

Running for Office to Make Change the Blue Jean Way



**BLUE
JEAN
NATION**

2019-2020 Edition

Start with why

So you are thinking of running for office. Your first question shouldn't be how. It should be why.

Why run?

Before taking any other step toward becoming a candidate, you need to answer this question and you need to boil your answer down to a mission statement of *no more than a sentence or two*.

That brief statement will be the foundation of everything else you do. Out of that statement of purpose will come a two- or three-word campaign slogan or motto. That statement will guide your campaign strategy. It will be at the core of your "elevator pitch," your "stump speech," answers you give in media interviews, and appeals for support.

There is nothing more important to your campaign's success than message discipline, and that discipline comes from continuously returning to your answer to the question why.

After answering the question why run, there's another why question you need to ask.

Why you?

Elections are fundamentally about representation. Voters are looking for someone to vote for who they can trust to think like them and act like they would act if they were in that position. Are you representative of the people being asked to elect you? Do you think like them? Can you act according to their wishes when it comes to making decisions on issues of importance to them?

Also think long and hard about the office you seek. Are you right for the job and is the job right for you? Are you qualified for the office? Do you have the skills needed to win the election and get the job? Do you have what it takes to do the job? Is there something about you that makes you uniquely suited for this difficult undertaking? What sets you apart?

Do you have a spouse or partner? If so, have the two of you discussed a possible campaign? How about other family members and close friends? Don't do this unless they are on board. Do you have the time to campaign? Can you put a career on hold, or at least balance campaigning with work duties so that running won't conflict with your employment or other responsibilities?

How many hours will you be able to set aside each week for campaigning? Are your finances in order?

First things first. Boil your answer to the question 'why run?' down to a statement of purpose no longer than a sentence or two.

Can you afford to spend some of your personal funds on the campaign? If so, how much?

All these questions need convincing answers. Answering them involves soul searching and requires clarity of purpose. Don't proceed one step further until you've done that searching and have that clarity.

This manual outlines the nuts and bolts of running for office, but there are many candidate training programs out there. Take advantage of them. There also are free online courses covering the basics of a campaign and providing step-by-step instructions. One such resource that is available on the web at no cost can be found at **nationbuilder.com/course_how_to_run_for_office**.

But before exploring how to run, start with why.

Define winning

You've decided to take the plunge. You're throwing your hat in the ring. You are running to win, right?

Hold it right there.

Before proceeding further, think again about why you are running and what winning means to you. How you define success will determine how you run.

Of course, the most obvious definition of success is winning the election and holding the office.

But is that the only way your campaign's success should be measured?

Central to the blue jean way of running for office is the realization that there is more than one way a campaign can be impactful and ultimately a success.

Think carefully about your purpose. Is it simply to launch a political career for yourself and hold an office? Or are you aiming for something bigger than your own personal advancement?

Imagine a campaign that:

- Changes the dynamics of the race by bringing issues to the forefront that had previously been overlooked or ignored.
- Reframes the debate by changing what is discussed, how it's talked about, and how voters are engaged on these topics.

- Measurably moves public opinion on key issues.
- Creates a highly competitive contest that heightens interest in the race and increases voter turnout.
- Transforms the campaign platform and policy agenda of the eventual office holder.

Say a candidate's campaign does all these things yet does not get the most votes and does not win the election. Was that a losing campaign? Did the candidate fail?

If the purpose of running for office is to make change, to make our society better, the answer to those questions is clearly no.

A singular focus on getting the most votes leads many candidates to say whatever they think people want to hear rather than saying what needs to be said. And it causes many candidates to take the low road—cutting ethical corners, accepting tainted money and engaging in character assassination of opponents—and drag our

Getting the most votes is not the only way – or even necessarily the best way – for a campaign to be impactful and ultimately a success.

elections down into the gutter. Those candidates might “win” but our democracy loses and trust in government is lost.

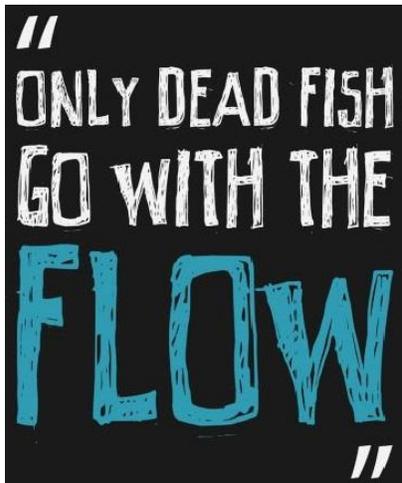
A candidate running the right way, an honorable way, might “lose” an election but win something far more valuable for our society. In the end, what matters in elections is which values are promoted and what actions our government is prompted to take and what problems end up getting solved. Winning the most votes in elections is not the only way—or even necessarily the best way—to bring this about.

The blue jean way

Running for office the blue jean way means waging a campaign as if you intend to leave our political system in better shape than you found it.

Running the blue jean way means embracing a fuller, more meaningful definition of victory that allows our whole society and not just the candidate to win.

Running the blue jean way means seeking to overcome money power with people power. It means discovering and putting to use other forms of political currency to combat the oppressive influence of big money in politics.



Running the blue jean way means swimming against the current. It means standing out from the crowd. When you think of running for office, a natural impulse is to look at how others have done it and copy them. Following this instinct leads you to mimic how they dress, how they carry themselves, how they talk, how they campaign. Before succumbing to this impulse, think about where it leads. Ask just about

anyone what they think of politicians, and what do you hear? Liars. Crooks. Cheats. Sellouts. Is that what you want people to think of you?

