Getting to the Gate
Discover Your Pathway to Find Success in Politics
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So you’re thinking of running for political office.

Amazing – we need you! Politics needs good, motivated people from diverse backgrounds to be a part of our democratic process.
This guidebook will help you decide whether politics is for you (it is for everyone) and whether it is for you now. We will also help you to consider where and for what level of government you might put your name forward. Our goal is to support you in assessing your strengths and experience, and in identifying where you can work to improve your skills and build capacity. The guidebook will help you craft an authentic message, identify your network and supporters, and identify your next steps.

Whether you’ve just started to think about it or you’ve already decided to run, this guidebook can help you get organized, build on your strengths, and get yourself – and a team – ready for your campaign.

Running for office – the good...

One of the main reasons people enter the political arena is to participate in the decision-making processes that have an impact on society in a broad and sustained way.

Elected representatives have the capacity to make a real difference. Running for public office is a way to ensure your voice is heard and the issues you care about are on the agenda. If you’re elected, there are opportunities to influence public policy and connect the individuals you represent to their government and the services they need.

The electoral process is also an incredible way to connect with your neighbourhood and the wider community. As you build a strong network and coalition to support your election, you will make relationships with individuals and organizations working in your community.

Running for office can also advance your non-political career. You’ll build relationships, make connections, and learn a lot. An election campaign can establish and enhance your public profile. It provides you with an arena to build and improve your leadership and communication skills, and further your position as a community leader.

If you have an established career, entering politics can provide a way to share your knowledge and experience in public service. You will serve as a role model and pave the way for others who also have something to offer politics. Putting an established network and life-long career to work in the public sector is an incredible way to give back to your community and cement your legacy.
the bad...

There are, however, notable downsides to running for and serving in public office. How much of a deterrent these are for you will depend on you and your current life. Knowing both the positive and the negative aspects of seeking a political life can help you make important decisions about when and where to run. It will also help you to anticipate some potential issues and prepare you for navigating the challenges along the way.

Travel and schedule: If you run for federal or provincial/territorial office, you can expect to be frequently away from home for multiple days at a time. Regardless of the level of government, it’s known that meetings with your constituents, in the community, or with your colleagues often run into the evenings and occasionally late into the night. Community, business, and charity events often take place on the weekends.

Life in the public eye: Elected representatives are subjected to heightened public scrutiny, both in terms of the political decisions they make and some of the details of their personal lives. Things you do or say may find their way into the media, and the targeted attacks on social media can be relentless. You are likely to lose anonymity in your community, irrespective of which level of government in which you serve. Things that were once simple and anonymous, like getting coffee in the morning or buying groceries, are likely to be interrupted by those who want your help with something, or who have something to say about politics, and the decisions you’ve been involved with along the way.

Financial cost: While you will fundraise to pay for your campaign, time away from work to campaign. You may also choose to donate personal funds for your campaign. Once elected, you may choose (or feel the need to) quit your previous job. At the municipal level salaries reflect part-time work often with full-time expectations.
We wish, in 2018, that we didn’t need to include this section, but we do. There are barriers and negative experiences in politics that are based on gender, race, ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, age and ability. Equal Voice, as well as many other organizations and current and former elected officials, are working to tackle these. However, until we move beyond them, it is essential to know what you can expect.

Sexual harassment remains a real predicament in Canadian politics. A recent survey of women MPs found that more than half had experienced at least one form of sexual misconduct, and almost as many had been subjected to inappropriate online comments.

We know that elected women still face negative mainstream and social media attention based on appearance, clothing, and even the sound of their voice. This is particularly acute for racialized women, those wearing visible religious symbols or gender non-conforming folks.

According to Samara Canada, we know that once elected, women are much more likely to hear heckles in the House of Commons based on gender, race and ethnicity, and appearance (like weight). Women are also more likely to be interrupted while speaking.

Whether or not women have children is also subject to a double standard. If women do have children, they face more questions than men about how they manage politics and parenthood in a way that their male parenthood. When women in politics don’t have children, they are likely to be subjected to criticism for not fulfilling expectations of motherhood.

Despite significant changes over time in the number of women working outside the home, data from Statistics Canada continues to show that women do the majority of unpaid work around the home, including caring for children and elderly relatives. The world of politics lags behind many other workplaces in terms of supporting and accommodating those with care responsibilities. Long hours, frequent travel, limited use of technology to accommodate offsite work, and lack of parental or compassionate leave can make balancing family and political life difficult, especially for women.

These realities, they are significant impact on who is elected – men in politics are much more likely to have children than women, and women in politics are more likely to be quiet about their parental status.

We share this not to discourage you – women in politics do make a difference and are respected and admired. They have the opportunity to serve as leaders in their communities. We also know that politics does not need to be more challenging for women.

Change is possible! Along with the individuals and organizations working to change politics, more women, more diverse representatives, and more political participation will make a difference.
We need more women in politics – and you could be one!

As of 2018, Canada ranks 60th internationally when it comes to women’s representation in our House of Commons. Countries as diverse as France, Sweden, Rwanda, Italy, and Nepal have more women in their national parliaments than we do here in Canada.

As of October 2018, women are better represented in some parts of the country: Quebec has over 40%, nearly 40% in Ontario and British Columbia. But in comparison, PEI has 19% and Northwest Territories at 11%. Just one-in-five mayors are women.

However, we look at the issue, the fact remains – women in Canadian politics are under-represented and that’s not good for democracy generally.

Women in politics are more diverse than their men colleagues. In the 2015 federal election, the 33 most diverse ridings fielded twice as many women candidates as the rest of the country. In the House of Commons, women are more likely to be racialized than were men, and women are better represented among racialized elected officials. When looking at Indigenous representation, there was a notable increase in the number of Indigenous candidates in 2015 (up 23% over 2011) and half of First Nations, Métis and Inuit candidates were women. But women representing equity-seeking groups remain under-represented in Canada. After the 2015 federal election, there were just three Indigenous women MPs. Women from the LGBTQ2S+ community and those living with disabilities are also not adequately represented in federal, provincial/territorial, or municipal politics.

We need smart, creative, innovative, compassionate, and hardworking people in politics. If we are not engaging and electing people from Canada’s diverse population, we all lose.

