CLEAN VIRGINIA



CANDIDATE GUIDE

A practical roadmap for launching and managing a successful campaign.

INTRODUCTION

Dear Candidate,

Congratulations on your decision to run for office. Seeking public office is a significant undertaking, and we hope this guide helps you navigate the process. Whether you're just beginning to explore a campaign or are already on the ballot, we're glad you've found this resource.

Clean Virginia is committed to supporting candidates who believe **Virginia deserves affordable energy, accountable government, and fair elections.** Through the Clean Virginia Fund, our affiliated political action committee, we support candidates who reject campaign contributions from Virginia's state-regulated utility monopolies and who share our commitment to clean energy, campaign finance reform, and greater competition in Virginia's energy markets.

This guide is designed to provide a practical roadmap for launching and managing a successful campaign. It covers the fundamentals, from filing the necessary paperwork and building a campaign team to developing a fundraising plan and organizing your campaign. While we strive to make this guide as comprehensive as possible, it is intended as a general resource and should not be considered legal advice. Campaign finance laws and election requirements can change, so we encourage you to consult qualified legal counsel before undertaking any activity described in this guide.

We also want to be a resource beyond these pages. If you have questions, need clarification, or believe there's information we should add in future editions, please **don't hesitate to reach out.** We're here to help, and we wish you the very best as you begin your campaign.

We look forward to supporting you every step of the way - onwards!

The Clean Virginia Team

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ABOUT CLEAN VIRGINIA

Clean Virginia works to make Virginia's government more accountable, its energy system more affordable, and its elections less influenced by special interests. Our work is guided by two core priorities:

Reduce corporate influence in Virginia politics. We support meaningful campaign finance reforms, including prohibiting direct corporate political contributions, establishing reasonable contribution limits on all other spenders, including Clean Virginia, and strengthening transparency and disclosure requirements. We believe public policy should be driven by the interests of Virginians — not by powerful monopolies or wealthy special interests.

Protect Virginia families and businesses from energy policies that put profits ahead of customers. That means preventing unjustified rate increases, tying utility profits to performance, ensuring that families and small businesses are not forced to subsidize large corporate energy users, such as data centers, and ensuring that data centers pay their fair share in state taxes.

CLEAN VIRGINIA IS COMMITTED TO ELECTING AND SUPPORTING STATEWIDE AND GENERAL ASSEMBLY CANDIDATES ALIGNED WITH OUR VALUES.

We can support these efforts in a variety of ways, including:

- Campaign launch
- General campaign guidance
- Vendors and staff recommendations
- Campaign contributions
- Fundraising support and donor management
- Social media and comms resources
- Training and educational seminars
- Policy and electoral research
- Campaign literature and materials

ENDORSEMENT PROCESS

Clean Virginia endorsements are reserved only for candidates running for statewide office — including for Governor, Lieutenant Governor, and Attorney General — and the General Assembly. **We do not endorse or fund federal or municipal candidates.**

Candidates seeking the support of Clean Virginia must complete the following steps:

1. **Complete the Candidate Questionnaire**
   Submit the Clean Virginia Candidate Questionnaire, available at cleanvirginia.org/giving/. The questionnaire helps us learn about your campaign, and positions on issues related to energy policy, campaign finance reform, and government accountability.
2. **Participate in a Candidate Interview**
   After reviewing your questionnaire, a member of the Clean Virginia team will contact you to schedule a 30-minute virtual interview. This conversation gives us an opportunity to learn more about your campaign and background, discuss your priorities, answer any questions you may have about Clean Virginia.
3. **Endorsement Review**
   Following the interview, Clean Virginia staff will review your questionnaire and interview materials and make an endorsement decision. Candidates will be notified shortly thereafter.

Please note that completion of the questionnaire and interview does not guarantee an endorsement or financial support. Endorsement decisions are based on a variety of factors, including alignment with Clean Virginia's mission, the overall political landscape, and available resources.

When determining which candidates we support, we consider the following:

1. Questionnaire and interview responses.
2. Alignment with Clean Virginia's values.
3. Electoral need and district competitiveness.
4. Legislative history (if applicable).

HOW WE FUND CANDIDATES

Clean Virginia provides financial support to candidates and campaigns.

STANDARD FUNDING PROGRAM

We believe that no state-regulated monopoly, like Dominion Energy or Appalachian Power Company, should be allowed to financially contribute to legislators tasked with overseeing them. To protect consumers, ensure accountability, and uphold public trust, we provide annual Standard Funding to incumbents aligned with this principle. This ensures that candidates doing the right thing still have access to campaign funding.