Running the blue jean way means consciously choosing to resist the impulse to look, sound and act like your typical politician. It means consciously choosing to break the mold and daring to be different.

If you go with the flow and campaign conventionally, you're told that you have two main jobs as a candidate—to raise money and gather endorsements. A fairly well-kept secret of modern political campaigning is how much of the money raised isn't spent on voter contact. Most campaign funds are spent on the salaries and consulting fees of political professionals and other costs associated with their services. A vast industry has grown up around modern politics, and the beast needs constant feeding.

Pollsters. Speechwriters. Media consultants. Telemarketers. Direct mail firms. Advertising agencies. List brokers and microtargeters. Fundraising specialists.

These professionals make a living by selling the idea that there is a formula for election campaigning and that if you follow the formula, you win.

The consultants' formula isn't shared in the form of an equation, but if it were, it would look something like this for a state assembly campaign:

$$V = E + \frac{70K}{22314 \rightarrow 7DM + \frac{pm}{r + pa} + \frac{gotv}{rc + dh}}$$

One assembly candidate in Wisconsin described the instructions he was given: Avoid taking positions on issues as much as possible, and steer clear of controversy. Victory (V) depended on gathering endorsements (E) and raising \$70,000 with most of it sent to an Alexandria, Virginia (zip code 22314) marketing firm to pay for seven mass-produced direct mailings (DM), and the rest going for a little paid

media (pm) including some radio (r) and print advertising (pa) and get-out-the-vote (gotv) expenses like robocalls (rc) and printed door hangers (dh). He followed the script. And lost. By a large margin. The formula failed him. More importantly, the formula fails our entire society. And it does violence to our democracy.

The blue jean way is based on the belief that good politics is not formulaic. Politics is an art, not a science. Politics is about relationships. Good relationships are built on trust. Money can buy a lot of things. It can't buy authenticity. It can't buy trust.

Speaking of money, the U.S. Supreme Court's 2010 decision in *Citizens United v. FEC* allowing wealthy individuals and corporations to spend as much as they want to influence elections and the court's 1976 ruling in *Buckley v. Valeo* equating money with speech created a new political reality for anyone thinking of running for office. Unless you are independently wealthy or have very rich friends, you are going to be up against vastly stronger opponents.

The blue jean way focuses on how to run successfully without being rich or mortgaging your home or your soul. And how do you do that when your opponents are vastly more powerful because they have big money behind them and you don't?

First, come to terms with the fact that this is an unfair fight. Yes, the odds are stacked against you. But you are not alone in that regard. The odds also are stacked against a truly representative democracy and a government responsive to all of the people. The blue jean way is about finding and putting to use ways to beat those odds.

The blue jean way focuses on three keys to overcoming opponents with immense money power:

- Don't play by rules that favor them.
- Use their strengths against them.
- Identify and utilize other forms of political currency that, when used creatively, can be more powerful than money.

When facing opponents with brute strength—namely an abundance of their own money or rich friends—following a formula that heavily relies on money is a huge strategic mistake if you don't have that kind of strength. You need another kind. One other kind is the willingness and ability to truly lead. Leadership involves many things, but a key quality is courage. You have to be willing to go where no one else is going, alone if necessary. Think about how rare true leadership is in politics. Most politicians won't move a muscle without polls and consultants telling them to. Leaders let their conscience be their guide. Conventional politicians have a sixth sense about where to find a parade, and then quickly run to the

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front and grab a drum. True leaders don't follow the crowd. True leaders have the courage of conviction that makes others want to follow them. Leaders take blame and give credit. Politicians routinely do the opposite.

What if you don't possess these qualities? You either have to develop them or admit you lack them and find someone who does to run in your place. Overcoming the brute force of money power is not for the faint of heart.

If Rule #1 of the blue jean way is don't play by your opponents' rules, Rule #2 is to use their strengths against them. Think of it as political jiu-jitsu. Jiu-jitsu is the martial art based on the concept that a smaller, weaker person can successfully defend themselves against a bigger, stronger assailant by using proper technique and leverage. The principles of jiu-jitsu can be applied to election campaigning.

Political money and all that it buys is like fire. If the fire is big enough, fighting it is fruitless. You'll never have enough water to put it out. You're going to get burned. You've got to make the fire fight itself.

The trick is to turn your opponents' greatest strengths into liabilities, and transfer your own weaknesses to your opponents. This maneuver depends on two things:

1. An honest accounting of your own and your opponents' strengths and weaknesses. You need to see yourself with honest eyes, as others see you. Just as important is the ability to recognize your opponents' best traits, or better yet admire them. Those who campaign the blue jean way can't be haters. Overcoming powerful opponents depends on understanding their strengths well enough to use those strengths against them. Hate blinds us to the characteristics of our opponents that we most need to understand. It also ends up obscuring what is best in us.

2. Willingness to focus on and openly deal with both your own greatest weaknesses as a candidate and your opponents' greatest strengths. This is completely counterintuitive. The natural impulse is to gloss over your weaknesses and draw no attention to your opponents' strong suits. Political jiu-jitsu hinges on resisting this impulse and acting counterintuitively.

Remember, when questions arose about whether Ronald Reagan was too old to bear the burdens of the presidency, he did not dodge the subject or try to fake youthful vigor. He famously quipped that he was "not going to exploit, for political purposes, my opponent's youth and inexperience."