For a political system to be truly democratic, all citizens must be equally and fairly represented by their elected leaders. All citizens must have equal opportunity to speak and be heard.

Research has shown that women bring an important perspective to politics that might otherwise be missed or under-emphasized. Sometimes this is about childcare, health care, education, or gender-based violence. But research has also shown that women bring important considerations to all kinds of conversations, like raising the issue of safety in discussions about public transportation or a broaden the view of economic development.

Your unique skillset and experiences are valued in the political world. We need you!

The next module prompts you to think about whether politics is for you and whether it is for you now.

To get started complete activity #1
Is taking the leap into politics right for you?

There is no ideal age, professional profile, or credential for elected office. The decision to run for elected office is personal, and the process is unique for each candidate.
One thing is certain; elected life requires that you to invest time. Time requirements vary depending on your chosen office, but this is a crucial initial consideration.

Do you think you can win? Not only should you consider your own sense of preparedness but also the electoral conditions in which you plan to run. Is now the right time for you to put your name and priorities forward? If you are new to the local, provincial or federal political scene, you may want to do additional research.

Are you prepared to lose? You can make an important contribution to the democratic process and raise issues for discussion even if you do not win your seat. Most candidates do not win in their first time. You might want to think through whether or not, at this time, you feel comfortable jumping into, spending time and resources on an uncertain situation, where you may not be the eventual winner.

Running in a general election, or for the nomination within a political party, is a competition. You need to be prepared to make the case that you are the best person to represent your constituency. Generally speaking, the more ‘winnable’ the seat is considered, the more competitive the nomination process will be.

If your goal is to win the election, it is important to carefully evaluate your resources and electoral conditions. You may decide that right now is not the time to run, which can be a wise and strategic decision.

As part of this decision-making process, you’ll also want to take a good look at your strengths and weaknesses. It will also help you decide whether now is the time or whether you’d benefit from additional opportunities to learn, make connections, and hone your skills before launching into politics.

There is no right or wrong answer here. Many of the skills and expertise you will learn on the go from those around you and from the experience of running. You do not need to know everything before you start! Understanding where you are, however, can be an extremely useful process in making this decision.
Advice from role models.

At this point, you may be asking yourself a number of questions regarding your entrance into the political race. Luckily, there are many strong, successful women political leaders to lend you words of wisdom.

Is it really the right time for me to run?

“Who knows [when it is the right time for women to run]? For me it was in my 50s. I had the freedom and financial support, my husband was supportive, and I had no other family commitments. Earlier, it’s tough. You need a very supportive family and extended family or independent financial means for babysitters and the emotional capacity to accept not having the chance to put your children to bed for years.”

– Susan Freeman, County Warden. Ontario

“I did not run for provincial office until my last two children were in high school... It worked, but I found the separation difficult. A supportive home base, however it is worked out, was essential for me, and, even then, I would not have taken on the provincial role when my children were younger.”

– Lyn McLeod, First woman party leader, Ontario

“Provincial politics worked for me. I chose a constituency where I lived, and which was 15 minutes from the Legislature, and my children were young. By 1994, when I moved to the federal scene, the girls had graduated from university and my husband had taken early retirement and was prepared to move to Ottawa.”

– Senator Sharon Carstairs, First woman to lead Official Opposition Manitoba

Continue with activities 2,3,4, & 5
Identifying your experience, qualifications, and network.

If you are actively involved in your community you bring an understanding of the issues that matter locally.
If you pay attention to politics, it can be tempting to think that we’re not a right fit for elected office. You may not see elected officials with your experience or qualifications. You may not see many women or people of colour.

While there is no credential required for elected office, it is a very good idea to begin to consider your accomplishments, and those that matter most to you and to others.

If you have worked to earn important professional credentials, stand proud and share these. You may need to help people understand what your title means, perhaps why what you’ve studied or achieved will make you a better representative.

It can be an enormous advantage to have a distinctive network when you are considering a political run. They do not need to be politically active, but it is helpful to have people who understand politics and local issues within your network.

The activities in this section will help you take stock of your skills, the experience you bring, as well as your networks, possible bases of support, and more.

Continue with activities 6 & 7
Experiencing self-doubt? It’s not you.

If you’re feeling some self-doubt or questioning whether you have the skills, experience, and knowledge to be elected, you are not alone. Since 1965, the Canadian Election study has asked individuals whether they think that “sometimes politics and government seem so complicated a person like me can’t really understand what’s going on.”

And since 1965, women have been about fifteen-points more likely to say that politics is too complex for someone ‘like them’. As more and more women have entered the paid workforce and attended post-secondary, women have remained more likely to think they can’t understand politics. Is this about education level? Income? Employment? No. Even controlling for all these factors, a gender gap exists.

Maybe it is because we don’t see nearly as many women in politics as we do men. Or perhaps it has something to do with public attention to clothing, appearance, and voice rather than substance. It’s clear that women don’t have the same opportunity to see ‘themselves’ in politics.

We also know that women are much more likely to doubt their qualifications and wait until they are fully prepared before even thinking about running for office. A study in the United States asked educators, lawyers, and business people how qualified they thought there were for public office. A clear majority (60%) of men who described themselves as “not at all qualified” had still thought about running for politics, the same was true of just half as many women. However, once they think they are “very qualified”, women are almost as likely to consider running for election as men.

You don’t need to be perfect to run. You don’t need to know everything now. Your experiences and knowledge matters. Your voice and perspective are needed in politics.

Maybe none of this may resonate with you – maybe you’re feeling confident, ready to run, and ready to learn on the go. If so, that’s great! You can see what you’ve got to offer to politics in Canada!

But if this does resonate with you, if you feel self-doubt, uncertainty, and don’t know if you’ve got what it takes, we want you to know – it’s not about you.

After reading this, maybe you want to revisit Activities 3, 5, 6 and 7. Were you giving yourself enough credit? Did you recognize what you do know? Your experiences and expertise? The network and skills you have?

In fact, the activity in this section is not for you to do. It’s for a friend, partner, sibling, family member, mentor, or co-worker – someone who knows and respects you and who you can trust.

Revisit activities 3, 5, 6, & 7
Where will you run?  
Picking your podium.

