



HOW TO RUN FOR DISTRICT LEADER

aka State Committee Member

Running to represent your Assembly District as a Democratic District Leader in Brooklyn

About This Guide Book

The purpose of this guide is to provide an overview of the District Leader position in Brooklyn and how to run a successful campaign for District Leader. The information included also covers the basic functions of a District Leader and information about the role in relationship to the Kings County Democratic Party. New Kings Democrats (NKD) believes this information should be publicly accessible and provided in a clear format to all registered Democrats. We hope this guide can help Brooklyn residents:

- understand the purpose and function of a District Leader
- feel empowered to run for District Leader seats in their Assembly District
- leverage experience presented in this guide to WIN a District Leader seat

The scope of this document is limited to guidance about the role of District Leader in Brooklyn, New York, and should not be utilized without reference to other materials. We recommend all candidates consult with an expert in New York election law. The contents of this document should not be construed as legal or official guidance or advice.

About New Kings Democrats

NKD is a progressive, grassroots political organization committed to bringing transparency, accountability, and inclusionary democracy to the Kings County Democratic Party. NKD is a space for individuals seeking to become more engaged in local politics, and nurtures and supports strong, progressive, reform-minded Brooklyn Democratic leaders.

NKD connects Brooklynites from across the borough seeking to transform local politics. From activists for social and environmental justice, to advocates for affordable housing and alternative transportation, to leaders in the struggle for immigrant and civil rights, NKD is building a progressive Brooklyn alliance. NKD facilitates opportunities for locally based organizations to leverage their own political power to achieve their objectives and to effect change across the borough.

Over the past 10 years, NKD has endorsed and volunteered for dozens of candidates, from District Leader to President. NKD has also trained and financially supported progressive community leaders running for local office and helped hundreds of Brooklynites run for Kings County Democratic County Committee (County Committee) through [RepYourBlock](#).

Further information about County Committee is available on our website. Not sure running for District Leader is the right fit? Consider becoming a member of County Committee by signing up for the community-led #RepYourBlock campaign.

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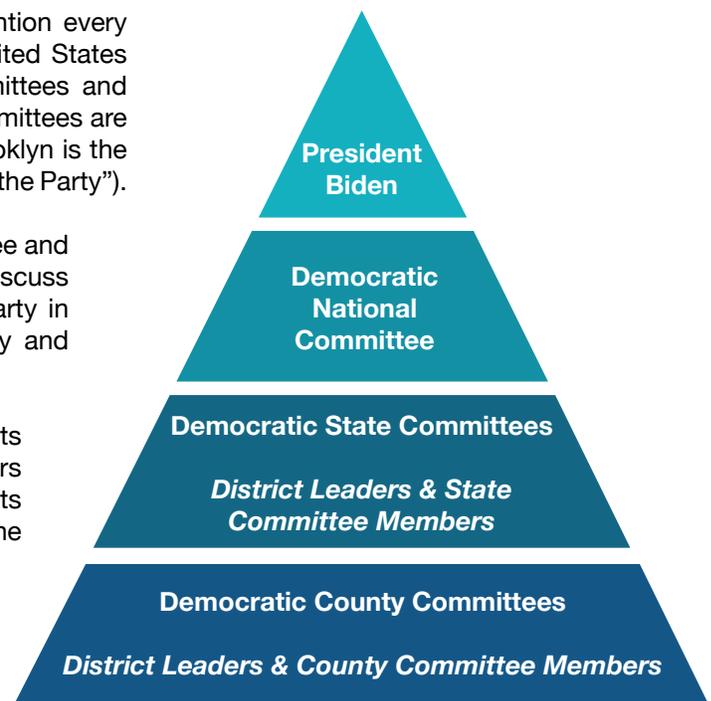
Section 1: District Leader Role and Function

The Democratic National Committee, which holds a convention every four years and nominates the Democratic candidate for United States president, is composed of the 50 Democratic state committees and several territorial committees. Those state and territorial committees are composed of county committees. County Committee in Brooklyn is the ground floor of the Democratic Party (referred to hereafter as “the Party”).

In Brooklyn, District Leaders sit on both the County Committee and the State Committee of New York. Both of these entities discuss and vote on the governance, policy, and strategy of the Party in these regions. District Leaders are the officers of the Party and serve as a representative for their Assembly District (AD).

As of December 2021, there were 21 Assembly Districts in Brooklyn, meaning there are 42 District Leaders currently holding seats. State law requires these seats be divided evenly by gender in each AD; requiring the same number of female and male District Leaders.

[A bill proposed in November 2021](#) in the NY Senate and Assembly would allow people who do not identify as male or female to run for these seats; hopefully this bill will pass and allow anyone to run for these offices.



District Leaders, together with the Executive Committee Chair, Executive Committee Vice Chair and Executive Committee Secretary, make up the leadership of the County Committee. They provide supervision and leadership of the general membership of the County Committee, which is made up of over 5,000 seats in Brooklyn. Under New York State law, District Leaders and County Committee members are elected in party primaries on the same ballot as primaries for Congress, Governor, and State Assembly.