If your opponents have more money, make money an issue. Hammer away at what all that money buys, especially that stable of political professionals at their service. Hammer away at how you don't have anyone telling you what to think or what to say or what to do, which in turn draws attention to your opponents' puppet strings.

If you are seen as inexperienced and your opponents' resumes look more impressive, make experience an issue. The mess that's been made is their doing, not yours. Make them own it. Similarly, if they've got more endorsements and establishment support, make the establishment an issue. Again, it's their mess, not yours.

There's another dimension to practicing political jiu-jitsu the blue jean way. It's best described using a practical illustration. Let's say you are seen as a tax-

The natural impulse is to gloss over your weaknesses and draw no attention to your opponents' strengths. It's completely counterintuitive, but do the opposite.

and-spend, big-government liberal. You've got a problem. Most people don't think much of government and aren't thrilled about paying taxes.

Trying to convince people that government is good is fruitless. Trying to get people to like paying taxes is just as fruitless. Both maneuvers also are violations of the basic principles of political jiu-jitsu. You can push against these forces with all your might, but they will still overwhelm you. Here's the thing, though...you don't need to convince people that government is good for them to support putting government to a constructive use. And you don't need to get people to like paying taxes for them to willingly pay for massive government undertakings.

There has always been strong anti-government and anti-tax sentiment in America, yet people paid for vast public works programs to lift the country out of the Great Depression, and paid to fight the Nazis, and paid to build the railroads and the interstate highway system and Hoover Dam, and paid to boost seniors out of poverty with Social Security and Medicare.

If you are seen as a big-government liberal, don't shy away from talking about taxes and government spending. On the contrary, you *should* talk about these topics. Just don't waste time defending government and taxation. Focus instead on identifying areas of agreement on how to put government and our tax dollars to the best possible use. That's political jiu-jitsu and it works.

Rule #3 of the blue jean way is making full use of political currencies other than money. That's not to say the blue jean way means running without any money. If you've got it or can get it without selling out, by all means use it. But if you don't have nearly as much as your opponents, all is not lost. Money is powerful in politics, no question about it. But it is not the only kind of political capital. There are others that, when combined, can make a concoction potent enough to overcome big money.

Alternative political currencies

Many different ingredients can be substituted for large sums of money in a recipe for a successful campaign run the blue jean way. Here are four:

1. **People power**, creatively employed. Conventional campaigns rely on costly paid advertising to reach voters. If your campaign isn't powered by big money, it needs to be people powered. Instead of just begging for money, beg for other forms of help like knocking on doors, making phone calls and organizing house parties and neighborhood gatherings. Combine old-fashioned shoe leather and new-age cyberstumping. Use the power of social media and other Web-based tools to complement volunteer effort. Maybe you can't afford to pay for a lot of television, radio or print advertising to get your name out there. But a standing army of volunteers can accomplish that aim and give your campaign a visible presence by becoming walking advertisements and making homemade posters and billboards that can be regularly displayed at busy intersections and highway overpasses. Conventional politicians give donors their undivided

attention and give voters the cold shoulder. Do the exact opposite. Go with the people.

2. **BIG IDEAS**, fearlessly shared. Money is a form of political capital, and it's pretty much the only one recognized by conventional politicians. Provocative ideas are an alternative political currency, as are organized people. Consultants teach conventional politicians to play it safe and avoid saying or doing anything controversial. Defeating convention necessarily involves risk. Successful low-budget campaigns make friends with controversy.

3. **Revolutionary spirit**, properly understood. Never forget the U.S. is the product of revolt against a king's power. Distrust of government is in our national DNA. Most Americans hate politics and politicians with a burning passion. Most dislike both major parties. Swim with these currents. Don't defend the system. Be anti-establishment. Be anti-royalty. Put the "little guy" on a pedestal. Conventional politicians fawn over VIPs. Aim your affections in the opposite direction. Make privilege the enemy. Large numbers of people see both the political system and economy rigged against them. They see both politics and economics working well for a few at everyone else's expense. Embrace what they see.

4. **Love**, publicly displayed. Hate is an undeniably powerful emotion. It incites people to action, even to violence. Fear and the hate that grows out of it are regularly put to use for political gain. There are hate groups and hate speech. Where are the love groups and love speech? Love is a powerful emotion too, and can inspire social action just as readily as hate does. With hate on the rise in our society, never has there been a greater need for love and empathy and compassion and concern for the common good in politics. We can't be afraid to say it's important to look out for each other and that we are our brother's—and sister's—keeper. Our society has become very self-centered and driven by greed. Now more than ever, "me" politics needs to be assertively challenged by "we" politics. Love needs to be put on public display.

Talking in jeans

As emphasized on page one, nothing is more important to your campaign's success than message discipline. That discipline comes from always keeping in mind your statement of purpose explaining why you are running. Those one or two sentences should be at the heart of your message throughout the campaign.

An effective message doesn't just say what you want to do and how you are going to do it. It focuses first and foremost on *why* it should be done. Before getting to the what and the how, your message needs to explain *why* your election and your actions as an elected official will benefit those you will be representing. Again, as emphasized on page 1, always start with why.

There are some other basics to good messaging. Think of them as the 3 Rs of effective communication.

Good messages are **refined**, meaning they are simple, brief and clear. Messages can be simple but not brief



or brief but not clear. Refined messages are all three.

Good messages **resonate**, meaning they are so clever or colorful that they echo

in the ear. They are memorable. To make sure good messages sink in, they are **repeated** often.

Your success as a candidate depends heavily on describing why you are running and why you are the best one for the job...and doing so simply, briefly, clearly and memorably...and saying it over and over and over again. Your success depends on telling your story, and your story is much more than a message.