Choosing a level of government that will fit your life – including your expectations and goals – is a great way to prepare yourself for its demands and position yourself for success.
This section will provide you with the information needed to pick your podium – your decision to run at the municipal, provincial, territorial, or federal level should be well-informed. Take this opportunity to learn about each level – what powers they hold, how they are structured, and the amount of time your elected position will require from you. Then decide which level best suits your life at this point in time.

Division of Powers

In Canada, each level of government has distinct powers and responsibility. The level you choose is likely to depend, in part, on the issues you have expertise in and those you want to work on as an elected official.

For example, if you care about health care, you may want to run provincially/territorial, as it is the territories/provinces that are primarily responsible for this issue. However, the federal government plays an important role in providing funding to the provinces and care for specific groups like refugees, veterans, and Indigenous Canadians.

Provinces/territories are also responsible for education and natural resources. The federal government is responsible for criminal law, trade, defense, and issues that extend beyond provincial boundaries. Municipal governments have more limited powers and are subject to the rules set for them by the province, but they also represent the order of government that is closest to the people. Responsibilities include planning, providing essential services like water, sanitation, police, and fire. Municipalities also work in collaboration with other levels of government to provide transportation.

Complete activity 9
Impact on Life

The policy responsibilities of different levels of government are not the only thing you should consider. The impact of a political career on your life, finances, travel, and time away will depend significantly on where you are elected.

If you care about issues that are primarily the responsibility of the federal government, but the travel and time away from home do not work for you at this particular point in life, then you might want to consider what you have to offer provincial, territorial or municipal politics. In many cases, issues that are primarily dealt with at one level can be addressed in other ways through other levels of government. For example, childcare is a provincially/territorial issue, but is discussed frequently at the federal level; a number of cities, park boards, and school boards have active childcare strategies.

At the municipal level, your government is close to home – you won’t be required to spend a lot of time traveling to meetings. Depending on the size of your city or school district, the job may be considered part-time. In many cities and towns, people hold their regular jobs while serving on council.

You will, however, still have responsibilities you must fulfill that will require time in your schedule. In addition to regular Council meetings, you may be asked to sit on special committees, boards, commissions or agencies that require a significant time commitment.

Council and board members are expected to attend every meeting, although it may not be mandatory. In some jurisdictions, a councillor or board member who is absent from meetings for a period of without permission, officials could be disqualified from office.

You will be expected to attend conferences, conventions, seminars, and workshops as well as many social events promoting your constituency.

Politics at the provincial or territorial level will require a larger time commitment. The House traditionally meets twice a year for the fall and spring sessions, each of which runs for two to three months.
Furthermore, all members participate in Committee meetings that run outside these regular sessions. Some legislatures have predictable and predetermined calendars, while others do not. You can look at your Legislature’s website to check when and how often they meet. If you can’t find it there, you may have to check the Standing Orders (try Googling “[your province/territory] Standing Orders and then search the document for the word ‘calendar”).

Unless you live in or near the capital city of your province or territory, you will be required to spend a significant amount of time outside of your riding, traveling to and from the Legislature. The distance can keep you away from home and family for days at a time.

On weekends, MPP/MLA/MNA/MHAs return to their riding where they spend time meeting with their constituents. The time required for riding activities must not be underestimated. The citizens of your riding will come to you for a variety of reasons and they will expect you to identify solutions. It is through these constituent-related activities that you will maintain and strengthen your power base in order to be re-elected.

The time requirements at the federal level are the most demanding, especially for those who live far away from Ottawa, who spend a significant amount of time traveling and away from home. Furthermore, the sessions - the time when MPs are expected to be in Ottawa and sitting in the House of Commons – are quite long. The House traditionally sits from September to December, and from February to June, five days a week, breaking Friday at noon to allow members to travel to their riding.

A Member of Parliament will then be expected to dedicate a good part of their time to constituency affairs once they are back in their riding. Many members of Parliament must also fulfill duties on one or more of the various committees, sub-committees, standing committees, and joint committees, or their duties as a parliamentary secretary to a minister. MPs are left very little personal – and family – time.

Again, none of this is to deter you from running. Many people do it and make it work. It is to help you identify which level of government is the best fit for you at this time in your life. An informed decision will make sure that you thrive in politics and enjoy you enjoy your time as a political candidate and representative, where you contribute to our communities and country in the best possible way.

Complete activity 10
The importance of parties – to run with, where, and when.

Unless you intend to run as an independent or at the municipal level (most municipalities in Canada do not have political parties) you will have to undergo a party’s nomination process. This process, known as ‘contesting a nomination’, is the point at which you present yourself to a political party’s riding association as an individual interested in running in an upcoming election.

Before we get to the importance of the nomination race, it is critical that you choose the party with which your views and brand most closely align, appreciating that there is likely no party with which you completely align.

Maybe you’re already a member or already have a party that you know is the best fit for you. If you do, we still recommend that you finish reading this section because it contains some good questions for consideration, but you might want to skip the activity in this section.

Look at the party’s platform and other policy documents. These can be found on the party’s website. Talk with party members for a sense of the membership’s desires for the future of the party. Are they moving in a more progressive or more conservative direction?

As a partisan nominee, you will be required to work in alignment with the party and their public priorities; there is no room for disagreement on public policy without potentially serious consequences from within the partisan system.

Do you support the current party leader? You will be required to campaign on their behalf once nominated. It can be difficult to sell someone who you do not believe in.

Once you have decided which party you would like to represent, you will need to research the local riding association landscape. For now, turn to the next activity, especially if you don’t have a current or long-standing relationship with a party, and work through an activity to help you understand where you fit among the Canadian political landscape.

Complete activity 11
Raising your profile and getting yourself prepared for the long game.

Here are some tried and true methods that will build your visibility, credibility, and lead you to successfully contest a nomination or run as a candidate when the time is right.
So, is politics for you? Is it for you now? What happens next?

If politics is for you, and you’re hitting the ground running, it might make sense for you to jump ahead to Section 6.

If you’ve decided that politics is for you, but not at this time, you can take some steps to raise your profile and make connections in your constituency. This will help ensure your future political success.

If you’ve decided that now is the time and are getting ready for an election or nomination contest that is in the medium to long-term, for example, in a year or two, you will also benefit from many of these steps.