District Leader Functions

In practice today, the office of District Leader in Brooklyn has three main functions:

- elect the Chair of the Executive Committee, commonly known as the Party Boss
- nominate judges for Supreme Court judgeships to the Judicial Convention
- nominate one of 10 commissioners to the Board of Elections to City Council for a vote

These three functions seem rather straightforward but provide the Party with a vast amount of influence. First, the Chair of the Executive Committee has the power to lead fundraising and direct the disbursement of the Party's funds. In previous years, the Party Boss has spent these funds on consulting firms to issue press releases following public criticism by press and reformers. The funds have also been spent to generously pay for media account influence.

Second, District Leaders play a large role in nominating judges for the Supreme Court in Brooklyn. State law outlines that the Party's nominees for Supreme Court judgeships are submitted to a Judicial Convention and elected by Judicial Delegates. In practice, the Executive Committee nominates only enough judges to fill the vacancies available — meaning delegates have no choice at the Convention. Judicial delegates' votes are therefore a rubber stamp on already chosen judges. It is also common practice for District Leaders to select and help judicial delegates run in their AD to attend the convention.

As a result, District Leaders determine who will hold seats on the Supreme Court, which oversees large felony and civil cases in New York City.

As a result, District Leaders determine who will hold seats on the Supreme Court, which oversees large felony and civil cases in New York City. Party leadership uses this power as a fundraising tool. Many judicial candidates are encouraged to donate to Party leaders and make up a sizable amount of many of the sitting District Leaders' donor lists. For a breakdown of the ways in which judicial elections and the Party are entangled in Brooklyn, please read the NKD Judicial Explainer.

Third, the 10 commissioners of the Board of Elections (BoE) are in charge of ensuring free and fair elections in New York City. This role is vital to our democracy and ensuring Brooklyn residents are enfranchised. NKD Board of Elections explainer has more details on the ways in which the relationship between the Party

and the BoE has been problematic. In addition to nominating commissioners to the BoE, District Leaders oversee and staff our elections in localized ways. They are responsible for hiring and coordinating poll workers at poll sites in their assembly districts. The BoE gives priority to poll worker applicants who are recommended by a District Leader.

The Role District Leaders Could Play

As it currently exists, the Brooklyn Party does not make use of all its power. Although the functions listed above are the main duties of a District Leader, there is opportunity to do so much more.

- District Leaders can convene an Assembly District Committee (ADC) of all general members of the County Committee in their district. An ADC functions as an official body of the Democratic Party with powers to fundraise and organize in that AD. In fact, this is required by the Party rules, but in practice rarely happens. The general membership of the County Committee should be crucial allies to District Leaders. By recruiting and training County Committee members, helping them petition for their seats, and organizing them into an ADC, a District Leader can build a local base of activated party members to support their efforts.
- The Party rules once required one policy meeting on a particular policy issue every year. Current rules, [as amended in November 2021](#) by the leadership of the Party, eliminated this meeting for more “informal gatherings” at which no votes are taken. Instead of changing rules to disenfranchise County Committee members, District Leaders could call for more policy meetings to drive a policy agenda for the local party.
- Funds raised by the Party could be utilized, at the request of District Leaders, to register voters, hold forums, and provide education to voters, as well as contest general elections against Republicans in swing districts in Brooklyn. The Party currently spends a majority of funds on public relations, consultants, and protecting incumbents from primary challenges.

Why District Leaders Matter

The role of District Leader has been historically used as a way for the party to maintain the status quo in terms of judicial appointments and other jobs filled through patronage. Most voters don't know about this position, and that is by design on the Party's part.

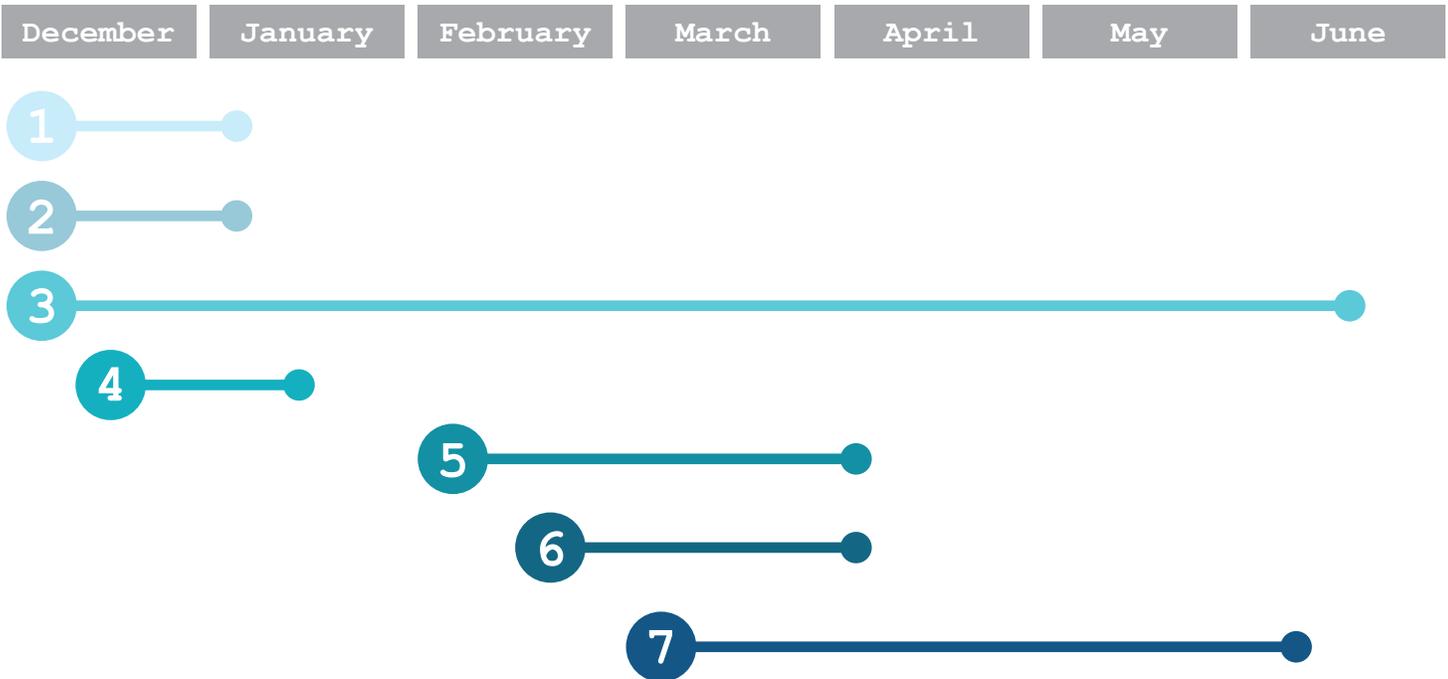
A good District Leader can do many things, such as increase the education and awareness of the voters in their district. Some District Leaders elected in the last few years have actively worked to engage constituents with the Party process. They've also brought new people into the electoral process and provided direct support to voters and residents by holding public events, sharing information, and bringing their concerns to Party leaders.