Just like a good message, a good story is refined and memorable and bears repeating. But good stories also bare the soul. They are windows into the storyteller. That creates a bond between the storyteller and audience. And that's what builds trust. Your story is not just about *what you believe*. It's about *who you are*. Voters want and deserve to know who you are. The success of your campaign depends on you telling them.

Practice Makes Perfect

You'll only get good at messaging and storytelling by practicing. Search out opportunities to do public speaking. Here's one good way to hone your skill in the security of your own living room or private gathering:

Step One – In 75 to 100 words, describe a problem you care about, what you would do to solve the problem, how you would do it and why.

Step Two – Get a group of friends together. At least six or eight. Preferably as many as a dozen. Sit them in a circle.

Step Three – Going either direction, explain what you've written to the person next to you in 30 seconds. Then have that person share your message with the next person in 30 seconds, who will pass it on to whoever's next in the circle and so on until your message makes it all the way back to you.

Step Four – Discuss what the message was in the beginning and how it became distorted as it was passed on. Think about how the message could be refined or made more memorable or repeated to increase the likelihood it is clearly understood and remembered by everyone.

Step Five – Try again, with a new topic. (As you all get better and better at the exercise, the messages need to be longer or the time allowed to deliver the message needs to be reduced to meaningfully test your ability to communicate clearly and effectively.)

One more way to practice. Film yourself speaking and watch the videos. It helps, it really does, by allowing you to see and hear yourself as others do.

Every day you are on the campaign trail, you will encounter people who don't see eye to eye with you on everything. There are sharp divisions in our society and the citizenry is highly polarized politically. Keeping conversations civil is challenging. Finding common ground can seem next to impossible sometimes. Here are four ways to make it possible to reach understanding if not agreement in contentious encounters:

1. **Keep it personal** if at all possible. If you are talking to a single individual, keep the conversation focused on the two of you. Your life stories. Your experiences. Your politics. Your religions. Your successes and failures. Your pet peeves. Your favorite things. The two of you almost certainly will find you have some things in common, even if the other person's politics are vastly different than your own. A human connection is made, allowing you to stop seeing each other as mere caricatures of the enemy and even opening the door to understanding one another. Same goes if you are talking to several people at once or even a fairly sizeable group. Work to keep the conversation focused on those involved in the exchange and what's going on in their lives. The more the topics of conversation expand outward—to Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton or Democrats and Republicans, for example—the more tribal instincts kick in and you'll be at each other's throats in no time. Minds close and walls go up. Any hope for a meeting of the minds is lost.

2. **Speak the other side's language.** Describe your values using their vocabulary. For example, if you're talking to people favoring less government and lower taxes, there's a big difference between saying "we need to raise taxes on the rich" and saying "no new taxes are needed but we ought to make sure everyone pays the ones we've got." The two statements make the same basic point about tax policies favoring the ultra-wealthy. One probably ends the conversation because all they hear is "raise taxes." The other leaves room for further discussion because they hear "no new taxes." Of course, this strategy depends on learning their language.

3. **Avoid old labels.** Labels are shorthand. They allow people and policies to be categorized for easy reference. They are used to make sense of political debates and elections and acts of governing by describing where all the participants fit on an ideological spectrum running horizontally from right to left. But with the highly polarized political landscape we have today, the traditional labels—progressive, liberal, moderate, conservative—only serve to promote division. They become baggage that weights us down. When running the blue jean way, *never carry baggage you don't pack yourself.* Start your campaign with an empty suitcase. That means resisting old labels and establishing your own identity.

4. **Think and talk vertically, not horizontally.** As the old labels indicate, we've all been conditioned to think about politics horizontally, from right to left. This way of thinking needlessly divides us by magnifying our differences and glossing over our commonalities. Turn the political spectrum on its head and think top to bottom instead of left to right, and a magical thing can happen.

Picture two people. A man and a woman. He's white. She's black. He is a farm worker, she's a child care provider. Both are struggling to make ends meet. He votes Republican, she votes for Democrats. On the old horizontal political spectrum, they are far apart, her on the left and him on the right. We see them as enemies. They see each other the same way. They are divided and conquered. Now think vertically—who's on top and who's at the bottom, who has the most money and who has the least, who has power and who doesn't, whose voices are heard and whose aren't. These two people are in the same exact spot on a vertical political spectrum. They have way more in common than either we or they have been trained to see.

Talking vertically involves talking about royals and commoners or have-lots and have-littles, not liberals and conservatives or left wingers and right wingers. Thinking vertically not only has the potential to unite those who are currently divided, but also empower those who are presently conquered.

Running in jeans

Don't do this alone.

Seriously, running for office is a team endeavor. You can't do it alone.

Once you are committed and prepared to run, your next step is to assemble a team.

Campaign organization

Roles in an election campaign can include:

- Candidate
- Campaign manager
- Networking and field organizing director
- Communications director
- Events and scheduling coordinator
- Fundraising director
- Treasurer
- Data and tech manager (including website and social media pages)

Depending on the office you are seeking and the corresponding magnitude of your campaign, you may have paid staffers in these positions or you may rely on volunteers. A paid or volunteer campaign staffer sometimes can handle more than one of the roles. In a small-scale campaign, the candidate can even perform some of the tasks on a periodic or even ongoing basis. But to the greatest extent possible, the candidate needs to concentrate on being the candidate and trust others to do the rest of the work.