Who's eligible for Standard Funding?

Incumbent state legislators who hold a principled stance against accepting political contributions from, or owning stock in, state-regulated electric utility monopolies, their top executives and their employed lobbyists

How does our Standard Funding work?

1. All incumbents receive a minimum yearly baseline amount determined by chamber
   - House of Delegates: $5,000
   - State Senate: $10,000
2. Additional funding above the baseline is allocated based on factors such as seniority, leadership, and district economic conditions to help offset systemic fundraising inequities

DISCRETIONARY FUNDING

We provide additional financial support to incumbents and candidates in competitive or challenging elections who demonstrate a strong commitment to clean, affordable energy and building a government that works for all Virginians.

Who's eligible for Discretionary Funding?

1. Candidates running for statewide offices, including for Governor, Lieutenant Governor and Attorney General
2. Candidates running for the Virginia General Assembly, including for the House of Delegates or State Senate
3. Candidates that are in competitive or priority districts

Learn more about our endorsement process and join our coalition:
www.cleanvirginia.org/giving/giving

To help you get your campaign off the ground, we've created a clear, easy-to-follow checklist to build a strong foundation for success.

CHECKLIST

- [ ] Select campaign treasurer (pg. 9)
- [ ] Register for COMET Account (pg. 10)
- [ ] File Statement of Organization (pg. 11)
- [ ] File for Employee ID number (pg. 13)
- [ ] Open bank account (pg. 15)
- [ ] Purchase campaign software (pg. 19)
- [ ] Curate contacts (pg. 20)
- [ ] Clean social media (pg. 23)
- [ ] Prepare campaign website (pg. 24)
- [ ] Announce campaign launch (pg. 24)
- [ ] Collect and file petition (pg. 26)
- [ ] Win!

Disclaimer: This document is not legal advice. It is meant to provide a general overview regarding the steps to become a candidate in Virginia. Consult your own legal counsel before undertaking any activity described in this document.

SELECTING YOUR CAMPAIGN TREASURER

Every candidate committee in Virginia needs an appointed treasurer. The treasurer is usually a volunteer position and should be someone who is responsible, reliable, and detail oriented. They do not need any special professional experience or accreditations in bookkeeping or reporting.

Treasurer Requirements

- Must be a Virginia resident
- Must be a registered voter in Virginia
- The treasurer does not have to live nor be registered in the district in which the candidate is running

Treasurer Responsibilities

- Keeping detailed and accurate accounts of all contributions received by the campaign
- Tracking all expenditures made by the campaign
- Record keeping includes:
  - Date of the contribution or expenditure.
  - Amount or value.
  - Name and address of the person or committee making the contribution or to whom the expenditure was made
  - Object or purpose of the contribution or expenditure

Campaigns that receive a large number of individual contributions might hire a compliance consultant or delegate some of the above responsibilities to a paid employee on the campaign. In this case, the treasurer is still responsible for checking reports for quality and ensuring timely filing.

As an organization committed to campaign finance transparency, Clean Virginia places a high value on accurate and honest financial reporting.

You will identify your treasurer when submitting Statement of Organization (more details on this below) to the State Board of Elections. It is possible to change the treasurer at any time during your campaign by filing a new statement of organization.

Linked **here** is additional information on responsibilities and requirements of your campaign treasurer straight from the source.

REGISTER A PO BOX

It is recommended that your campaign open a PO Box so all official correspondence is routed through an address other than your home. This will serve as your public campaign address and can be used for donor mail, campaign materials, website listings, and other communications. Using a PO Box helps protect your privacy and ensures your home address is not publicly shared.

Your committee address should be separate from the candidate's personal residence, as it will be listed publicly as the primary point of contact for the campaign. A United States Postal Service PO Box is the preferred option, though a private mailbox or office suite is an acceptable alternative.

When selecting a location, choose one that is convenient to your home or workplace. As the campaign ramps up, you or a staff member will likely need to check the box daily. Most campaigns can operate with an extra small or small box. If you pay for the box with personal funds before opening a campaign account, be sure to save your receipt so you can reimburse yourself later.

Please follow the attached link to register for a PO box.

CREATE A COMET ACCOUNT

COMET is operated by the Virginia Department of Elections and it is the system in which you (or your treasurer) will be submitting your Statement of Organization and campaign finance reports. Before you can file your Statement of Organization, you need to create a campaign COMET account.