A good District Leader can ensure qualified people are working for the BoE and court system. These roles have the potential to elevate the experiences of anyone voting or interacting with the court system. District Leaders can push for a more open hiring process for the jobs that the party controls, like poll workers. These jobs could go to qualified people, rather than just people with connections to the Party. Over time this change could increase the professionalization of the staff at the BoE.

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Fired up and ready to run? A map of each Brooklyn Assembly District (AD) can be found at the [Board of Elections website](#). You can confirm your own AD and other voter information through the [NYC Voter Search](#). Be aware that 2022 is a redistricting year. It is possible, and likely, that at least some of the existing ADs will change in early 2022. The timeline for these changes and the new maps varies depending on the process, but we expect to have a full understanding of the new ADs by late February, prior to petitioning. Due to 2022 being a redistricting year, you can run in any AD so long as you have been a resident for the preceding 12 months, and move into the newly drawn AD within a reasonable time post-election.

Section 2: Key Milestones for a Successful Campaign



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- 1 Register as a candidate**
 - Tax identification number
 - Campaign bank account
 - File paperwork to declare candidacy
 - Find a treasurer
 - Retain an election lawyer
 - 2 Communications**
 - Craft narrative about yourself
 - Craft campaign message
 - Create a campaign website and online presence
 - Create an email account for campaign
 - 3 Fundraising**
 - Set fundraising goals
 - Begin fundraising
 - 4 Create field team**
 - Begin organizing field team and volunteers
 - Research district and win number
 - Determine methods for outreach
 - Determine technology related to field work
 - 5 Seek endorsements**
 - Research what community leaders, political clubs, and others are looking for in a District Leader
 - Work to be publicly endorsed by local electeds, community leaders, and others
 - Participate in the endorsement process for local and district-wide political clubs
 - 6 Petition to get on the ballot**
 - Create a committee on vacancies
 - Research and abide by petitioning rules and regulations
 - Negotiate to appear with other electeds or potential electeds on petitions
 - Educate field team on petitioning rules and regulations
 - Collect petitions and track good signatures
 - Bind and submit your petitions
 - 7 Campaign**
 - Knock doors, call, text, e-mail voters
 - Go to community events and be seen
 - Distribute mailers or internet ads (if relevant)
 - Follow-up with absentee ballot voters to ensure receipt and mailing
 - Poll-site visibility from you and your volunteers
 - Complete poll-watcher form

Section 3: Communications and Social Media

One of the most important things to do in a campaign is explaining what a District Leader is and why you want to be one. It is important to craft a narrative for yourself as a candidate; what do you want people to know about who you are and why you're running for District Leader. When crafting your story, account for the likely audience in your district and the voters you want to serve.

Your campaign message will be the main thing people remember about you and your campaign. Be sure it reflects your values and vision in a real and relevant way. A strong core message is:

- Clear and concise
- Anchored in values and personal story
- Authentic to you and your vision
- Reflects the experience and moral foundations of the voters you wish to serve

Policy goals are relevant to voters, whereas policy details will be important for endorsements. Think about your audience as you develop your website, communications, and other methods for engaging with the public and other political organizations or electeds. Voters typically support candidates who:

- Shares their values
- Have a relatable personal story
- Understand the district, its people, and its specific challenges
- Will fight for them and help improve their lives
- Listen

Brooklyn is full of diverse communities, and outreach in different languages can be crucial. Machine translations are awkward at best and outright wrong at worst. Translations should be performed by native speakers and/or professional translation services, and all final materials should be proofread by native speakers to ensure that no formatting errors have occurred.