In addition to the campaign staff, it can be very useful to form a steering committee or “kitchen cabinet” of

friends, family and supporters who can advise you and network on your behalf.

A finance committee also can be a great asset. Raising funds for the campaign can't just be the job of the candidate and the fundraising director. It has to be a team effort, and every member of the team needs to pitch in. All hands on deck. Having someone with fundraising experience heading the finance committee and someone with money management experience as campaign treasurer is obviously ideal.

After getting this campaign infrastructure in place, the real challenge of organization building begins. Running a strong grassroots campaign that engages directly with voters without spending huge sums of money to do it requires heavy reliance on volunteers. A good rule of thumb—ambitious but feasible—is one volunteer for every 2,500 to 3,000 people living in the area where you are running.

There are 99 state assembly districts in Wisconsin. Each has roughly 57,000 residents. Somewhere in the neighborhood of 20 volunteers is the target to aim at in a grassroots assembly campaign. State senate

A vibrant grassroots campaign needs one volunteer for every 2,500 to 3,000 people living in the area where you are running.

districts are three times the size of assembly districts, so shoot for about 60 volunteers in those races. For congressional elections, the size of the volunteer corps rises to at least 250. For a statewide race, the number runs up to 2,000 or more.

Money is the lifeblood of conventional campaigns. Campaigns run the blue jean way depend more on people power than money. At least as much time and energy need to be devoted to volunteer recruitment and guidance as is spent on fundraising.



Matching volunteers to tasks they are well suited for and comfortable with is critically important. Giving volunteers choices and considerable say over how they'll be involved is what will keep them engaged. Don't try pounding a square peg into a round hole. Undoubtedly you know some introverts who want to help. Chances are they won't feel comfortable knocking on doors or making phone calls. Put them to work in ways aligned with their skills and personality. Put a premium on following up promptly with everyone who signs up to volunteer. Don't give anyone the impression that their help is not needed.

There's a wide range of tasks volunteers can perform that are highly valuable to a campaign. Among these are:

- Organizing house parties and meet-the-candidate gatherings at popular locations in the community
- Planning and helping with fundraisers
- Gathering signatures on nomination papers
- Phone calling
- Social media monitoring and posting
- Writing letters to the editor to local newspapers
- Calling into talk radio programs
- Recording and sharing videos
- Door-to-door canvassing
- Lit drops and distributing yard signs
- Stuffing envelopes
- Data entry
- Clerical assistance and helping with bookkeeping or required campaign filings
- Driving the candidate to events and other campaign appearances
- Staffing information tables at fairs, neighborhood festivals and other community events
- Being part of a "people-powered billboard" crew holding banners and signs in parades and at busy intersections or highway overpasses to create an ongoing visible presence for the campaign

- Get-out-the-vote activities like texting, phoning and handwriting postcards to friends and neighbors.

Budgeting

As you are building a campaign organization, you also have to build a budget. Running the blue jean way means campaigning on a shoestring. This requires you to be ruthlessly strategic about how you spend and pay special attention to squirreling away resources until the end of the campaign. Plan on doing a substantial amount of your spending in the final months or even weeks of your campaign, when voters are paying the most attention and making up their minds.

If you're running for the first time, it's hard to know what you'll need to spend money on and how much. One good way to get a ballpark estimate is to examine

What should you spend on? Stuff that gets you votes. Concentrate your resources on direct voter contact as much as you possibly can.

the campaign finance disclosures of other candidates' campaigns from previous elections. You may not have as much money as them, but you'll see how they spent their funds and you can prioritize your spending and decide what you can do without.

What office you are seeking and how much money you can realistically raise will have a significant bearing on what you include in your budget and how much you commit to each item. Keeping in mind that you probably won't need or can't afford everything on this list, here are some expenses to consider when budgeting:

- Staff compensation or consulting fees
- Voter files and databases
- Website construction and web hosting fees
- Phone service

- Office space, equipment and supplies
- Letterhead and envelopes
- Campaign literature (palm cards, flyers, etc.)
- Printing
- Postage
- Bank and payment processing fees
- Business cards, ID badges, etc.
- Donation cards and remittance envelopes
- Fundraising event expenses (venue rental, food and beverages, etc.)
- Community meeting expenses
- Campaign swag (buttons, stickers, shirts, hats)
- Yard signs
- Banners, billboards and other signs
- Posts, poles and zip ties for road signs
- Gas and other transportation costs
- Advertising production (digital, print, broadcast)
- Ad placement cost
- Direct mail design and delivery
- Live and automated calls
- Volunteer expenses
- Canvassing and get-out-the-vote operations



Prioritize, prioritize, prioritize. Think about what spending will get you the biggest bang for your buck. For example, a \$2 yard sign placed on a lawn along a busy street can be seen by thousands of passersby every day, while a \$20 t-shirt will end up being seen by far fewer people. Focus on spending that reaches voters directly, builds your name recognition and gets your message out. Having volunteers hand out literature at well-attended public gatherings is less expensive than paying to mail it to large numbers of households.

Even in statewide races, a good way to cut corners financially is to utilize modern technology and have campaign staff work out of their own homes or from remote locations instead of paying rent for office space. Volunteers often can be found who are willing to make their homes available as meeting places or shared work spaces for the campaign.

You'll need voter lists. If you are running for a partisan office—and in some cases even when the office you seek is nonpartisan—voter lists can be obtained from party organizations, sometimes at no cost. Lists also can be purchased either from private list brokers or from public election authorities such as a local clerk's office or state election commission. Or you can build your own database using paid platforms like NationBuilder or open source ones like CiviCRM. Shop around. Ask about where you can get the best lists and data management tools for the lowest cost.

