

Running for election –

Building your confidence
Communicating your message
Campaign success

Before you decide to run...

Before you take the leap and announce your candidacy, it is advisable to take time to reflect and assess yourself as a candidate. Being clear about this will help you feel confident in your candidacy and why you should be an elected representative in your area.

Assess why you want to run

- Build the self-confidence necessary to put yourself forward
- Analyse the political landscape in your local area to see if it's possible to win
- Start to plan how you will get selected
- Think about what needs to go into your campaign plan
- Build a team of active supporters who will work hard to help you win
- Develop your message and communicate it to voters through the media

Ask yourself the following questions, consider them carefully and be honest with yourself. This can be a tough journey and you need to be clear why you are doing it. Knowing the answer to these questions will help you when you are challenged in your campaign.

Questions to ask yourself before you decide to run:

- Why are you running for election?
- What will you change by being in politics?
- Are you contesting the right election?
- Have you considered the time and commitment necessary to win?
- Have you consulted those you trust, including existing or past politicians and taken their advice?
- Do you have people around you who will support you and become part of your team?
- How do you cope with defeat?

Building your confidence

Confidence is a feeling, more than something we can easily define, and there are different kinds of confidence, associated with different roles and experiences. For example, confidence can come from your title, your qualifications or knowing you are expert at something; it can come from experience or a reputation you have built up over time. At different times in your life, in different situations, your level of confidence may vary.

Confidence is vital for those in the public eye. You will be subject to scrutiny from the electorate, the media, those you meet, those you don't. You will need to be confident enough to essentially ask a stranger to like you (at least enough to vote for you). Public speaking, whether it is to 20 people or 200 will become a feature of your life.

As an election candidate it is important to be confident in your ability to represent your constituents and to demonstrate that confidence to them in your materials, public interactions and media performances. Having a strong campaign plan and good communications strategy (communications is dealt with later in your guide) are key tools in demonstrating that confidence.

3 Top tips

1. **Know the difference between fact and fiction:** Factual under-confidence is not having the confidence to do something because you don't have the necessary skills (e.g. being an engineer without studying engineering). You can address it through learning and up-skilling. Fictional under-confidence is the voice in your head telling you that you can't do something; the tips you learn on INSPIRE will help you quieten that voice.
2. **Learn, learn, learn... and delegate:** List the things related to your action plan that you are good at and those where you need support. Decide where you are going to up-skill to address those areas where you don't feel strong, and where you are going to delegate. Remember, you don't have to do it all yourself.
3. **Remember your successes:** We need the good days to keep us going on bad days. Keep a record of your successes (positive feedback you've had, good results, media recognition) and store them in a folder to come back to and review when you're feeling low or stressed. Your journey is a marathon not a sprint and it's important to have little personal boosters to keep you motivated.

Communicating your message

At the core of your message is YOU – why do you want to be in politics and what do you want to change. Being clear and strong on your message is vital – you’ll hear this a lot in politics, and it is very true. And remember, your message is not just for media, it’s for everything: canvassing, meetings, vox-pops, interviews, you name it. So take time to think about it, work it out and test it.

Your message is what you want people to think about you when you’ve left the room. It’s usually just a couple of words, along the lines of *“You know that woman, she’s the...”*

In your campaign, you’ve got an opportunity to control what words people use to associate with you. These are usually a mixture of words that describe who you are, what’s you’ve done and what you are like.

One of the first things you need to do when building your communications element of your campaign is to write these down. This has to be done objectively, and it’s useful to work with your campaign manager to decide this message.

3 Top tips

1. **Work out your message.** Work out what are your best strengths as a candidate, factoring in your key voter audiences and who you’d be running against (if you know this right now). This has to be authentic, clear and concise.
2. **Start building your materials.** First step is that 30 second pitch, followed by those photos, your social media outlets, and those all-important leaflets.
3. **Really get to know your media.** Research your local radio stations and newspapers, identifying where you could fit in. Take the time to make connections with producers and editors over coffee to get their advice.

Campaign success

Whether you're just thinking about running for election or you've already decided to throw your hat in the ring, you will no doubt be asking yourself, "When should I start my campaign?" The answer is always the same. NOW! This may not involve any public declarations, but it does require the research and planning to prepare a plan (we call this the 'Path to Selection', and it will be examined later in this guide) and starting to build a team and an infrastructure.

Academic research informs us that the electorate rewards early contact from their candidates. So remember that it's never too early to start your political campaign. Some things have to wait until the election is formally announced, but now is the time to avail of opportunities to increase your profile and enhance your candidacy.

3 Top tips

1. **Do your research:** Know as much as you can about yourself, your opponent, your party (locally), your constituency (its geography, history and demographics) and local issues. These elements are critical to development of your campaign plan.
2. **Have a plan:** Make a clear plan based on your research and don't deviate from it. Your plan should be based on how many votes you need to win. It should include your campaign structure and core message, your canvassing plan, your online strategy, your advertising plan and your postering plan.
3. **Hire a campaign manager:** You should never manage your own campaign, regardless of the size of the election. Your campaign manager must be someone who works well under pressure, knows how to delegate and who will stay focused on the goal of getting you elected in the face of incessant distractions.