Key Elements of your Communications Plan

- Personal Story - Chronological list of major life events formative in shaping your point of view or placing you on the journey that led you to running for office. Be sure to include why you want to be a District Leader and how your election can be integral in helping to solve challenges faced by your community.
- Core Values - Set of values that reflect the intersection of your experience and the experience of voters in your district that will guide your decisions as a policy maker and public servant.
- Core Message - One paragraph that articulates what you want voters to remember about you. Should quickly communicate who you are, what you're about, and why a voter should support you.
- Make a Message Box - Translation of your message comparing you to opponents. Be sure you can articulate what sets you apart from other candidates.
- Tailor for Key Audiences - For each potential constituency it is important to effectively communicate your core message, which should change slightly based on their viewpoints and interests.

Tip: As you draft this narrative, remember voters typically care more about compelling personal stories than policy details.

- Prepare an FAQ - Create a list of talking points for frequently asked questions around your narrative. Include bullets on why you are running, stories reflecting the kind of public servant you will be, and legislation or policy issues relevant to your district.
- Write a Message Guide - Create a message guide for your staff and volunteer leaders, and revisit it throughout the campaign to revise.

Visual Standards and Design

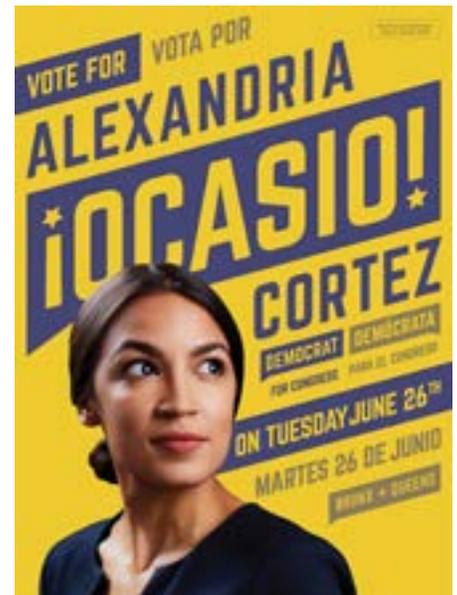
Successful campaign visuals should be treated with much care and importance. A website, a piece of literature, or a social media profile has the potential to be viewed by many more people than can be door-knocked or canvassed. It is important in a campaign context to have a singular, consistent design aesthetic. Consistent design focuses your message and your brand. See *Congress Member Ocasio-Cortez's poster at right for an example of a strong campaign brand.*

At minimum your visual guide should contain (a) your logo, (b) your color scheme, and (c) a consistent font. Your guide can also include a 'brand voice' to highlight key concepts from campaign messaging.

If it is within your campaign budget, a good graphic designer can provide design and guidance, as well as provide insights around the ways in which certain designs will be interpreted by different community groups and populations.

Professional printing can save time, money and frustration. If utilizing a professional printer, we recommend a union printer, and someone in the district. We do not recommend holding design competitions or asking for work on spec. If people are willing to volunteer their time and talent, that is amazing! Just recognize design is work and value it accordingly.

Once you have your logo and guidelines, [Canva](#) can be a great resource for quickly creating social media and digital graphics without further costs. With a Canva Pro account, it's possible to have a complete brand toolkit ready for any staff member to get to work. With some planning, it's also possible to create templates for specific actions and events, such as endorsements and canvasses.



Using Social Media

Even a minimal presence on Twitter and Instagram will help raise awareness of your campaign, if you can connect with politically active accounts in your district and in Brooklyn. Facebook community groups can also be a good way to make connections.

Creating a Website

Having a website early on in your campaign is vital and is a sure way to increase visibility to voters. It is also the easiest way to publicly present your campaign narrative. If you want to run for District Leader, having a website is a must. Below is a simple outline for a website:

- Home page
- Biography / About
- Issues / What is a District Leader
- District map
- How to Volunteer
- How to Donate

Common platforms for creating a website are SquareSpace, WordPress, Campaign Partner and CampaignPies. Whatever platform you decide to utilize, be sure to integrate a method to collect a list of donors and volunteers. This list will build up and translate into your list of voters. Common platforms for email and supporter management include Mailchimp, Action Network, or NationBuilder. See fundraising section for more information.

For some great examples of District Leader websites, check out the below, from Brooklyn candidates who won seats in 2020:

- <https://www.juliopenabk.com/>
- <https://www.shaquanaforbk.com/about>
- <https://jessepierceforbrooklyn.com/>

Press Coverage

District Leader races don't get much news coverage, but first-time candidates taking on long-term incumbents might get a reporter's attention, especially if there's a hook that connects with your campaign — something else in the news that you or your opponent are involved with. You could organize a statement or press conference with other candidates, if there's a current issue that you all feel needs urgent action. Start building relationships with local reporters or partner with someone you may know with local press contacts, such as a PR professional or a friend who handles press for an organization.

Section 4: Fundraising and Campaign Finance

Setting goals and identifying a financial timeline for your campaign should be done as early as possible. Fundraising is essential to all campaigns, regardless of size. The key is to fundraise for the bulk of your expenses early on. For District Leader, we recommend fundraising the majority of funds before the petitioning deadline in late February. Then set aside time to fundraise every day throughout the remainder of your campaign. Your campaign should have weekly and monthly goals with a wide variety of fundraising tactics.