Another way a shoestring campaigner can scrimp while opponents are spending like drunken sailors is to say no to the large herd of political professionals who descend on campaigns offering their assistance. As noted on page 3, a mammoth political campaigning industry has formed and the consultants in this industry charge an arm and a leg. No matter how much money you raise, they can quickly devour it. Replace paid professionals with volunteers whenever you can.

Volunteer-driven campaigning is far more cost effective. Instead of a telemarketing firm taking your

Your campaign's biggest expense should be voter outreach. If it's not, you are wasting money.

money for automated phone calls, volunteers can make calls and send texts from their own phones. Instead of paying an outdoor advertising company for billboard space, volunteers can make large banners and display them in heavy traffic areas. Inexpensive yard signs can be displayed on lawns. Hand-painted road signs and billboards can be made and erected on supporters' property.

As you are doing budget planning with your campaign team, don't forget to set aside enough resources for spending that can be done late in the campaign when voters are tuned into your race and are actively considering their choices and deciding which

candidate will get their vote. Your biggest expense should not be campaign operations, it should be all the various forms of voter outreach including advertising. A key to getting the best possible return on investment of campaign resources is to target your advertising very carefully. No matter what office you seek, you'll

Campaigning Out of the Box With People Powered Advertising

The goal of campaign advertising is to get your name and message out there. Reaching that goal doesn't have to cost a fortune. Volunteers can become walking advertisements, working in shifts of one to two hours holding banners in high-traffic areas. Busy intersections. Freeway overpasses. It can be done weekly or even daily, however often the size of your volunteer corps allows.

Banners printed on durable, waterproof vinyl with metal grommets are relatively inexpensive and can be displayed repeatedly by volunteers or hung on barns or other highly visible buildings or locations. Or the signs can be homemade at next to no cost. Here are some guidelines to follow if you go this route:

1. Make 'em big, preferably 4 feet by 6 feet or thereabouts, even larger if possible. They need to be easy for people to see from a distance while moving.
2. Make the lettering large, ideally 12 to 14 inches high in **BOLD, BLOCK CAPITAL LETTERS**. If the background is light, use dark lettering. If the background is dark, use white or very light lettering. Again, it needs to be easily visible from a distance.
3. Use heavy duty cloth. Canvas tarps work great. Bed sheets with a high thread count can be used but are not ideal. Put metal grommets in the corners.
4. Be sure to use permanent markers or paint that doesn't smudge or wash off when it gets wet. Tape can be used to make letters on vinyl or plastic tarps.
5. Keep the message very simple...the candidate's name and the office being sought and little else. Three to four words, tops.

be asked when you are going to start airing TV ads. You may be better off resisting the temptation. In a state the size of Wisconsin, a typical television market covers 10 or more counties. If you are running for city, town, village or county office or the state legislature and you pay to air television advertising, most of the people seeing your ad will not be able to vote for you. Radio markets typically cover about half as much territory as TV markets or even less, but even radio advertising reaches large numbers of people who cannot vote for you unless you are seeking a seat in Congress or are running for statewide office. Direct mail advertising can be sent only to target audiences. Same goes for email messages. Likewise, online advertising on social media and other digital platforms can be targeted in ways that broadcast advertising cannot. Give careful thought to what forms of advertising make the most sense for your type of campaign.

Website and social media pages

Every campaign should have a website. And the website's address needs to be on every piece of literature that gets handed out or mailed. It's your campaign's home base. The site doesn't have to be elaborate, but it does need to have certain basic features:

- Your name, your campaign's logo, the campaign motto or slogan and your brief statement of purpose.
- Photos. A picture is worth a thousand words.
- A way to easily sign up online to volunteer for the campaign.
- A way to easily and securely donate to the campaign.
- Contact information to allow people to get in touch, including a mailing address for people who prefer sending a check rather than processing a credit card transaction in order to contribute financially.

Without a website that includes a feature allowing online donations, you'll be losing out on valuable

financial support for your campaign. Every campaign website should have a mechanism for processing credit card transactions in a way that's simple, easy and safe to give the campaign money. There are countless online services for credit card transactions to choose from—Action Network, CrowdPac, Authorize.net, ActBlue, PayPal, Square, Stripe and many others. Do your homework before choosing the one that's best for your campaign website.

Another critical function of your website is helping to build a database of contacts. Supporters need to be able to sign up to get on your campaign mailing list and to volunteer. As noted on page 11, there are data management tools like Nation Builder and CiviCRM that can be used to build your lists of contacts, supporters, donors and volunteers. Or your campaign can go the do-it-yourself route using a spreadsheet program like Microsoft Excel or Google Sheets. Keep track of everything—who is volunteering, who has donated, who is willing to put up a yard sign, who attended campaign events.

Then you need to have the ability to send emails to your various lists. Avoid using your personal email. Depending on the size of your contact database, chances are you'll want to use an email delivery provider such as Mailchimp, Constant Contact or ActiveCampaign. As with the credit card processing services, do your homework before choosing what email service is best suited for your particular campaign.

