

WHY ARE YOU RUNNING?

This is one of the very first questions you will be asked, and you will hear it over and over again in various forms over the course of your campaign. Many candidates will respond with a laundry list of their problems with the political establishment, or they treat their candidacy like a popularity contest and don't give an answer with substance. You should think about your answer now, so that you will be ready to communicate your thoughts in a way that shows your concern, comes from the heart, and gives your potential constituents confidence that you have a real plan. To create the core of your answer, do this writing exercise.

For ***part-one*** of this exercise, create an outline for each of the three following topics- you will perfect your language and fill in details later:

- ★ **Personal story:** What is your individual and professional history? What path led you to decide to run for elected office? Take some time to write down a brief history of your life, including some related anecdotes. These stories are what make you “you.” It might take more than one writing session to complete this, but it's an invaluable tool for developing your message.
- ★ **Goals:** What do you hope to achieve in the office you are running for? What do you want to accomplish if elected? This will take

some time and thoughtful consideration, but think about it and jot down any and all ideas. What motivates you and your general vision for public service? Do you have any specific fixes or programs you've come up with? The key here is to think creatively, but find realistic solutions.

- ★ **Local Issues:** This should be a functional list of things that normal people talk about in your community. Think “water cooler” talk, or issues highlighted frequently in local media. Taxes, traffic, and crime are good places to start. You must take the time to note and understand key issues—even if your positions do not coincide with popular public sentiment.

Now it's time to look at your outlines and see where they intersect. Thinking about these questions and organizing your thoughts should help you draw a connection between your story, aspirations and how they apply to the issues and people your community. **This will be the heart of your message or platform for running.** If a clear theme doesn't quickly emerge, you may need to reconsider your responses.

Part-two of this exercise will help you tailor your message and fill in the details of your story- it's time to figure out exactly who your audience is. Some candidates know surprisingly little about their area and the people who live there. Before you decide to throw your name in the hat, it's vital that you have a deep

and thorough knowledge of the district or region you would represent if elected.

Make a list of everything you currently know about your targeted district, **and then check it against the facts-** you want to make sure you know what you are talking about before you start. Be sure to include physical characteristics of your community (boundaries, major roads and highways, neighborhoods, large employers, etc.) and or planned development. Don't forget the demographics either: population, ethnic make-up, political party registration rates, economic snapshot, and past election results are all important. Then, fill in the details of your message with facts and information that applies to your audience.

Finally, knowing whether a certain elected office is actually attainable should be the ultimate question you ask yourself and your closest advisors. Then after you've determined why you are running, it's time to get started with your campaign plan.

For tips and tools that will help you start putting together your campaign plan take a look at the resources available at

www.AmericanMajority.org and www.NewLeadersProject.org.