Expect the majority of expenses at launch, such as website and brand development and retainer for an election lawyer to ensure you end up on the ballot. The remainder of your spending will be based on fundraising goals and should be utilized to reach the voters you need to win your race.

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Registering a Campaign and Campaign Finance Law

Filing requirements and deadlines are very important to understand. There are a lot of rules when it comes to campaign finance. This document is not a complete explanation of registering or finance compliance. Candidates and their Treasurer / Finance Director must abide by the requirements for accepting contributions, spending money on election and campaign expenses, and reporting their financial activity following the election. We recommend having a treasurer and election lawyer to help you navigate this process.

Below are the basic steps for registering your campaign:

- **Request EIN number from IRS:** Political committees may obtain an Employer Identification Number (EIN) online or by completing IRS Form SS-4.
 - EIN is required to open a bank account and file W-9s for payroll
 - File Form 8871 to ensure you do not have to file taxes
- **Open a Bank Account:** The account must be at one of the following: national bank, state bank, or FDIC- or NCUA-insured institution.
 - Account cannot collect interest; be sure the bank can accommodate. Look for a bank with lower wire transfer fees and that can wire past 2 PM.
 - All bank accounts must be opened in the name of the committee using the committee's EIN. Bank accounts should never be opened in the name of an individual using an individual's Social Security Number.
- **File a Statement of Organization:** Fill out and mail the [Candidate Authorization \(CF-16\) Form](#). More information on this form and other important information on filing and disclosing can be found [here](#).

Although a candidate can choose to act as their own Committee Treasurer, there is a lot of work that goes into ensuring campaign finance laws are being followed during the campaign. A Treasurer can be valuable in helping to complete the above steps and ensures compliance with campaign finance law, including:

- Signing and filing all committee reports and statements
- Depositing donations in the committee's designated bank within 10 days of receipt
- Authorizing expenditures or appointing another person (orally or in writing) to authorize
- Monitoring contributions and ensure compliance with legal limits and prohibitions
- Keeping records of receipts and disbursements for three years from the filing date of the report to which they relate

Methods of Fundraising

There are different tactics for fundraising for your campaign! Depending on your weekly and monthly goals, you may use different methods throughout your campaign. The most common fundraising tools are:

- **Fundraisers (both in-person and virtual):** Always set a fundraising goal for your event before selecting the time, date, and location.
 - Ask donors and supporters to be a part of a host committee who are responsible for bringing people to the fundraiser and raising a certain amount of money.
 - Ask people to donate before, during, and after your event and tell them what their money will go towards.
 - Follow up a donation with a thank you and an ask, such as more money, volunteering, or telling a friend about the campaign.
 - Be sure you have collected contact information for any event — this is list-building!
- **House Parties (in-person and virtual):** A more informal fundraising event where the individual hosting is responsible for recruiting guests and meeting the agreed upon fundraising goal. In this instance, you as the candidate can just arrive to talk about the campaign.
 - Provide hosts with a house party toolkit, including who to recruit, how to make a hard ask for money, and follow-up after the event.

- **Email List:** Ensure your campaign is constantly building and adding to your list of supporters and donors. We recommend scheduling regular emails to this list with a specific ask that explains what you'd like to do with their money. Explain in each email why support at this moment is crucial.
- **Social Media:** Raise money on Facebook, Instagram, and/or Twitter. These guerilla style campaigns can be successful, but we recommend always linking to ActBlue for donations given campaign finance rules. Keep in mind that Facebook is currently taking approximately one month to process paid ad submissions.

Important Tips for Fundraising

- The maximum someone can donate to your campaign varies by Assembly District according to the number of active registered Democrats in the district. This is calculated as \$0.05 per active registered Democrat. In Brooklyn, the maximum ranges between \$1500 and \$3500. You will need to identify the maximum for your district.
- Get comfortable talking about yourself and asking for donations!
- Calls are the most cost-efficient way to raise funds. Make a list of your closest family, friends, and community leaders, and explain why you're running and ask them to donate.
- List building is important work! Don't skip building up your supporter and donor list, and make sure to keep it up-to-date throughout the campaign.
- If you use ActBlue for fundraising, it is the easiest way to ensure necessary information is collected for all donations. Be sure to sync your bank account to ActBlue page for easy record keeping.
- Send thank you notes to everyone who donates! We recommend emails for small donations, calls for donations of any amount from family and friends, mailed letters for donations between \$100-\$250, and personal calls from the candidate for any donation totaling more than \$250.

Common Campaign Expenses

The following list outlines expenses that are considered “must- have” and “recommended”, based on conversations with individuals who have previously run for District Leader, as well as insights from individuals who have worked on and run campaigns.

Must Have:

1 Election lawyer

Retain a lawyer to ensure you make it onto the ballot. The majority of the work will be filing of petitions, including binding and submission, but a lawyer may also help in navigating campaign finance laws. The price will depend on a number of factors, mostly the contesting of any petition signatures. We recommend budgeting a retainer of around \$3,500 to \$5,000 at the outset of a campaign and an additional budget, if manageable, in case petitions are challenged. **If you are running an insurgent campaign, you should expect challenges which serve to cost you money, time and energy right as the campaign begins.** Total Budget recommendation: \$7500

2 Petitioning

Printing petitions with a union printer is Democratic best practice, and given the rules and regulations for printing we **do not recommend** printing on your own. Cost can vary if you have an overlapping district race and a candidate is willing to share petitions (i.e., Congress, State Senate, State Assembly), or if a political club is willing to provide an in-kind donation of petition printing.