Choose those that work for you. Pick ways to get involved that feel natural and authentic that overlap with the issues you care about or the skills you bring. Choose a group or organization that aligns with your beliefs.

Go after the leadership positions such as chair or spokesperson. You don’t need to do everything, but if you think you plan to run in the future, finding ways to increase your profile and visibility will be key to your success.

Run for something at home.
Politics happens everywhere there are elections e.g. school councils, health boards, ratepayers’ associations. Even if the process lacks an official election, get involved as a representative or elected official.

Get involved with local media.
Write letters to the editor. If you have a particular area of expertise that the local TV station might welcome in community programming, offer it.

Join a political party.
You can volunteer for your riding association, national or regional party.

Work on an election campaign.
Volunteer on an election campaign. There is a range of roles that will help you hone your leadership skills, expose you to the electoral process, and to how critical campaign decisions are made.

Join your riding association.
The longer you are involved in the riding association, the more you learn about the nominations process, the more you get to test your leadership skills, and the more visibility you have with members.

Participate in municipal advisory committees or consultation processes.
These activities will deepen your understanding of issues, of local decision-making processes, and of the various community positions on issues.
**Volunteer for a task force.**
Taskforces exist for local, provincial, and federal issues. For example, you might be interested in health policy, which is under provincial jurisdiction. For example, if you have the opportunity to participate in the local taskforce trying to recruit more doctors to the community, you would gain insight into healthcare human resource planning.

**Work with a mentor.**
Women in politics are known for their capacity to support one another in a non-partisan way. Look around you. Very likely there will be an experienced elected woman nearby willing to mentor you through these critical beginning stages.

**Get involved in organized labour.**
The world of organized labour mirrors in many ways the world of politics and provides good schooling for women who want to test the waters, and develop some of that ‘thick skin’ needed to succeed in politics.

The activity in this section can help you plan a strategy for increasing your engagement. Do your research, identify possible opportunities and organizations, when you are ready – get out there!

Complete activity 12

While you’re getting more well-known in the community, you can also work on those skills that come less naturally to you. The next activity identifies the skills and areas of knowledge that you can work on while preparing to run for office. It will ask you to define success, identify ways to learn, practice, and improve.

Complete activity 13
Next steps.

So, you want to get going! This section helps you identify what the next steps are for you.
What you will need to do depends in part on where you’re planning to run, whether you are planning to run as an independent or with a party, and when the next election is. This section and the activities will help you get going; depending on your individual path and timeline, you may not need to do everything right away.

Develop your elevator pitch

Even if an election is two years away, even if you have not yet secured a nomination from the party of your choice, you can act and talk like a candidate. Developing an elevator pitch will help you cultivate interest in you as a candidate.

What’s an elevator pitch?

It is a brief, persuasive speech that you can use to spark interest in you as a candidate and your platform. It should be engaging, informative, memorable, and succinct. You want to be able to tell people who you are, why you’re running, and why they should care. When you’re out and about in your community, you’ll be able to quickly communicate your key message.

Complete activity 14

Understanding your riding

Regardless of when the election is, the more information you have, the better. You can pull together information about the last election, including who won, by how much, and how many votes were necessary to win. You also need to know the dates for filing nomination and how many signatures are required.

Complete activity 15
Will you run with a party? Assessing the local riding association landscape

Once you have determined your partisan affiliation, it is important to research the local Electoral District Association (EDA), sometimes also called a Riding Association (RA). An EDA or RA is a group of partisan volunteers who locally represent the national, provincial or territorial party. They have a formal organizational structure with a President and Executive members who are elected at Annual General Meetings.

The EDA is very involved in the search for and nomination of their candidate. If you aren’t an active member of your local EDA, it is wise to buy a membership and attend regular meetings. Not only will you better be able to build your local partisan network, but you will also have a clearer sense of the type of candidate the local EDA seeks.

Most importantly you need to know whether or not the party already has a candidate for the next election. Sometimes parties pick their candidates well in advance. If the MP or MPP/MLA/MNA/MHA for the riding is a member of your party, you’ll want to know whether or not they are running again. If they are, do you want to contest the nomination? You may decide you can win or you may decide that it is not the right time to run.

Parties often have a ‘green lighting’ process, which you are required to go through before you can even seek the nomination. Parties and local riding associations also have a great deal of control over the timing of nomination races, the deadline for new memberships, and other rules for the race. Get yourself connected with the local association and the riding president so that you can be involved in these discussions or at least be apprised of anticipated decisions, requirements, key dates, and deadlines.
A key role of an EDA is ongoing fundraising for the general election. It is also helpful to know if your EDA has adequate financing to run a strong election campaign. If they do not, it will add a burden of work to you and your team should you seek and win the nomination.

A nomination race is your first electability test. It will require you to organize, mobilize, and get your supporters out to vote. Your supporters must be members in good standing for the party. You will have an opportunity to sell your supporters memberships to the political party in advance of a cut-off date. This process can be extremely competitive, it is essential you and members of your team understand all the rules, including your rights and entitlements.

At the time of the nomination, all registered local members come together to vote for their preferred candidate. Mobilizing your vote will be key.

If your riding association chooses you as their candidate, you will be able to run in the election. As the chosen candidate, you will then have the full support of your party’s riding association to help you win the election. All the money that the riding association has raised will be used to campaign.

Running outside your ‘home riding’

You can see why it would be quite challenging to organize and mobilize in a community where you are not well-connected. A political party may ask you to run in another community if they feel you have a better chance of winning the nomination race or if they prefer someone else in your home riding. Do not be afraid to push back and ask for an explanation.

Think carefully before agreeing to this offer. In the past, some very strong and electable women candidates have been “parachuted” into challenging ridings without sufficient supports to ensure their victory. It is wise to ask a party for a legal commitment in writing to provide all supports that you feel you need to win the race in a distant riding.

Complete activity 16
Building your team

It takes a village to run and you won’t be able to do it on your own. Building a strong team will be essential to your success at the polls. Your team will vary depending on several factors, such as contesting a nomination versus running as a candidate and the riding which you will represent (rural versus urban, small versus large). However, the team members you need will be much the same. Always remember, one team member may accomplish more than one task.

