

Once you have hired your staff, consider drafting a staff agreement that clearly outlines your expectations and their responsibilities. Should problems arise, it can make your job easier as you help your staff meet their goals, which results in your campaign success. An example is included in the resources section of this manual.

## **Roles in a campaign**

### **Candidate**

As a candidate, you really have only two jobs. Your job is to raise money and meet voters. In a nutshell that means you need to craft your campaign's message, set your budget and fundraising goals, and decide what strategies will work to garner the votes that you need to win. You are committing many hours to an important cause and it will benefit you and your campaign if you create a plan, implement the plan and work the plan. Remember your plan is a living, breathing document and you have the ability to tweak it as needed, but a good plan from the start will require few changes as you move

forward.

## Campaign Manager

The Campaign Manager in tandem with the candidate will create, implement, and oversee the campaign's strategic plan. The campaign manager reports directly to the candidate and is responsible for directing the path of the campaign in accordance with the candidate's mission, vision, and values. They are responsible for making certain that the campaign is organized to make decisions effectively, efficiently, and quickly and must receive final approval from the candidate on all expenditures as well as all sponsoring decisions. With the help of the candidate and potential advisors, the campaign manager: Writes the campaign plan; Hires and manages the core team responsible for the campaign's operation; Makes strategic and tactical decisions throughout the race while always staying in close contact with the candidate to ensure transparency. If you have the time and the ability to educate yourself on the process, there is nothing that prevents you from being your own campaign manager.

## Treasurer

Your treasurer is a very important person with very important responsibilities. The treasurer must keep the financial records of the campaign in a timely manner and insure their accuracy.

Nebraska campaign laws require a treasurer to sign the campaign finance reports and certify their accuracy. Tasks for treasurers include paying bills, overseeing the deposit of donations, helping to manage the budget, shoring up compliance with Nebraska campaign finance laws and preparing campaign finance reports that include donations and expenses.

## Political Consultant

Political consultants are experts in particular areas of planning and running campaigns. Political consultants serve in advisory roles. Consultants may be hired when staff or volunteers do not have the expertise or time to perform tasks or when hiring staff is cost-prohibitive

Campaigns hire consultants when existing staff and volunteers do not have sufficient expertise or time, or when it is financially advantageous versus adding staff. Consultants can be freelancers or work for outside firms. There are consultants available for most campaign functions. Examples of campaign consultants are media, social media, or fundraising experts.

Keep in mind that consultants are not always needed and you may often find volunteers willing to take on those roles. You only need to ask if they would be willing to help.

### **Field Director**

Field Directors are in charge of your campaign's grassroots organization. When you begin your campaign, the field director will design a field plan. The field plan will lay out the tasks needed to achieve goals for voter identification, persuasion, and voter turnout. How you will canvass and your Get Out The Vote (GOTV) efforts are part of the field plan. During the campaign, the field director also manages field organizers and reports to the campaign manager and candidate keeping them in the loop daily as to the potential win numbers.

### **Field Organizer**

A field organizer recruits, trains, and manages volunteers or paid canvassers in the grassroots effort to identify, persuade, and mobilize targeted voters. Field organizers also recruit other volunteers. Field organizers report to the field director and are most commonly assigned specific geographical areas or responsibilities.

## **Running Against Incumbents**

If you are running against an incumbent at any level of government, you will likely hear that it will be hard work. That isn't necessarily a false statement. However, it's also not impossible to beat an incumbent and there are many examples of this being accomplished here in Nebraska.

There tends to be a high level of dissatisfaction among voters when it comes to elected officials and government. You should see this as an opportunity to beat an incumbent in any election.

The downside is that incumbents usually have the benefit of better access to donors unless they've made poor decisions while in office, better name recognition and stronger voter contact because of past election cycles. If they have been weak in any of these areas that is a benefit to your campaign.

The upside for your campaign is that incumbents have a public record that you can use. It's pretty rare when you can't find a bad vote or an issue that area voters may not support. You will hopefully find these things when you do your opposition research. Should you debate your opponent, you can take them to task for the bad decisions and force them to answer in a public forum. Video or text from these debates are great content for certain social media outlets. Other things to consider is if the incumbent may be out of touch with its voter base. Have they been there for decades and ignore the needs of younger voters? Have they become egotistical and become tone deaf to their constituents? These are all issues that can help you beat any incumbent. Don't make it a hatefest, just stick to the facts.

## Campaign Timeline

Below is a basic synopsis of what has already been discussed in this manual. Breaking it down into bite size pieces may help you to not only better plan your strategy, but make it easier to remember as you move forward. This allows you to refer back to the pages that apply to each task/topic below.