1. Go to the Department of Elections website to create a new account
2. Use your personal (or ideally your campaign email, if created) to register
3. Check your email for the verification link
4. Fill out your contact information; you can use your home address

That's it - you're all set

FILE STATEMENT OF ORGANIZATION

Filing a Statement of Organization registers your candidacy with the Virginia Department of Elections. As far as the state is concerned, this is the official beginning of your run for office. You are required to file a Statement of Organization within 10 days of any one of the following:

- Acceptance of a contribution
- Expenditure of any funds
- The payment of a filing fee for any party nomination method
- The filing of a candidate statement of qualification
- The appointment of a campaign treasurer, designation of a campaign committee, or designation of a campaign depository

Please keep in mind that any information you include in your Statement of Organization will become public record as soon as you file, so please consider your privacy, when applicable, when completing this step.

INFORMATION NEEDED TO FILE YOUR STATEMENT OF ORGANIZATION:

- Your full name and residence address
- The full name and mailing address for the campaign committee (this is where you want to use the PO Box)
- The full name, residence address, and daytime phone number of the treasurer
- The office being sought and district
- The recognized political party affiliation of the candidate; if you do not select a party preference, the Department of Elections will list you as an independent candidate
- The name of the financial institution for the campaign depository

DEVELOPING A COMMITTEE NAME

Your committee name is the official legal name of your campaign to appear on all public-facing and compliance materials, so it's important to choose carefully. Think of this as your campaign's business name:

- The legal name for your committee
- Listed on all campaign finance reports
- The name donors will write checks to
- Included in disclaimers for paid communications

You'll want a name that is **clear, simple, and evergreen** so it remains appropriate throughout the campaign. Most campaign committees follow a standard format, such as:

- Friends of Wanda Sykes
- Wanda Sykes for Virginia
- Sykes for Delegate
- Sykes for Senate

INFORMATION NEEDED TO FILE YOUR STATEMENT OF ORGANIZATION:

1. Log in to COMET
2. Once logged in, select Candidate Campaign Committee
3. Fill out the required information:
4.
   - Committee Name
   - Primary Financial Institution: List the bank you plan on utilizing for your campaign
   - Filing Reports: Select "eFiling Application — COMET" (info about COMET below)
5. Once submitted electronically, you must print four copies of your application to use as follows:
   - Submit one, printed and signed, to the State Board of Elections at 1100 Bank Street, Richmond, VA 23219. Certified mail is recommended or hand delivery with receipt.
   - Mail or hand deliver a copy to your local electoral board or registrar in the county or city where you will be running. This step varies by locality, so please check with your local government and on the State of Elections Candidate Bulletin for specific information for your locality.
   - Keep one as a backup or for your own records.
   - Keep one for your bank, as some may require it to open a campaign bank account.

   IMPORTANT: Follow up with the State Board of Elections to ensure your information has been
6. received and accepted. Mistakes happen within our Elections and Postal systems. **The onus is on YOU to ensure the proper documents have been properly filed and accepted.**

OPTIONAL, BUT RECOMMENDED, STEP: HIRING AN ATTORNEY

Most campaigns will need to consult an attorney at some point in the election cycle. It is also prudent to have all legally enforceable documents like voter petitions reviewed by counsel. Establishing a relationship with someone who can serve as the campaign's lawyer, on an as needed basis, ensures you are prepared for all scenarios that may arise.

FILE WITH THE IRS

Getting an EIN Tax-exempt political organizations are required to obtain an Employer Identification Number (EIN), also known as a Federal Tax Identification Number. The IRS uses this nine-digit number to identify taxpayers that are required to file various tax forms.

1. Navigate to the IRS Website
2. Click "Begin Application Now" Note: the application is only available during set hours
3. Select "View Additional Types, Including Tax-Exempt and Governmental Organizations"
4. Select "Political Organization"
5. Click "Continue"
6. Select "Started a new business"
7. Fill out your name and Social Security Number
8. Select "I am a responsible and duly authorized officer or a board member having knowledge of this organization's affairs."
9. Click "Continue"
10. Fill out your HOME address (you cannot use a PO Box) and phone number
    [Put your name in the box below so the mail is directed towards you]
11. Select "Yes" for "Do you have an address different from the above where you want your mail to be sent?"
    [This is where you enter the PO Box]
12. Click "Continue"
13. If you selected "Yes" for the different mailing address, a new screen should appear asking for the additional address. Input your PO Box here and click "Continue"

Instructions to file with the IRS continued on the next page.