Building your nomination team:

Your nomination team is your initial team. You can begin assembling your nomination team as early as you decide to seek the nomination. This team will require a campaign manager, a treasurer or chartered accountant, and possibly a legal advisor and a communications advisor. They will all act as your strategy committee. Generally, these individuals carry on their responsibilities beyond the nomination process through the election campaign.

Tasks of this nomination team include but are not limited to:

- Making sure that all the registration requirements are met;
- Making sure you respect all the financing rules and regulations;
- Developing your nomination campaign strategy;
- Developing a budget to support the strategy.
Building your campaign team:

Your campaign team will be much larger than your nomination team and should be put in place several months before voting day. Try to recruit people who seem to have organizational experience, either in corporate management, politics or through community groups switch to or, other organizations, volunteer organizations. These people tend to grasp more clearly how a campaign has to work, even if it is the first time they are involved politically.

- Campaign Manager
- Secretary
- Treasurer
- Financial Chairperson
- Volunteer Chairperson
- Research Chairperson
- Meeting Chairperson
- Advertising Chairperson
- Sign Chairperson
- Office Manager
- Director of Organization
- Director of Literature Distribution and Door-to-Door Organizer
- Transportation Chairperson
- Nomination or Election Day Coordinator
- Poll Captains

Don’t worry if you don’t have the resources for the full team listed above. Not every campaign needs to fill in all the roles listed. Develop a team that is suitable to your campaign. For example, if you don’t have an office, you don’t need an office manager. And if you like doing research, you might want to be your own research person.
Position Descriptions

What follows are descriptions of some positions you will want to fill in your campaign team.

**Campaign Manager**

The campaign manager is the person who makes sure the candidate’s vision and goals are achieved while they are out on the hustings. This is a full-time job that starts weeks prior to the campaign and continues throughout its duration. They must:

- Assist the candidate in developing her platform including communications materials;
- Recruit and manage the campaign team;
- Determine the specific tasks and their dates of completion;
- Plan a temporary budget and arrange for deposit payments;
- Facilitate the initial requests for funding;
- Lead the development of a master mailing list;
- Arrange the kick-off rally;
- Perform administrative tasks;
- Provide constructive criticisms, firmly if necessary, but always discreetly;
- Support the candidate in public, witness what is said, and note the citizen’s impressions and concerns.

**Financial Chairperson**

The Financial Chairperson’s main goal will be to raise as much money as possible through individual or corporate donations and any other form of fundraising. They must:

- Identity; contact and meet with potential donors;
- Follow up with people who have indicated that they are willing to give support;
- Remind donors of tax credits when applicable;
- Track gains and setback with the treasurer

**Secretary**

The Secretary provides secretarial support before, during and after your campaign. They must:

- Keep files of candidate’s photos and other material;
- Type letters, and mailing addresses and other campaign material;
- Buy envelopes and stamps;
- Manage the distribution of mail, e-mail, etc.
**Treasurer**

The Treasurer is responsible for the budget and must ensure compliance with it and with all the financial reporting requirements. They must:

- Manage the budget, pay bills;
- Establish a strict policy on payments, receipts and use of petty cash. Cheques are encouraged over cash;
- Open a bank account with a co-signer. They are responsible for deposits and withdrawals;
- Keep a ledger of all expenditures, contributors, and amounts given;
- Provides regular financial updates;
- Balance and close the account after the nomination or the election;
- Compile the financial statements required for the candidate to submit her financial support.

**Research Chairperson**

The Research Chairperson will conduct all research related to your campaign. They must:

- Form a committee to help with research;
- Request schedules of other party candidates;
- Seek intelligence on opponents’ campaigns;
- Read general literature, reports and platforms about issues to acquire facts and figures to support the candidate’s stand;
- Help write position papers and press releases.

**Volunteer Chairperson**

The Volunteer Chairperson is responsible for managing campaign volunteers. They must:

- Delegate tasks based on the information individuals provided on participation cards;
- Recruit additional helpers if necessary;
- Create a database of volunteers’ names and what they are able to do.
Meeting Chairperson

The Meeting Chairperson coordinates the candidate’s activities to maximize the use of her time. They must:

- Keep track of the events calendar and set up dates for ‘Meet Your Candidate’ sessions;
- Arrange for sponsors and locations;
- Develop sign-up sheets or participation cards to enlist support;
- Prepare instructions for sponsors and deliver them in advance of speaking engagements;
- Provide suggestions about room arrangements (candidate should be visible to all), nametags, introductions, refreshments (before and after presentation);
- Work with the sponsors to draw up guest list;
- Invite supporters in the area to meetings;
- Keep lists of event attendees.

Transportation Chairperson

The Transportation Chairperson is responsible for organizing the transportation needs of your campaign team. They must:

- Receive the names of drivers from the Volunteer Chairperson and the names of people who need rides from the Poll Captains;
- Organize, assign, and provide rides to poll of nomination meeting.

Advertising Chairperson

The Advertising Chairperson is responsible for all campaign advertising. They must:

- Set advertising priorities and budget;
- Develop a communications strategy including the slogan, the design and execution of paid and free media activities, the design and content of flyers, bumper stickers, buttons;
- Find writers and, if necessary, translators;
- Keep files or original releases, speeches and copies of radio and TV interviews and ads;
- Make arrangements for endorsement tapes or letter to be used in various media;
- Manage the material posted on the candidate’s website.
**Sign Chairperson**

The Sign Chairperson will be responsible for all campaign signage. They must:

- Check the legal limits for signs and the local laws regulating the use of utility poles and trees for posters and signs use;
- Order commercial and lawn signs or strike a volunteer committee to build them;
- Contact owners of commercial properties and residents for permission to post signs;
- Develop a strategy of setting up signs to demonstrate campaign momentum;
- Remove signs and posters after the election.

**Nomination or Election Day Coordinator**

The Nomination or Election Day Coordinator is responsible for coordinating operations on Nomination or Election Day. It is recommended that this person have experience as a scrutineer. They must:

- Line up people who will phone voters;
- Prepare a list of drivers;
- Book victory hall and refreshments;
- Arrange and train scrutineers;
- Get necessary approvals.