### **5 to 7 Days Prior to Announcement/Registering**

- Research
- Develop Your Campaign Message
- Know Your Election Rules
- Know Your Timeline for Reporting/Filing
- Votebuilder Access
- Voter Demographics
- Win Numbers
- Strengths & Weaknesses
- Oppositional Research

- Campaign Strategy/Measured Goals
- Needed Resources
- Messaging
- Stump Speech

#### **4 to 12 Months Prior To The Election**

- Identify Your Voter base
- Voter Persuasion
  - Canvassing
  - Phonebanking
  - Social Media
  - Events
  - Texting
  - Email
  - Website
  - Mailings
  - Signage
- Fundraising
  - Dialing for dollars
  - Merchandise
  - Fundraisers
  - Pledge Campaigns
  - Social Media Requests
  - Online Donations
  - Text To Give
  - Direct Mail
  - Change Drives
  - Benefit Concerts
  - Email Requests
  - Meal Hosting

#### **4 to 6 Weeks Prior To The Election**

- GOTV Efforts
  - Ballot Chase
  - Early Voters

- Shore up your base
- Educating
  - Do your voters know where to vote?
  - Do your voters know how to vote?
  - Do your voters know the window of time to vote?
- Reminding
  - Remind your voters to turn in their mail-in ballots
  - Remind your voters to vote early
  - Remind your voters to vote on election day
  - Remind your voters to use the drop box if they missed the mail-in deadline

## The Grand Finale

Now that you are ready to move your campaign forward and you are nearing election day, you need to be hyper-focused on your final days. Even though you have worked hard throughout the campaign, you will need to shift your efforts to get the most out of the few days you have left.

When you are three days away from the election, there are lots of opportunities not only for the candidate but also for your volunteers.

Consider implementing the following ideas:

**Day 1:** Find your major intersections and hold campaign signs while waving at passing traffic. Be sure everyone helping is enthusiastic and exhibits welcoming smiles.

Get your canvassers out to knock on the doors of the homes of unidentified registered voters that have yet to commit to a candidate or call those households of unidentified registered voters and deliver any needed campaign signs to those homes.

**Day 2:** Find your major intersections and hold campaign signs while waving at passing traffic. Be sure everyone helping is enthusiastic and exhibits welcoming smiles. Get your canvassers out to knock on the doors of the homes of unidentified registered voters that have yet to commit to a candidate or call those households of unidentified registered voters and deliver any needed campaign signs to those homes. Remind them that the next day is election day.

**Day 3: Election Day!** Find your major intersections and hold campaign signs while waving at passing traffic. Be sure everyone helping is enthusiastic and exhibits welcoming smiles. Don't forget to vote, if you've not done so already. Be sure you have your signs out at area polling places and should you have workers who can stand and hold signs at the polls, that is even better. Bring coffee and drinks to your volunteers throughout the day and make sure they have breaks for lunch and the restroom. Help your phone bankers make the final round of calls for GOTV and arrange rides as needed to the polls. Once the polls are closed, find a place to watch your results and be prepared should the media give you a call for a statement. Be sure to thank your volunteers.

### **After Election Day**

- Press release-Statement for the media prepared (win or lose)
- Have a plan for any leftover funds
- Thank all who helped
- Make sure you organize all data for future use (re-election or future candidates will need prior data for success)
- Pick up your yard signs
- Pick up any large signs on private property
- Take a breath



# Communicating with the State Party

If you have any questions please contact the State Party:

[CandidateHelp@nebraskademocrats.org](mailto:CandidateHelp@nebraskademocrats.org)

## Resources and Training

These are some resources along with scheduled trainings fellow groups have posted. In addition to the trainings we offer, here are some great resources. Everyone has a role in building the Democratic Party.

1. Campaign Budget Template
2. Consultant/Staff Contract Template
3. Statewide Media List
4. Social Media Policy & MOU
5. Subscriptions for current messaging, issues and training sessions
  - a. Most are free, but other may include a small fee
  - b. Subscriptions help with updates of events, messaging or training

### Trainings at the NDP Meetings

The Nebraska Democratic Party holds four meetings a year where you may attend trainings on various topics and participate in Caucus groups and party operations:

- [nebraskademocrats.org/events/](http://nebraskademocrats.org/events/)

### National Democratic Training Committee (NDTC)

Sign up for a free training account to access many “how to” and training presentations:

- [www.traindemocrats.org](http://www.traindemocrats.org)

### Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee (DCCC)

The DCCC has a great social media toolbox available for volunteers:

- [dccc.org/together](http://dccc.org/together)

### Democratic National Committee (DNC)

- <https://democrats.org/>



Analyst Institute

- <https://analystinstitute.org/>

### **Indivisible Guide**

The grassroots group Indivisible is always a great resource to learn more about becoming an effective advocate at the local level: [indivisibleguide.com](http://indivisibleguide.com)

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### **RELIABLE POLITICAL NEWS—NO FAKE NEWS HERE**

Crooked Media has great podcasts including Pod Save America. The company was started by several leaders from the Obama Administration. They also have a new nightly email called “What a Day” which we highly encourage everyone to sign up for because it will help you stay informed.

- [Crooked.com](http://Crooked.com)
- <https://crooked.com/podcast-series/pod-save-america/>
- [messagebox.substack.com](http://messagebox.substack.com)

**Political Wire** is an old-school email you can sign up for that sends information all day long on politics. [politicalwire.com](http://politicalwire.com)

**Project Vote Smart** and **League of Women Voters** are two places you can go to look up key issues and candidates. While neither site is “perfect” (meaning sometimes there is missing information, etc), they are a good starting place to see where candidates stand.

**Project Vote Smart:** [votesmart.org](http://votesmart.org)

**League of Women Voters:** [lww.org](http://lww.org)

Find all the local Democratic candidates running across the state on [NebraskaDemocrats.org](http://NebraskaDemocrats.org)