3 Website

As noted previously in this guide, your website is a voters' first impression, so spend the money to ensure your website communicates effectively and collects the information you need. Below are commonly utilized platforms and their pricing.

- [Square Space](#) - simple templates, an easy to use back-end, and integrates with Mailchimp. Typical plan costs between \$96 and \$151 monthly.
- [Wordpress](#) - This is an industry standard and is very customizable. However, this requires some knowledge of website development. Typical plan costs \$25/month.
- [Campaign Pies](#) - affordable and easy to use. A basic plan can cost about \$25/month, though the plan varies depending on campaign size.
- [Campaign Partner](#)

4 Voter Data

To have a successful campaign and organize in the field a voter data file will be integral. For more information on utilizing and organizing, see Section 7. Below are different platforms for accessing voter data.

- [VAN/Votebuilder](#) - This is the Democratic campaign standard. Cost of this platform varies by the number of active voters in the district; therefore someone running in AD 52 will spend significantly more than someone running in AD 54. We recommend buying in January because the platform charges for the whole calendar year. Platform comes with a CRM (My Campaigns) and a dialer (openvpb) for contacting voters. Costs can be reduced by sharing with other campaigns in the district (i.e., Senate race).
- [L2](#) - raw data that will need to be reformatted before shared with field teams.
- [NYC Board of Elections](#) - Large CSV file sent as several DVDs so you'll have to figure out how to extract data from and organize. Cost ~\$50.

5 Tools for Organizing

You may want to consider purchasing additional platforms and/or tools, in addition to the voter data file that can help to reduce the manual labor your campaign will need to do for organizing.

- Phonebanking:
 - [Openvpb](#) - Cost an additional \$0.04/call, plus ~\$50 set up fee if you purchase [VPB Connect](#) which allows volunteers to use anonymous phone numbers instead of their own phone numbers or a google phone number.
 - [TurboVPB](#) - FREE Google Chrome plugin to save your volunteers time on dialing numbers on their own phone.
 - [ThruText](#) - this is a very popular tool, but has a very high price point.
 - [CallHub](#) - Used by many non-profits and the Bernie campaign. Pricing options vary, but include a pay as you go option ~\$3 for about 43 minutes of call time or \$200/month for up to 2,899 minutes. Can also be used for text banking.
- Textbanking:
 - [Spoke](#) - This is the preferred choice. An open source, and therefore inexpensive option. Cost is \$.0075/text, plus \$1/mo to rent phone numbers. You need one number for ~200 texts.
 - [ThruText](#) - Option syncs well with VAN and is easy to use, but has a higher price point.
 - Google Sheets - FREE to make a text bank list and ask volunteers to text voters directly via google phone number or their cell phone.

5 Tools for Organizing (continued)

- General Outreach Tools:
 - [Reach](#) - popular choice which loads all registered voters in your district into your account, syncs address book with voter file, logs conversations, provides support scores, and other data in the app. Costs between \$75 and \$150/mo.
 - [Impactiv](#) (formerly Outvote) - provides similar options as Reach, but has a less intuitive end-user experience. Good tool for digital organizing.
 - [Outreach Circle](#) - basically FREE service allows you to send customized emails from your address book at once and is a volunteer management platform.
- Volunteer Management:
 - [Mobilize](#) - volunteer/event recruitment management tool that syncs seamlessly with VAN/Votebuilder. Higher price point of about ~\$150/mo.
 - [Action Network](#) - affordable email, fundraising, and event building platform. Free up to a certain number of users, \$10/mo after ~2,000 subscribers.
 - Google Sheets - FREE

Recommend Having:

1 Photographer

Having some high quality photos of yourself can go a long way on the campaign. A professional photographer will usually deliver better results than a friend who owns a nice camera, but do what your budget allows. Just remember to credit photographers regardless!

2 Campaign literature

If your budget allows, we recommend printing some literature for you, staff, and volunteers to utilize during campaigning and field work. Having printed materials for voters you talk to face-to-face and outside high traffic areas in your district is a key tactic for raising awareness about your campaign.

3 Mailers

Depending on your district and the competitiveness of your race, mailers can be an effective way to reach voters you cannot contact directly. However, mailers are typically expensive. A cost-effective method would be a postcard campaign volunteers can help with. Due to the high cost of mailers, we recommend targeting a smaller demographic of voters instead of a blanket campaign.

4 Email Service Provider

To manage your email lists and communications, an email service provider will be helpful to build your list of volunteers, donors, and supporters and ensure you're reaching the right audiences at the right times. Total Budget recommendation: Up to \$200/month (look for pricing based on number of emails sent, so you aren't overcharged for contacts that aren't engaged)

Section 5: Petitioning

Remember, if you are running a contested campaign, you are not a candidate until your name appears on the ballot! All candidates are required to collect signatures from registered Democrats in the district where you run in order to be on the Primary ballot. District Leader candidates in Brooklyn **must collect 500 signatures** (or 5% of registered Democrats in your AD, whichever number is lower) to qualify in their Assembly District to appear on the ballot. Signatures can only be collected during the designated petitioning period (see timeline). **Although the requirement is 500, we recommend getting triple the amount of required signatures.** If you are expecting a contentious race, you should consider getting many more signatures than you need. More on this later.