**Director of Literature Distribution & Door-to-Door Organizer**

The Director of Literature Distribution & Door-to-Door Organizer is responsible for distributing your materials to the public. They must:

- Determine the amount of literature needed;
- Define the areas or districts to distribute to;
- Solicit and train volunteers to distribute.
**Director Of Organization**

The Director of Organization is responsible for organizing campaign outreach and developing a campaign outreach strategy. They must:

- Establish the number of dwellings to visit and number of areas within the constituency;
- Schedule the start and finish dates of canvassing;
- Check previous election returns to identify swing-vote areas;
- Select Area Chairpersons and assist them in choosing poll captains;
- Set up training sessions for poll captains and canvassers on canvassing and election or nomination day procedures, advance polls, proxy voting;
- Get voters' lists from returning officer generally four weeks before voting day;
- Organize a committee to establish and number walking routes (approx. 4 hours – 50 houses);
- Hold weekly meetings with area chairpersons to maintain enthusiasm;
- Provide supervision of election day polling activities and analyze results to determine how the candidate did in each poll.

**Office Manager**

The Officer Manager is responsible for managing operations from the campaign office. They must:

- Secure a suitable location, install phones, arrange for light, water, keys, furniture, stationery, coffee supplies, insurance to cover fire, theft, and public utilities;
- Determine number of volunteers needed for office duties;
- Obtain constituency lists, maps, the number of registered voters and polls;
- Establish a filing system;
- Set up petty cash fund;
- Develop charts for everything (campaign organization, workers, sign locations, canvass lists, telephone numbers, contact lists, etc.);
- Monitor distribution of literature, signs and canvassing activities;
- Prepare scrutineers;
- Provide copies of marked voters lists and maps;
- Prepare poll-by-poll charts to record election returns by candidate.
Poll Captains

Poll Captains are responsible for thorough canvassing of the polls during the campaign and for getting out the vote on election or nomination day. With regard to canvassing preparation, they must:

- Select reliable poll residents who are willing to canvass
- Send a list of canvassers to Chairpersons;
- Facilitate training for canvassers;
- Check in with canvassers to monitor their progress;
- Inform the Area Chairperson when a route is done;
- Ensure that all supporters vote;
- Coordinate a telephone blitz of the poll to offer transportation and sitter services;
- Mark Candidate’s supporters on the voters’ list;
- Keep up the pressure until the last minute;
- Be inside the poll when it closes and stay for the count. Check the tally and then phone headquarters;
- Gather helpers and attend the victory party;
- Supply headquarters with the names and addresses of all the helpers for thank you letters.
Who should be on this team? And what kind of experience do they need?

Before you build your team, just think very carefully before naming your mom your campaign manager. It’s not a great idea to build your central campaign team up of your immediate family. You’ll need them holding down the fort during the election, sometimes things can be a little too ‘close’ or stressful with family involved. Should you have your partner, parents or children come door knocking with you? Of course! On the other hand, friends who share your values can be a great asset on your team, especially if they have capacity and skills to put in the hours needed.

Not everyone on your team needs to have extension or even any campaign experience. For example, someone with enough organizational skills to keep track of locations and a car bigger enough for signs can easily be your sign person. Someone who has experience managing or volunteer coordinating can make a great volunteer coordinator, even if they’ve never touched politics before. New faces can bring fresh ideas, energy, and ‘outside’ the traditional campaign box thinking.

Particularly if it is your first time involved in a campaign, however, building your time to include someone who has worked on an election before is ideal. Ask around, maybe a friend of a friend has been involved in a political campaign. There are often passionate, engaged, and experienced folks who are looking for good candidates to support. Can’t find anyone? Maybe you know someone who has worked on an advocacy, education, charity, or fundraising campaign. Some of these skills will be translatable and are a great starting point, to build a team.

Complete activity 17
Raising money and identifying possible donors

To run, you’re going to need money. Contributions – or donations – are a key factor in financing a campaign. You’ll need to identify supporters and donors in your network and develop a strategy to look for support beyond your circles.

Before you ask for or receive donations, you should make sure you are fully aware of the regulations that apply to nomination contests and election campaigns. You’ll need to know the limits that apply to contributions, who can and who cannot contribute, and the spending limit for nomination races and elections. There is also a defined period for contributions, so ensure you accept donations only within that period.

You should also learn what candidates spent in the last election. You can find this by looking for election filings from the last election.

Raising money to get to the gate is one of the most challenging aspects of becoming an elected representative. This can be a formidable challenge for women, especially since they generally do not have the same ‘backroom’ connections as men. Persistence and a well-developed fundraising plan will be key in garnering funds for your campaign.

It is important to recognize the gendered dynamics of fundraising and opportunities to access financial resources. The gendered and racialized wage-gap continues to exist in Canada, despite gaps in education and labour market participation decreasing over time.

According to the Canadian Women’s Foundation, women earn 75-cents for every dollar earned by a man. The gap is even large for visible minority women (67-cents), Indigenous women (65-cents), newcomer women (71-cents), and women with a disability (54-cent).

This gendered wage gap may impact your own ability to take unpaid time to campaign, it also may impact your opportunity to seek donations from your network. If your network, professional or social is made up of mostly other women, wages and rates of poverty may reduce the amount of monetary contribution.

Before you begin fundraising you must learn to be comfortable saying, “I need your help in my campaign.”

The activity in this section will help you identify donors and practice an ‘ask’.
Congratulations!

You’ve completed Getting to the Gate and have the political ‘street smarts’ to get going.

The activities you completed will serve you on this journey for both the long and short term. Keep the lists and plans you made close by.

As you expand your engagement and connection to your community, add names and organizations to your network, add to your experiences and expertise, update your self-assessment as you learn more and practice your skills.

If you’ve gotten through this section and you are ready to get going, check out the following section for bonus tips, and tricks.
Hitting the ground running? Here are some more resources that might be useful for you!

How to answer tough questions.

As you become increasingly involved in public life, you will have to answer direct questions that are tough, difficult, and relevant. You will need to provide a clear, clean answer. These questions may come from constituents, special interest groups, opponents, staff, people affected by your decisions and, of course, media.

You’ll need to conduct research into the issues that are important to your constituency and prepare answers for questions you are likely to be asked. Do detailed research so that you can build your answer on solid, verifiable content. You should also simulate these situations by having team members act as an interviewer or member of your constituency.

