

Jan 29, 2004

What Every Green Candidate Should Know

Compiled by Susan Fawcett,
member, Coordinated Campaign Committee

This document is the product of the responses to a questionnaire that was sent out to all the Green candidates who ran in the U.S. 2004 general election. With the luxury of hindsight, candidates reflected and shared their experiences of what worked best, and what could have been better. This is intended to be a refined checklist of things candidates and their campaign committees should have in mind before deciding to run for office. For a thorough guide to the many intricacies of campaigning as a Green, please refer to the Campaign Manual available at:

<http://gp.org/committees/campaign/manual.html>

Why Run?

That should be the first question a candidate asks herself. Ideally, candidates should run to win, but that is not always a realistic goal, in which case Greens run to:

- *earn credibility for the party
- *energize and educate local greens
- *attract new members/supporters
- *gain practical experience
- *raise Green issues/educate the community
- *pressure opponents
- *increase choice (democracy)
- *achieve ballot access
- *establish districts

Now what?

Effective campaigning means effective use of limited resources (people, time and money). These resources are used most efficiently in different ways depending on the scope of the campaign and the office sought. State-wide or large district races with limited funding are better off spending money on things that will reach the largest amount of people possible (i.e. bumper stickers, ads), while smaller races benefit most from voter contact and mailings. Green campaigns are too diverse to generalize, but candidates felt that the following resources were the most important:

The **Candidate** is generally the best resource. S/he needs to be willing and able to put the necessary time and energy into the campaign. The most effective way to campaign is to speak to voters *face to face*. In races with a reasonably sized electorate (this number changes from race to race) the candidate and volunteers should begin blockwalking early and often. Most candidates said that this was their most effective use of time.

Volunteers are essential, but tend to work best when well organized; find a volunteer coordinator, figure out jobs for people, and plug them in! Greens easily get caught up in trying to make decisions as democratically as possible, but should be aware that many volunteers just want to help out---and not attend meetings to discuss it. Try to find people to serve as campaign manager, treasurer, volunteer coordinator, webmaster, etc. early on.

Fundraising should begin in the earliest stages of the campaign, and fellow Greens, friends and family of the candidate are often the best places to start for seed money. Don't be afraid to ask for money! Often those who sympathize, but don't have time to contribute are happy to make a financial contribution to a worthwhile cause.

Budgeting Depending on how much is available, money can be used for a variety of things of varying usefulness, but most candidates (especially in local races) found

that sending out mailers was the most effective use. Visibility is essential, and can be enhanced through ads, yard signs, bumper stickers, etc. but free sources (radio shows, television, letters to the editor, candidate events and fora) can be just as useful. Resist the temptations of expensive, flashy unnecessary things.

Platform The first thing the candidate should do before declaring is to familiarize himself with the issues. Volunteers may be helpful in researching certain topics. While developing a platform, candidates should also spend time approaching groups and individuals in the community and simply *listening* to what they have to say about the issues.

Website Having a good website can be crucial, and should be developed in conjunction with your platform. A website has the benefit of being free (talk a friend into setting it up!) or fairly cheap and still being able to reach large amounts of people. Unlike literature, it can be updated on a daily basis, if necessary. It's a good idea to include your website on any materials you put out; lit, buttons, yard signs, etc.

Endorsements It's amazing what can be done with little or no money, as long as the campaign takes advantage of as many opportunities for public exposure as possible. This gets back to the importance of listening. Many organizations won't invite Greens to seek their endorsements, and begin the process before the Democratic and Republican primaries, so it's up to you to take the initiative and approach labor, environmental, LGBT groups, etc. Try to keep your eye on all the questionnaires that come in, because they can make the difference, especially in a large race.

Media The same rules apply when dealing with the media: Seek them out and send press releases early and often, and try to give them a story instead of just announcing an event. Develop personal relationships with the political correspondents of newspapers.

Final Considerations Predictably, Greens also said they would start organizing sooner, and involve themselves with as many community groups as possible. In retrospect, many Greens also said they would choose to run for a more winnable office, if given another opportunity. We are a grassroots party, and though it is necessary to maintain visibility and keep raising the issues in big races, our victories will come from the bottom up.