

# Running for Office in Howard County

Welcome to the Howard County League of Women Voters Campaign Guide! The goal of this guide is to give a prospective candidate an overview of the requirements and activities involved in running for office in Howard County. We touch upon both county and state level positions, namely County Council, Board of Education, State Senate and House of Delegates. There are other important elected offices in Howard County, but for conciseness we focus on these named positions.

1. **Getting A Campaign Started: Organizing the team** - To officially get a campaign started in Maryland, a campaign committee must be registered with the State Board of Elections (SBoE). Along with the candidate, the campaign treasurer must also sign the committee filing form; therefore a person for this position needs to be chosen ahead of time. A campaign entity name, such as, "Friends of Jane Smith," must also have been chosen and provided in the filing form. This is the name the campaign will have used to open a campaign bank account. (See [Board of Elections](#))
  - a. **Treasurer** is an important position to fill as early as possible in order to file the campaign committee and begin fundraising. The treasurer should be someone who is conscientious and firmly committed to following all campaign finance laws. This person should also feel comfortable with web-based applications as the finance disclosure forms are all submitted electronically via the Internet. The SBoE provides training seminars on campaign finance rules and procedures. The training is highly recommended for both treasurer and candidates. For more information on campaign finance and training, see: [Summary Guide](#) and [Campaign Finance Training](#).
  - b. **Campaign Chairman** is the other legally required position in a campaign. The Campaign Chairman can be, and in local elections at least, most often is the Candidate. The Candidate cannot be his own Treasurer but can be his own Chairman.
  - c. **Manager** Besides treasurer, a campaign manager is the next important position to fill as they are the 'CEO' of the campaign. The manager should be a person who is well-organized, schedule-oriented, personable, and most importantly, someone who the candidate is very comfortable with.
  - d. **Other positions or volunteer tasks** include event coordinator, volunteer organizer, and social and print media coordinators. Ideally the media coordinator will familiarize themselves with our local *Howard County Times* and *Baltimore Sun* political reporters.
2. **Campaign Timeline (You can NOT start too early!)**
  - a. **Importance of time management** It has been said that a campaign can always raise more money, acquire more volunteers, garner more support, but it can never get more time. That is why having a well-planned schedule is very important. A campaign doesn't want to be in a situation where it did not print materials on time or get its list of volunteers ready for polling day. It can be helpful to split a schedule in two parts, a primary-cycle schedule and post-primary schedule. Dates that must always be noted are the candidate filing deadlines and the financial disclosure deadlines. For a full election calendar see: [Board of Elections](#)
  - b. **Candidate Filing Deadline** The candidate filing deadline occurs some months before the election primary date. This is done in person or by mail. There is a filing fee. For more candidate filing information see: [State Candidacy Information](#) and [HoCo General Candidate Information](#).
  - c. **Primary and General Election Dates**  
For Primary and General Election Dates and information on Early Voting see: [Board of Elections](#)
  - d. **Financial Disclosure Dates and Deadlines**  
For Financial disclosure dates and deadlines see: [Campaign Reporting Schedule](#)

3. **At-Large vs District-Centered Campaign** - In Howard County, council and state legislative seats are district-based, meaning they are defined by geographical boundaries and only residents of those districts are able to vote for those positions. In contrast, Board of Education seats, and many other elected positions of the county, are at-large positions where the electorate is made up of all registered voters in the county. Running an at-large in Howard County means aiming to reach roughly 205,000 registered voters. District-centered campaigns are able to concentrate on the smaller electorate within their district boundaries. Nevertheless, Maryland has a somewhat unique system with 'at-large Legislative Districts (LD)'. LD 13 and the new LD 12 are examples of this, both with three at-large seats. These at-large districts significantly increase the cost of running and often a slate of candidates will team-up and pool their resources. First time candidates should understand that they need to address 3 times as many voters in a *3 at-large district*, and that is 3 times the neighborhoods to walk, and 3 times the mailboxes to cover with mailers. For maps and information about the county's LDs and county districts, see: [HoCo State Legislative Districts Map](#), [HoCo Council Districts Maps](#), [General Assembly Legislative Districts Maps](#), and [General Assembly Legislative Election Districts](#).
  - a. **Residency Requirements** State legislative candidates must reside in the district they are running for and must have been a MD resident for at least one year. County council candidates must reside in the district as well, but there is no minimum time of residency. BoE candidates may reside anywhere in Howard County and have no minimum time of residency.
  - b. **Mapping the Electorate** As of 8/20/2013, there are 205,168 registered voters in Howard County out of a population of roughly 300,000. There are 5 county council districts, 4 state delegate districts (LD 9A, 9B, 12 and 13) and 3 state senate districts (LD 9, 12, and 13). (See [HoCo Election Reports](#))
4. **Fundraising** - The amount of money raised in a campaign plays a significant role in its success because it provides the resources to effectively reach voters, whether by mail or other media. Though electoral history in this county favors the better financed campaigns, money is never the sole factor in a campaign's success.
  - a. **How much?** Target amounts for fundraising will depend on many factors, such as size of the electorate, position sought, and the competitive nature of the race. A candidate's name recognition may also dictate how much money is needed. Even with a well-organized campaign and well-articulate positions, it is hard to overcome an opponent with better name recognition, and it becomes more important to have the resources to build stronger name recognition.
  - b. **Financial Disclosure information** can be found at: [Campaign Finance Disclosures](#). All monetary (cash, check, credit card) donations must be disclosed, along with any in-kind donations such as equipment, food, and expenses incurred for an event. Note that there can be a real or perceived influence on a candidate when donations come from politically-connected industry or interest groups. Therefore, a campaign may decide not to accept donations from such groups. In such cases, letting voters know this can be help in raising money from individuals who value more grassroots fundraising.
5. **Overcoming Obstacles and Common Doubts for First-time Candidates**
  - a. **Qualifications** Residency in the county or specific election district is the only legal and mandatory qualification for a candidate in Howard County. For county council and BoE position, an age requirement doesn't even exist. It can be said that being well-informed and committed to the public good are the only qualifications needed. In Howard County, volunteerism and civic engagement are traits that candidates will often promote as much as their professional backgrounds. Anyone contemplating running for office should not be dissuaded by their line of work or lack of political experience.
  - b. **Political know-how and aptitude** Running for office in Howard County can involve participation in many types of public activities. There are candidate forums such as those organized by the League of Women Voters, Chamber of Commerce, or the Howard County Farm Bureau. There are also written surveys to answer from civic groups who endorse candidates. These sorts of

activities, along with the many other public appearances, may cause consternation to a first-time candidate. Reaching out to members of those organizations, current and past elected officials, and researching the issues important to those groups helps to prepare for these tasks. Having a volunteer that helps in such research is also very helpful.

- c. **Fundraising** Raising money can be difficult even for a seasoned politician, let alone a first-time candidate. There is no magic bullet and there are many guides and recommendations published online and in print. It is important to note that a hard-working and well-organized campaign with strongly dedicated volunteers can be just as successful as the better financed campaign.