14. Tell us about the Political Organization.
- Legal name of the Political Organization*
  [Name of the committee]
- Trade name/Doing business as
  [Leave blank]
- County where Political Organization is located*
  [Use the county for your PO box or home address]
- State/Territory where Political Organization is located*
  [Virginia]
- Political Organization start date*
  [Use the month you filed your Statement of Organization]
- Closing month of accounting year*
  [December]
- Will you file Form 8871 under Sec 527?*
  [No]

15. Click "Continue"

16. Do you have, or do you expect to have, any employees who will receive Forms W-2 in the next 12 months?
- If you plan on hiring staff > **Yes**
- If you do not plan on hiring staff > **No**

17. Click "Continue"

18. If you clicked "Yes" to hiring employees
- What is the first date wages or annuities were or will be paid?
  [Select the month you expect to make your first hire]
- Number of agricultural employees > **0**
- Number of employees
  [How many people do you expect to hire?]
- Do you expect your employment tax liability to be $1,000 or less in a full calendar year?
  [If you plan on paying out more than $4,000 in wages, then the answer is "Yes" otherwise, the answer is "No"]

19. How would you like to receive your EIN Confirmation Letter?
- Select "Receive Online"

20. Summary of your information
- Review everything to make sure it is correct, then click "Submit"

OPENING A BANK ACCOUNT

A separate bank account is required so that you can receive contributions and pay campaign expenses. You cannot and should not use anything but a specific and designated campaign account. Do not use an already established personal or business account. Using previously established accounts opens your candidacy up to potential campaign finance violations.

Considerations for Opening A Bank Account

- The campaign's financial institution must be within the Commonwealth (read: select a bank with a branch inside Virginia).
- Select an institution that has branches close to your home and/or work. Remember, you will be depositing checks and conducting frequent banking business. Do not choose an institution where the only location is 45 minutes from your house or with extremely limited hours; you want somewhere convenient. Ideal locations offer at least some weekend hours and/or mobile deposit options.
- It is recommended to open an interest-free checking account rather than an interest-bearing savings account. Any interest earned on a campaign bank account must be reported in your finance reports. Considering how little banks pay in interest, the small amount of money to be gained is hardly worth the additional effort required by your committee treasurer to report.
- Make sure the account you are opening offers same day or next day wire transfers. Understand what will be required of you or your treasurer to complete a wire transfer. Close to the election, down the road, large payments for things like mail and TV must be paid via wire transfer. Long wait periods or other red tape could create major delays when there is no time to spare.
- Upon opening your account, order a campaign checkbook and two debit cards with the treasurer's name. Credit cards are generally not a good idea, as they complicate reporting and keeping track of cash flow. Keep things simple by sticking with debit cards and checks.

DOCUMENTS NEEDED FOR OPENING AN ACCOUNT

Note: Requirements and documentation vary by institution.

Recommended list of documents to have ready when attempting to open your account:

- Photo ID
- Statement of Organization
- Federal EIN
- A small (usually around $100) initial deposit

Recommended Institutions:

- Truist - Community Checking
- Amalgamated Bank - Political Organizations

WIRE TRANSFER BEST PRACTICE

Campaigns in Virginia have been targeted by scammers who hack into campaign email accounts and send fraudulent invoices and wire instructions that look like they are coming from the campaign's real vendors. Be sure to set a clear approval system, with redundancies, for wiring money with your campaign treasurer in order to avoid falling victim to these scams.

EMPLOYING STAFF

If your campaign plans to employ paid staff now or in the future, you must register with the appropriate agencies. Just like a business, you will need to report your organization and its hiring activities to state and federal agencies to stay compliant. These steps can sometimes take several weeks to process, so it is best to do them at the start of your campaign, so you are ready to hire and pay staff when the time comes. Filing is free and there is no penalty if you choose to close your entity or end up not employing staff during the course of your campaign.

Register with VA Employment Commission

Register with VA Department of Taxation

When hiring staff, it's important to consider the following:

- **Past experience**

  Don't just focus on potential staff's win/loss record with past campaigns. Analyze the role they had and the decisions they made to better understand what part they played in that campaign's success or failure.

- **Policy alignment**

  Your prospects may have an impressive history, but do they truly believe in the policy goals you're hoping to achieve? In many ways, your staff will be "selling" your campaign. Do you want them to believe in what they're selling to donors or voters?

- **Relationships with the political landscape, not with you**

  Many candidates fall into the trap of hiring past coworkers, friends or family members. Good staff bring more than just their work ethic, but they can also bring winning strategies, useful connections and important donor or press contacts with them. Sometimes thinking outside of the box, or outside of your immediate political community, can help you find a staffer with new ideas that will give your campaign a leg up on the competition.