Note that candidates frequently appear on each other's petitions, if they are running to represent overlapping areas. For example, a candidate for Assembly, State Senate, or County Committee could also include a District Leader candidate on their petitions. Then signatures from voters who live in the overlapping districts would count for both candidates.

The signer for your petition must:

- Be a registered Democrat in New York
- Be registered in the district where you are running; if a person is unsure if they are registered in district, they can sign, but the signature might be thrown out during filing
- Not have signed a petition for another candidate running in the same race
- Sign their name in presence of another

Important note: A person's signature can only be on a petition sheet in one place. That means if you sign a petition sheet as one of the ~10 signatures of support, you cannot be the "witness" on that sheet, which is the final signature at the bottom of the sheet. A good rule of thumb is to have your volunteers return completed petition pages without signing the "witness" line at the bottom, and to instead do that in your presence or that of your lawyer to ensure it is all done correctly.

Petitioning requires meticulously following guidelines. State law outlines explicit rules about signatures and the contents of the petitions. As noted previously in this document, we recommend printing petitions with a union printer who understands the formatting requirements.

Each petition page must include:

- Candidate's legal name and registered voting address, and the office they're running for
- A Committee on Vacancies – a list of registered Democrats who would choose a replacement if the candidate drops out, which is particularly important because if a candidate can no longer run, the Committee can select someone else
- Voter dates, signatures & addresses from voters
- Statement of Witness
- A space to indicate the Sheet Number when you bind the petitions

To make sure your signatures are valid and your petition sheets will not be thrown out, do not cross out any signatures if someone makes a mistake. Simply ask people to start over on the next line. **Dates must be in proper sequence; i.e., if there is a blank row on a sheet do not have someone sign it on a different day than the other date on the sheet.**

Addresses and other information must be filled out in full for each row; never write “ditto” or quotation marks. All information for a petitioner must be completed in full. You can fill in the statement of witness and sheet number when you’re ready to bind the petitions; as another reminder, encourage your volunteers to return completed petition pages before signing the witness line at the bottom of the page, and instead do so with you and/or your lawyer to ensure it is done correctly. Otherwise, you could have to throw out all the signatures collected on that page.

Binding and Filing your Petitions

In New York, all petition pages must be sequentially numbered and securely fastened. This is what we mean when we talk about binding — and there are specific regulations for how to do this. In addition, if a petition contains more than 10 pages, a cover sheet must be included. Cover sheets must document:

- Name and residential address of the candidate
- Office being sought
- Name of the party
- A statement denoting that the petition contains at least, if not more, than the 500 required signatures

We’ve mentioned it before, and will say it again: New York election law is very strict around binding and filing, so an election lawyer is a must. An election lawyer may also be helpful if the validity of your signatures is called into question. Any registered voter can challenge your petitions. This is the number-one reason we recommend collecting above and beyond the 500 required signatures, especially if you are challenging an incumbent with the Party Boss’s backing. If the validity of your signatures is in question, it will be helpful to have more than necessary as some may be invalidated.

Section 6: How to Profile A District

Understanding the demographics of your district and its voting history is an important part of running a successful campaign. Through the use of publicly available data, your campaign can identify previous political races with similar dynamics to your campaign and can help to clarify the ways people in your district may vote and the likely turnout in your primary.

As you profile your district, consider the following groups as necessary to profile in order to win a campaign:

- **Electoral Base:** Your electoral base is made up of two groups. The first are voters in the community who already know and support you (this might include voters from political clubs, Community Boards, schools, faith-based organizations, and family and friends). The second group are voters in the district who are very likely to vote for you, so long as they know who you are and why you’re running. The use of publicly available election results and demographic data from the census to identify these groups can be very helpful in informing your organizing methods. You can then concentrate on areas of the district with voters most likely to turn out and vote for you and focus your outreach to specific voter groups and raise awareness of your campaign. The information may also help inform your fundraising efforts.
- **Swing Voters:** These are voters who might or might not vote for you. There may be particular areas of the district where these voters are concentrated. In drafting your organizing plan, be thoughtful about your communication strategy and what information you NEED to know about this group of voters to inform this strategy work.
- **Your Opponent:** In the majority of District Leader races, there are not the same opportunities to define an opponent in the media as exist in higher-profile races. However, you should still be able to articulate what differentiates you from your opponent. Learn who they are so you know what to say about them.