Once these essentials for your campaign website are in place, and you've made arrangements for data management and emailing capacity, you can consider adding other content to your website including:

- Campaign videos
- Issue position papers and press releases
- Links to news coverage of the campaign
- A blog
- Podcasts or other forms of audio

Social media pages are a must for everyone running for office. The top social media priority should be a Facebook page for the campaign. Pages are different from your own personal Facebook profile. They are public and have no limits on how many people can “like” your page. You'll also need one if you want to do paid Facebook advertising later in the campaign. Volunteers can be trained to monitor and update the campaign page. Along with Facebook, a campaign Twitter feed can definitely be valuable and don't forget to set up a YouTube channel for posting and sharing campaign videos. If the campaign has the means to maintain more social media sites, Instagram is a good place to share photos and videos and connect with young people. A personal LinkedIn profile that is up to date and utilized to share information also can be worthwhile.

Social media pages are where you will want to share daily campaign developments, and highlight campaign stops and upcoming events. You also can invite people

Campaigns are fundamentally about making lists and communicating regularly with everyone on those lists. Successful campaigns make full use of modern technology to do those two things well at an affordable cost.

to events using social media tools, supplementing your campaign email updates. These pages can help build a following for the campaign, and they are a good way to keep followers in the loop and on top of campaign activities.

Taking care of the formalities

Get familiar with all the legal requirements to make your candidacy official. Know the forms that need to be filed and the filing deadlines. Familiarize yourself

and your campaign team with campaign finance laws that apply to your race. Find out when reports are due, what the limits on donations are, when you can legally accept contributions, what donor information you need to collect and report, and when those disclosures need to be made. Make a list of every step that needs to be taken and when, and determine who on your team is responsible for completing each task. Candidates for local, state or federal office in Wisconsin can find information about the process at elections.wi.gov and a step-by-step guide to becoming a candidate is available at elections.wi.gov/candidates. Information about campaign finance laws as well as disclosure requirements can be found at ethics.wi.gov.

Elected clerks at the city, county, town and village levels also are excellent sources of information about elections. The national Campaign Finance Institute provides useful links to information on election and campaign finance laws and reporting requirements in every state at cfinst.org/law/states.aspx. The Federal Election Commission's website has a section devoted to assisting candidates with the process of running for federal office at fec.gov/help-candidates-and-committees.



Many first-time candidates mistakenly believe that running for office begins with gathering nomination signatures. That's not even close to the first step in the process, which is why petitioning for a place on the ballot is being addressed for the first time on page 14 of this manual.

Making sure you are prepared to be a candidate, developing your campaign's principles and core message, and beginning to assemble a team come first. The first legal steps to becoming an official candidate are submitting forms **declaring your candidacy** and **registering a campaign committee**. That authorizes you to open a campaign bank account and allows you to start accepting campaign donations. Then you can get busy building a campaign organization and equipping it with the technology and other tools needed for an effective campaign.

Well after all that work has begun, you reach the stage of gathering and submitting nomination paper signatures. If you go into this thinking that's where the journey begins, you are in for a rude awakening. That's why a key component of your campaign plan is a detailed calendar that maps out a timeline of campaign activities that builds to the final weeks before the election, when most of your voter engagement and advertising is done.

If you run the conventional way, you can take multi-millionaire investment banker and Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel's advice: "The first third of your campaign is money, money, money. The second third is money, money, money. The final third is votes, press and money."

For those keeping score at home that's money 7, press 1 and votes 1.

Running the blue jean way is more like this: The first third of the campaign focuses on building organizational infrastructure, assembling and growing your campaign team, media outreach and fundraising. The second third is community events, candidate appearances, more media outreach, on-the-ground volunteer deployment, and continued fundraising. The final third is street-level campaign visibility, voter engagement, media attention (including supporter-generated letters to the editor and the like), targeted advertising and get-out-the-vote operations, along with enough fundraising to get to the finish line.

OK, you've made it this far. Now the fun part.

Kicking off the campaign

You never get a second chance to make a first impression. The way you announce your candidacy should set the tone for the entire campaign. There must be a hundred different ways to do it. Some campaigns are launched with a statement to the media. Some with a press conference. Others start with much more involved events or rallies with supporters. Do what

feels comfortable. But be sure to get the point of your candidacy across. Set the tone.

If you do a kickoff event, give careful thought to the location. The place should have special meaning to you. Invite the press. Livestream it on social media. And take lots of pictures to share online and via email. Tweet about it. Make it a happening.

Hitting the campaign trail

Go where the people are.

That sums up a key element of the philosophy behind running the blue jean way. Don't expect people to come to you. Go to them. Reach out to every imaginable kind of group in the area where you are running and ask for an opportunity to speak to the group or at least attend their meetings. Make sure your campaign has a visible presence at community festivals, fairs, farmers markets and other large gatherings.

Too often, campaigns focus on organizing their own events instead of taking advantage of those organized by others. Yes, plan your own events. Give people every opportunity to get to know you as a candidate. But again, don't rely on them coming to you. Go to wherever they are gathering.

Reach out to local media. Don't wait for them to ask for an interview. Stop by the local TV and radio stations to introduce yourself. Connect with the newspaper reporters and editors and ask to meet with the editorial board to discuss why you are running. Over the entire course of the campaign, regularly feed information to journalists in the form of press releases about issues and campaign developments and media advisories alerting them to campaign appearances and activities.

By the time you enter this active campaign mode, you should have already laid the groundwork by practicing your communication skills as recommended on page 7 and honing your campaign message.

You'll need to be able to give a good stump speech for occasions when you are given four or five minutes to introduce yourself and say why you are running. You'll need a good elevator pitch for the times when you have only 30 seconds or a minute to make an impression. If you're not familiar with the term elevator pitch, think of sharing an elevator with someone and the time between getting on and leaving the elevator. The average candidate sound bite in a television news story is nine seconds. You need to be able to say why you're the best candidate in the race in nine seconds when a camera and microphone are in your face. But then sometimes you'll be given opportunities to speak at length—for 20 or 30 minutes or even an hour—and your message needs to be full of substance that shows you have a command of the issues while still emphasizing your core themes.



