

# Election-specific Skills

## MODULE 7: CAMPAIGNING

Campaigning is about getting your message out. Communications is a critical component of your campaign and political life overall. Developing a clear message and familiarity with communications and social media tools and platforms is a fundamental part of becoming a political leader.

To campaign effectively you need to have a clear campaign message that speaks to the issues most important to your constituents.

### Activity 1: Creating Your Campaign Message

Identify 3-5 key issues and create a brief message addressing each one based on your values and your perspective on the issue:

1. Key Issue:

Message:

2. Key Issue:

Message:

3. Key Issue:

Message:

4. Key Issue:

Message:

5. Key Issue:

Message:

Canvassing (or going door-to-door) is an effective means of communicating your campaign. Here are some quick tips about how to canvass effectively:

- Canvassing intends to connect you personally with voters so that they know who you are and what you stand for and for you to learn what their concerns and interests may be.
- Choose your canvas times strategically to maximize when people may be home, without disrupting their family routines.
- Determine if you will require an interpreter to accompany you.
- Take pamphlets/posters with you to leave behind, or in case no one is home.
- Keep a written record of the homes visited and the issues/concerns raised and note any follow up committed to.
- Decide on what to do about dogs – many canvassers carry dog treats.
- Consider your safety and the safety of your volunteers and do not go alone.
- It may be worthwhile to go back over the canvass route before Election Day.

## Voters List

One of the most important things you will get for your campaign is the voter's list. This list will keep you organized in terms of who is living in which district as a registered voter.

## Getting Out There



Although doing door-to-door (canvassing) during a campaign is still regarded as an essential part of winning the confidence of the public, opportunities to share your campaign on social media are worth exploring as well.

Social media has become the primary source of information for citizens and a quick and effective way to connect with elected leaders. Social media has changed how people discover, read, and share news, information, and content, and puts powerful publishing tools into the hands of individuals.

Social media also allows for information, whether true or false to spread quickly and easily. It has proven to be a powerful tool but has also lead to some political blunders. Learning how to use social media, and other media strategies effectively will strengthen your message and confidence as a candidate. However, recognize that not everyone is on social media.

## You Will Be News



As soon as you announce your candidacy, the media, and the public will want to know what you have to say about the issues central to the campaign. Make sure you are comfortable responding to the issues before you announce your candidacy. Be prepared to respond to any manner of questions concerning local issues as well as broader issues facing the community, territory or country.

As you prepare to announce your candidacy, have a standard resume and biography outlining your background, career history, general goals, and any personal information you wish to share on hand. These are items that you can give to the media or members of the public looking to learn more about you and your views.

For incumbents, be prepared to share and, at times, defend your record as a public official. For new candidates, be prepared to highlight why you are the winning choice and what you will bring to the table as an elected official.

## Know the Other Candidates

It is important to know the strengths and weaknesses of the other candidates. Although other candidates are indeed opponents, some of them may become your colleagues at the end of an election, so it's important to maintain a respectful relationship with the other candidates throughout an election. Be aware of the other candidates' positions on the concerns of voters, particularly where they differ and agree with your beliefs and values. This will help you to align with some of the candidates as well as to differentiate your campaign from others.

**Useful Information**

- Who are the other candidates?
- What are their backgrounds?
- Describe their education.
- Describe their previous jobs.
- Describe their previous elected, appointed, or public positions.
- What are their voting records?
- What previous public statements or important votes have they made?
- Why are they running for office?
- What do they hope to accomplish in office?
- What issues are personally important to them?

Gather information about other candidates from media reports, public meetings, and materials published by those other candidates, and their social media accounts.

If you are unable to attend a public event that would help you gain votes, network with other candidates or better understand community concerns, make sure a member of your campaign team or a supporter attends that public event, asks questions, and reports back to you or your campaign manager about what the other candidates had to say.

Do not go to any public meetings or debates without as many supporters as you can gather. The supporter's role is two-fold: to ask difficult and challenging questions of your competition, and to ask you questions that give you an opportunity to outline your views and share your message as the winning candidate.

It is highly recommended not to personally attack another candidate as it may damage your reputation by doing so. It is possible that you, or your family, may be the target of a personal attack from another candidate or candidate's team. Be prepared for your 'dirty laundry' to be aired and manage it with as much dignity as possible.

## Interacting with the Media



Handling the media is a skill you need to develop, both as a candidate and a politician. The relationship between the media and the candidate is interdependent: the media cannot do a story without a candidate, and the candidate needs the media to get her message out to a wider audience. A respectful relationship with the media will help ensure that your position on issues is articulated fairly and accurately.

### Media Do's

- Be polite and clear about your limits, and always bring the subject back to your key messages. If the media asks you to answer a question you find objectionable or too personal, do not feel obligated to answer.
- Try to be on good terms with reporters, commentators and columnists, along with their editors, as they determine what/how much to write about you and your local campaign.
- Maintain a media list that includes reporters, columnists, and commentators specific to your constituency so that you can be sure that press releases and other notices get to your contacts and are not overlooked or forgotten.
- Always respond to a media request even if you don't intend to grant an interview. It is not only professional but could be helpful later when you want coverage on an issue.
- Try to know what issue the reporter is asking about in advance. Either you or your research officer should gather as much information as possible before you speak to the reporter, including what your opponents may be saying about the same issue.

## Media Don'ts

- Don't believe that anything is ever "off the record." Everything you say may be reported. If you don't want to read it on the front page of tomorrow's newspaper, don't say it.
- Don't pretend you know the facts when you don't. If you are asked questions about an issue you don't have an answer to, say so. Most reporters and voters will respect a candidate who is honest and upfront about what they know and what they don't know. Commit to getting back to them later, do the research, and get back to them as soon as promised.
- Don't overreact to bad press. The purpose of an interview is to communicate your message.
- Don't make promises to the media or the public that you are not prepared to keep.

## Social Media



Social media allows people to create and share information and make connections. It is a powerful publishing and communications tool that has changed how people discover, read, and share content. People increasingly rely on social media for up-to-date political news and information. It can also spread political information quickly, whether it is true or not.

Social media activity can taint a political figure's reputation with information that may or may not be true. Before a candidate or a politician can confirm, deny, or explain, the public may have already formed an opinion based on that information. When done well, the spread of information on social media for political means can help campaigns immensely.

Campaigning online can be difficult, especially for campaigns with limited resources. Focusing your efforts and cultivating followers on specific platforms can pay off come to Election Day. A strong social media presence is vital to any campaign. (Note that a lot of people are on Facebook in the communities. Is it recommended to set up a separate Facebook account for election purposes? What about a webpage?)



## Activity 2: Use of Social Media

Consider some social media Do's and Don'ts that Candidates need to be aware of to have a successful social media presence. Write your thoughts in the table below and be prepared to share:

Social Media Best Practices	Things to Avoid in Social Media



No matter what social media platforms you choose, remember:

- **Be Smart**  
Each network has its language – learn it and use it to ensure you are reaching as broad an audience as possible.
- **Be Active**  
If you are on social media, then use it. Post at least once a day.
- **Be Consistent**  
Each platform may need you to tailor how you get your message out, but be consistent in always echoing the same message via different platforms.
- **Be a Great Listener**  
Get clues from your audience as to what they want further details on and what issues are important to them. Give them the information they are seeking to get their votes!
- **Be Resilient**  
Grow a tough skin and don't let negative comments get you down. Bullying and offensive remarks dominate social media, but don't let them dominate your campaign.

## Summary

Running a successful campaign is your best bet at getting elected. Creating a clear message about who you are and why voters should have confidence in you is only part of the task – getting your message out there to as many people as possible is the other part.