- If you expect your race will be structured as an insurgent against an incumbent, look for races which have a similar structure. Cynthia Nixon versus Andrew Cuomo for Governor in 2018 is perhaps the highest-profile version of such a race, but there have been many state legislative and district leader elections in New York City.
- Make sure you can identify their likely electoral base of voters, and what strategies can be used or have been used in previous elections.
- Make sure you can clearly outline their voting record, if relevant. For District Leaders, understanding how they have voted on rules reforms and engagement with local county committee seats and community is vital to your race.
- **Local Validators:** Consider well-known and connected people in your district who might be interested in supporting a campaign like yours. For low-profile races, higher-profile validators can be a key to a winning strategy. Think about who can help you become recognized in your community or raise your profile to a group you otherwise could not reach on your own. Different people can provide needed support and resources in the form of time, money, connections or experience.
- **Local Organizations:** Generally speaking one of your jobs as a candidate is to go and participate in the ongoing social and political life of your district. Identify which organizations are important to the life of your district — hopefully some of which you are already connected with — and show up and meet people, hear what they are looking for, and introduce yourself.

Below is a list of publicly available resources and data sets to better understand your electorate.

- [Election Results](#): From the Board of Elections, these are downloadable CSV files with results broken down by election districts. See how your AD voted
- [2020 Census Results](#): “Customize Table” and then select Geo -> State Legislative District (Lower Chamber) to find your district
- [Voter Analysis 2008-2018](#): Open source Data from NYC
- [Voter Enrollment Totals](#): Data Summaries from BOE
- [New York City Campaign Finance Board](#): Provides yearly voter analysis reports under the Media/News section

Section 7: Field Campaign Organizing

Now that you’ve profiled your district, you are starting to strategize your organizing! Before you start knocking on doors, spend some time outlining your ‘Win Number’. This number represents one vote over 50% of expected turnout. A win number is valuable to have because it’s always critical to be working towards a specific number of votes.

However, it is difficult to predict the specific voter turnout for an election. The truth is you never really know. For example, the 2018, 2020, and 2021 primaries had a much higher voter turnout than in 2017, 2016 and most preceding primary elections. Since you cannot identify a true voter turnout, think of your win number as a moving target. Below is the formula for calculating your win number. The average voter turnout in your AD should be taken from the turnout of the last three similar elections in your district.

$$\left(\frac{\text{Average AD Turnout} \times \text{\# of Registered Voters in AD}}{2} \right) + 1$$

If there are multiple candidates in the race (i.e., more than two), replace the “2” in the formula with the total number of candidates in the race. For data that may be helpful in making these calculations see the [election results turnout](#) and the [voter enrollment totals](#).

Voter Contacts

Voters will need to see your name a lot in order to remember you when they go to the ballot box. The best way to achieve this is through a mix of contact methods including:

- In-person contacts, such as door knocking or high-traffic canvassing
- E-mail communications
- Press coverage and/or social media
- Print and digital advertisements
- Friend-to-friend outreach
- Visibility in the district

Set realistic contact goals based on your campaign's capacity. Calculate the impact you can make given the number of field organizers and volunteers you have, your budget for ads and mailers and your capacity for consistent social media, press coverage, and community engagement.

As you build toward the primary, begin by building up your list of volunteers and campaign staff to ensure you can knock and call as many people as possible. Spend time crafting messaging best suited for each type of contact. For example, in-person conversations are better for persuasion, while texts are better for reminding folks to vote. Lastly, strategize the best timing for each type of contact and draft a timeline for contacts.

Concentrate the majority of your contacts in the last few weeks of your campaign when voters are paying the most attention.

Tip: Mailers are most effective when they arrive during election week or right before early voting opens.

Volunteer Team

Below are key recommendations for organizing a volunteer force. If you aren't sure where to start there are two key strategies to implement now:

- **Relational Organizing:** Have family, friends, and campaign team reach out to people they know instead of contacting random voters. Identifying super supporters in your network to recruit other volunteers will go a long way in building your volunteer network.
- **Collaborate with groups and individuals who have endorsed you:** Fill volunteer shifts and help you reach contact goals. If you've been endorsed by a political club or other candidate or elected, be sure you enlist on them to help drive interest and volunteers for your organizing!

As your volunteer network grows and you approach the primary, be sure to keep volunteers engaged. Always make a concerted effort to make volunteers feel like they're making a difference and get to know them personally. Here are a few ways you can do this:

- Use a tracker or central spreadsheet with your volunteers, their contact info, and any other relevant details like their weekly availability and skill sets.
- Hold weekly relational organizing parties via zoom and/or in person events to mobilize volunteers to leverage their contacts.

- Utilize the ‘reshift’ model, allowing volunteers to change their activities from week to week.
- Set regular shift times weekly to help volunteers re-shift and/or commit.
- Provide consistent communication through social media and email to recruit volunteers.
- Identify active volunteers and promote them to leadership positions and have them host volunteer events.
- Offer ongoing training to volunteers.

Organizing Your District

Your campaign should reflect your district and you should ensure your campaign does the work to include all volunteers and voters. Make sure your in-person campaign events are accessible; the location has an elevator or ramp and has ADA-compliant bathrooms. Include alt text in your images and subtitles or text transcription in videos (including translated subtitles). If people in your district communicate on Whatsapp and WeChat, make sure people know about you and your campaign on those platforms and that messages are translated.

Providing voter materials in languages for voters and ensuring disability access are crucial steps to including voters typically disenfranchised from the political process.

Conclusion

Running for District Leader is a great way to get involved in your local community and in Democratic politics. We’re so excited you’re part of this process and we hope this guide helps as you prepare your campaign. Please reach out with any feedback about our guide, or tips you’d like to share. Thank you for your time!