Many times, it's not the candidate delivering the campaign's message. The candidate can't be in two or three places at once, but the campaign can. The candidate doesn't need to be everywhere. The campaign does. There is great value in the campaign having a presence in a local parade or at a community festival even if the schedule doesn't permit the candidate to be there.

In fact, when events don't provide an opportunity for the candidate to speak, the campaign may better off having volunteers there instead. When scheduling conflicts arise—and they will arise—prioritize opportunities for you as a candidate to deliver your message and directly engage with voters rather than merely be in attendance. At events where attending is all that's asked or offered, send others to represent the campaign. Literature can be handed out. Signs can be displayed. The campaign can get the word out without the candidate there. It takes a team to run the blue jean way.

To establish and maintain an ongoing, visible presence in the communities you are seeking to represent, your team needs to constantly expand the network of people actively involved in the campaign. Success depends on turning volunteer workers into volunteer recruiters.

And if you don't have big money donors, your campaign needs a whole lot of contributors giving small amounts. That depends on turning donors into fundraisers.

The foundation of your campaign—that simple statement of purpose discussed on page 1—has to come shining through in every campaign message. But at the end of the message, there needs to be an ask, too. Invite everyone to get involved, to give to the cause, whether it's time or money or both.

Not everyone can afford to give much money. But a grassroots campaign needs to give everyone the opportunity to give, even if it's just spare change. Have a jar or a basket at every event with a sign on it or next to it saying something like “small change can make big change.”

Not everyone has much time to give. People are busy. But everyone can be asked to at least tell five or 10 other people about your candidacy. One statewide

Grassroots campaigns run on people power and lots of small donations. Success depends on turning volunteer workers into volunteer recruiters and donors into fundraisers.

campaign run the blue jean way had brown paper lunch bags containing a small number of the campaign's palm cards available at every stop. Each sack was labeled either “Tell 5” or “Tell 10” and carried a handwritten message: “The election is in the bag.” Thousands of these bags were taken by people who were inspired by the candidate's message and figured they could find the time to spread the word to five or 10 friends, neighbors or co-workers.

This is one example of how even very modest levels of involvement can be valued and encouraged. Be creative about how you ask for help. But be sure to ask.

Be creative about how people are able to pitch in. Some super-volunteers will devote dozens or even hundreds of hours of work to a campaign. They are the backbone of a grassroots campaign run the blue jean way. Most people don't have that much time to give. But even if they can only spare a few minutes a day or an hour a week, their involvement must be sought and valued. No amount of help is too small.

The secret sauce of a campaign run the blue jean way is an extensive network of volunteer ambassadors for your candidacy. Building that network is hard work and time consuming, but there's also some magic involved. The magic happens when some control is surrendered and volunteers are given real freedom to make decisions and put their stamp on the campaign. You know you have something special on your hands when they stop calling it your campaign and start seeing it as their own. A few of them will do some things that can make you cringe. Let your discomfort be known, but resist the temptation to impose top-down rule. Some occasional overzealousness or clumsiness is a price worth paying to build grassroots power. Challenging people to be full-fledged citizens, empowering them to take action and giving them the freedom to exercise creativity is what fuels volunteer commitment. Cut the fuel supply and the engine will stall.

The home stretch

The final third of the campaign is when volunteers hit the streets and blanket neighborhoods. It's when letters to the editor are needed most. It's when campaign visibility has to peak. Yard signs and homemade road signs go up on supporters' property. Teams displaying banners stand vigil at busy intersections. Lit drops and door-to-door canvassing intensify. In the final weeks before the election, whatever targeted advertising the campaign can afford is done. Get-out-the-vote operations kick into high gear.

Before you know it, the final days before the election will be upon you. Using your database of contacts,

volunteers should be making calls, sending emails and texts, knocking doors and handwriting postcards right to the end. Arrangements should be made so the campaign can offer rides to polling places if needed. Plans for an election-night gathering should be in place. As the candidate, you should be pounding the pavement and reaching out to voters until the end. But you also should be preparing for media interviews and thinking about what you will say in victory or defeat. Remember to call your opponents when the outcome is decided. And don't forget to thank supporters...on election night and in the days and weeks following the election.

Now you wait. The voters decide.

Elections are about representation. All voters have at least one thing in common: There is one above all others who best speaks for them, who best represents them. **Themselves.** But for one reason or another, they do not wish to be a candidate for office or an elected official. So they look for the next best thing...someone who is their reflection. A good representative of the people is like a mirror. When voters look at that representative, they should be able to see someone who thinks like them and acts as they would like to act if they were in that position.

Whatever the outcome of the election, respect the wishes of the voters. They deserve to have the kind of representation they want.

Regardless of the election's outcome, you will have gone on a journey few others have experienced. You will be enriched in ways few others can relate to. And by running the blue jean way, you will have the added satisfaction of having waged a campaign with the intention of leaving our political system in better shape than you found it. You will have violated just about every rule in the professional consultants' playbook, and our democracy and our society will be richer for it.

Though not phrased in a way that's in keeping with modern sensibilities, what a former president said in a bygone day and age still rings true today:

“It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, who comes short again and again, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming; but who does actually strive to do the deeds; who knows great enthusiasms, the great devotions; who spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who neither know victory nor defeat.”

—Theodore Roosevelt