In general, you will have very little time to answer adequately. You may have less than 10 seconds to make your point. Follow these three important steps to prepare short, effective and direct answers:

1. Allow 3 seconds for your answer. It must be straightforward and honest.

2. Allow 5 seconds for your message. Here is where you support your opening statement with crisp facts, explained in clear, simple language.

3. Allow 2 seconds for your conclusion. This sentence wraps up the above and provides a punch line. It is the impact you want to have on a wider audience, beyond the questioner in front of you.

4. Link each step with bridges such as “and,” “however,” and “having said that.” All three steps are equally important since only one of them may be picked up by the questioner and used in print or online media or spread by word of mouth.
How to engage with the media.

Timing is key to successful media relations. You can never guarantee what will happen the day you call a press conference or send out a press release. Your story may be totally lost. But you must come to understand what media deadlines are all about. For example, the Saturday paper is usually prepared on Wednesday, so a Friday event will have less chance of being reported in the Saturday paper, unless you have sent notice sufficiently in advance. On the other hand, during the weekend, media will be looking for stories for the Sunday and Monday editions.

Print and electronic media have different deadlines of which you must become aware. As a general rule, it is not good practice to call reporters in the afternoon. They are busy writing their story for the evening news or the next day’s paper. Take time to find out from the media outlets what they need: establish a rapport.

Substantial information is also key to media relations. Reporters and editors are not there to provide you with free publicity, they are looking for stories. Find the human interests or stories that support your vision, document them, and provide the information to the media. Help them break news. Chances are they will run with your story.

Preparing for the media.

- Practice with a neighbour or friend;
- Get media training or have somebody play the reporter for you;
- Use simple language that everyone can understand.
- Usually, radio or TV reporters don’t take clips from a speech. Be prepared with a 5 to 10-second clip to summarize your message for the reporter after the speech if you want to make it on air.
Know your audience(s).

You may have one goal and a key message, but you will definitely have many audiences, which you will have to tailor your message. Keep these individuals and groups in mind while developing your communications plan to cover all of your bases.

Here are the main audiences you will be dealing with:

- Supporters in your party, if applicable
- Supporters in your community
- Undecided voters
- Voters traditionally supporting your opponent
- Traditional non-voters
- Opponents
- Media: reporters, columnists, editorialists, opinion makers (who may become third party supporters)

As a woman in politics, you may face questions or media coverage that have less to do with your experience, expertise, or platform. Instead, you are more likely be asked about how you look, dress, or organize your personal life.

Research indicates that women are more likely to be asked questions about their children and who is caring for them. This is sometimes called the ‘double-mommy penalty’. Not only do women, in general, do a disproportionate amount of unpaid care labour, but they more frequently need to answer questions about how they manage.

Other research into women in Canadian politics has shown that women are subjected to more attention to any perceived aggressiveness or confrontation, sometimes through the use of sports or war metaphors.

Gender is not the only thing that matters – media analysis shows that racialized candidates are less likely to be portrayed as a viable option when they are running for the first time. Racialized women may be more likely to be challenged about their credibility and capacity.

So, what can you do? Prepare for and practice answers to these questions, turn attention back to your skill sets and platform. Just as important, however, remember that these questions are not about you, they are not about how you do politics or whether you’ve made the ‘right’ choices for your family.

It can also be useful to practice some self-care in these instances. If you receive a question about your appearance or parenting, or challenging your ‘aggressive’, ‘bossy’, ‘angry’ approach, return to Activity 1 and Activity 6 to remind yourself why you are running and the skills and expertise you will bring to the table. Try to also identify someone you trust and feel comfortable with who you can talk to for perspective about questions that seem unfair, disrespectful, or based in a gender-based double standard. Your support person(s) can provide a safe place for you to vent and remind you what makes you a great candidate and future elected official.
How to clarify vague questions.

Watch out for those who are going fishing! If somebody broaches you as a public figure with a question based on a statement or an accusation or are wrapped in hazy or unclear wording, BEWARE! These come from both friends and foes, either innocently or by design.

What to do in such a situation? CLARIFY! If you don’t, your answer will probably end up being irrelevant at best and damaging at worst.

The way for you to clarify a question before answering it is to put it to the test of the very questions good reporters always use, also known as the 5Ws.

Keep in mind and project the image, that you are genuinely seeking information to be able to provide a proper answer. Listen carefully to the answers you are provided. You should be ready to zoom in and ask for some specific examples.

Start your response by restating the question or issue in question form. Get your questioner to confirm that you got it right. Then answer the question using your 10-second clip technique.

You have the right to know what you are being asked. You have the responsibility to understand what you are being asked before answering.

These steps will help you avoid getting trapped into providing an answer to a question that you do not understand.

1. Recognize the question is not clear; determine if this is coming from a friend or a foe.

2. Use the 5Ws (Who? What? Where? When? Why? and How?) to clarify the question. Listen carefully to the answers you are given; the real focus of the question put to you will emerge.

3. Ask for some specific examples.

4. Start your response by restating the question or issue in question form.

5. Get your questioner to confirm that you have correctly identified the question being asked.

6. Answer the question using the 10-second clip format.
How to maintain your credibility under pressure.

The following techniques are designed to help you defuse exchanges that are confrontational so they won’t get out of hand.

There are three main techniques to deal with these situations and you can use them either separately or together. Use these techniques, then respond with your 10-second clip technique.

**Technique 1: The explosive and/or emotional exchange.**

There is a slight difference between these two exchanges. The explosive question will likely be thrown at you by an adversary. The emotional question, which is just as dangerous, is likely to come from somebody who is genuinely frightened, angry or upset. In a public setting, you could be bombarded with both. They will both use trigger words that provide the explosive and/or emotional tone.

First, you boil down the question or preamble and rephrase it in a statement from which you have removed the trigger words. Then proceed immediately and assertively with your answer.

The goal is to defuse the question or statement by taking the emotion out of it. In doing so, you should be reducing the level of rhetoric. To do so you must 1) keep your cool; 2) listen carefully; 3) be fair and accurate in your rephrasing. You are boiling down the question, not watering it down.

**Technique 2: Sorting our fact from fiction.**

You will most certainly face questions or statements that, by accident or design, contain both fact and fiction. In such a case, concede what is fact, which should help you to then set the record straight on the fiction, so you can tell your own story.

By conceding to the fact you should be able to achieve two goals: 1) take the sting out of your opponent’s assault; 2) heighten your own credibility by demonstrating your capacity to listen as well as be balanced, honest, and generous. As the saying goes: concede to succeed.

**Technique 3: Blatant distortion.**

You may be faced with questions or assertions that contain blatant distortions of the facts and/or direct attacks on your personal credibility. Do not let these distortions pass unchallenged. You must respond immediately and unequivocally. It is not only your right, but your responsibility to set the record straight with a firm denial and a very clear correction. You must turn the question to your advantage.

Whoever the person or group you are facing may be, you must listen very carefully. You will be surprised at how often you will hear what you need to in order to turn the situation in your favour.
How to develop a budget.

Your budget is your most valuable asset. One of your primary goals should be to not accumulate a huge debt over the course of the nomination contest or election campaign. Your official agent is in charge of all the financial requirements of your nomination and election campaign, they must determine the dates on which the official disclosure of expenditures starts and ends. They will ensure you stick to your budget. When developing a budget, it is important to include and consider the following items:

**Administration**
- Rental of office space
- Telephone/lights/heat/water
- Equipment rental (computers, fax, photocopier, etc.)
- Stationary/office supplies
- Staffing
- Petty cash

**Mailings**
- Solicitation letter (printing/stationary/postage)
- Flyers
- Pre-election ‘You vote at’ postcard

**Advertising And Promotion**
- Photographs
- Newspaper ads
- Radio/TV
- Buttons/stickers
- Canvas brochure
- Signs/posters

**Other**
- Meeting place (training sessions/rallies/events)
- Travel expenses (in particular for getting out the vote on nomination/election day)

**Election follow-up**

There are some other types of expenses that can be particular to women’s campaigns. For example, women are more likely to need child care assistance on the campaign trail. Some jurisdictions consider child care to be a reasonable elections expense, while others do not. In some places, care costs count toward your expense limit, while others do not. You should check with the electoral organization in your jurisdiction.

Given the expectation of women’s hair, make-up, and clothes, you may also have costs associated with your appearance. We wish, of course, we didn’t need to address this in 2018, but we do think it is important to have on your radar. In some cases, women have claimed salon visits as election expenses and have been criticized for doing so, despite built-in expectations about their appearance at public events.
How to build a communications plan.

A well-developed communications plan will ensure that your message is delivered effectively and accurately to all audiences throughout the course of your campaign. Building a communications plan should be a priority on your pre-campaign to-do list. Communications will make or break your campaign, so it is essential to have this plan in place well before you enter the race.

You will develop your communications plan with your campaign manager and communications director. You must submit the plan to your team, so they can understand it, buy-in to it, and implement it with you, according to the tasks each member will be accomplishing.

When developing your plan, be sure to identify:

**The Goal**

Though it may be as simple as winning, write it down! Think about it: winning by how much, against whom, with whom, because of whom, why, and so on.

**Key message**

Your key message will become your slogan. It must be clear, simple, catchy and inspiring for your team. This message must consistently underline everything you and your team members do and say, be it one-on-one, on the phone, in print, or online. Make sure any translation of your key message conveys the same energy and vision; literal translation may not suffice.
Strategic considerations

Never forget that your campaign is unfolding in a specific context, both personal and social. Make sure to clearly analyze the basic elements of this context to ensure your message and activities are on track.

Here are some of the basic questions you and your team must rely upon in developing the communications plan and in evaluating its chances of success:

- Pourquoi vous présentez-vous?
- Qui fait partie de votre électorat?
- Où sont ces gens?
- Que recherche l’électorat?
- Avez-vous ce que ces gens recherchent? Qui sont vos supporters tiers?
- Qui sont vos adversaires (candidats, candidates et leaders d’opinion)?

Tone

The tone of your campaign must be consistent from the wording in your messages to the style and content of your products, the attitude of your spokespeople, and your participation in activities. It is just as much your signature as the words you use and the photographs on your material.

The tone of your campaign will be based on the context in which it is unfolding. For example: are you bringing a positive message of hope or a more adversarial message concerning the need to overthrow somebody who has caused problems for some reason or another? Or a mixture of both, with the obvious need for subtle balance in tone?

Or you may also be involved in a passionate and possibly more confrontational one-issue campaign relating to a specific issue in your constituency.

Timelines

Divide your communications plan into three phases to establish what tasks must be done, and to make sure your goal, messages, products, and activities are coherent throughout.

The short-term section of your plan covers the setting up of your nomination or election campaign, the initial announcement, and positioning of your campaign.

The medium-term covers the period between your initial announcement and the beginning of your campaign. This could be anything from a few weeks to a year or more. It is important to always remain focused on your main goal and message, but continue to keep revising your research and polling data.

The long-term covers the nomination or campaign itself. If you win the nomination, your communications plan should be extended to include the election campaign.
Spokespersons

You are the main spokesperson for your campaign, but others will also speak on your behalf: your campaign director, your communications director, and all the volunteers who support you on the ground - fundraising, door-to-door, phone calls, responding to mail, etc. You must set very clear guidelines on who will be the spokespersons on your campaign, and for what purpose. This is particularly important in media relations. You must make sure all your volunteers understand your message as well as the importance of sticking to it. Keep close track of the questions your volunteers have to answer on the campaign trail and develop the appropriate answers for them.

Tracking Information

This activity is sometimes called media tracking and analysis. Whatever the title, you must remain constantly aware of how your message is being received, or played, by voters, the media, and opinion makers. You must also remain constantly aware of the same information concerning your opponents. Make sure you have copies of their campaign material, as soon as possible. They will be doing the same to you.

To do so, you and your team should keep close track of what is said in the electronic, print media, in door-to-door contacts, and in private meetings. This should allow you to pick up trends among voters, media opinion makers, and valuable information on your opponents. They say all press is good press, but for women in politics this is not the case. Social media in particular can be a dark place for women in public leadership positions. If you find this to be the case for you, it can be helpful (and good for your mental health) to ask someone to take over your social media media: to deal with negative, threatening, or obscene content directed your way.