- **Hire what you can afford with expected donor revenue**

  Campaign staff will be a recurring expense and cutting staff due to poor financials is usually a calling card for a declining campaign.

CAMPAIGN FOUNDATION

Depending on the size of your campaign budget resources, these are the potential roles that you will need to fill on your campaign:

JOB TITLE	ROLE DESCRIPTION
Campaign Manager	Oversees the day-to-day operation of the campaign and manages staff, strategy, and execution.
Finance Director	Plans and executes the fundraising program, manages donor relationships, and ensures campaign finance compliance.
Field Director	Builds and manages the voter contact program, including volunteers, canvassing, and GOTV efforts.
Call Time Manager	Schedules and manages candidate call time, tracks fundraising goals, and prepares donor outreach materials.
Field Organizers	Recruit volunteers, organize canvasses, and engage voters directly in the community.

IMPORTANT DATES

As I'm sure you can imagine, there are a handful of dates that are critical for your campaign to have on its calendar throughout the cycle. Obviously you should have both election days (primary and general) in big red bold letters and circled multiple times, but you should also make note of when early voting starts in your district, when the deadlines are to file your Statement of Organization (SOO) or to file your campaign finance reports. It also may be helpful to note the last days to register to vote or to request a mail ballot, as these things could help with some of your campaign strategy.

These dates are never consistent throughout the years, but they sure do look similar.

You can find the current cycle deadlines below.

Click Here for Electoral Deadlines

Click Here for Campaign Finance Deadlines

ACTBLUE

ActBlue is the main vehicle you will use to collect credit card contributions from donors. It is an easy-to-use interface with helpful integrations and responsive customer service. ActBlue charges campaigns a standard 4% transaction fee and sends checks (direct deposit available upon reaching a donation threshold) every two weeks.

Sign up for ActBlue here

Information you will need:

- Name of the committee (ex. Friends of Barack Obama)
- Election date
- Official mailing address (this is where the checks are sent)

While not required to set up the account, it is helpful to have the following information:

- Federal election: FED ID number
- State/local election: Campaign finance ID

NGP

NGP is the system where you will track your donors, supporters, and volunteers, as well as record contributions that you can run as reports to submit to COMET. Think of NGP as your campaign CRM (customer relationship management) database. Critically, you can sync NGP to ActBlue so that when someone donates, this information can automatically transfer.

Sign up for NGP here

- NGP is as powerful as it is confusing, so hiring staff with experience in NGP is crucial. This software will determine which doors you knock on, which voters you're calling and which mailboxes will receive your campaign literature.
- Signing up for NGP is annoying as you have to request it through scheduling a demo (you can skip the demo part if you want).
- As NGP can be expensive, it is recommended that you purchase the system only during your election year as that is when you will actually need it to target voters. If in a primary election, you should consider purchasing at the beginning of the year; if you only have a general election, you can get it in the early summer. You will only really need it when you build out a field program and start talking to voters.

CHECK TRACKER

It is highly recommended to create and keep a record of all checks with a check tracker spreadsheet. The value in this lies in having a record of which checks were deposited as a batch. When you make a deposit at the bank with multiple checks, your online record will not show which checks were deposited but only the total amount. When needing to conduct a future reconciliation, having this information will be critical when trying to match checks back up to deposits.

Click here to find check tracker template

ROLODEX CONTACTS

For first time candidates, rolodexing your contacts entails tapping your personal network of family, friends, colleagues, and connections to help get early seed money in the door. There is an article by Medium that does a great job at explaining the steps and network circles.

Read the article here

Be sure to upload your rolodexed list with contact info into NGP once it's built out.

ENDORSEMENTS/OUTREACH LIST

Building support in your district and community will be crucial to your success. As such, it's important to start reaching out and meeting with various elected officials, community leaders, local organizations, homeowners associations, and other interested parties. Ideally, these folks will endorse and support you down the road so it's important to get on their radar now.

The first step is building a list of all the individuals and groups. Create a spreadsheet and start researching the following entities in your district:

- Current elected officials in your district (Senator, Delegate, County Supervisor, Mayor, City Council, School Board, Soil and Water Board, etc.) These will ideally be people who have advocated for policies or taken positions that you agree with. If they also occupy positions of leadership within their party or elected body, even better.
- Neighborhood groups (ex. Southside Neighborhood Association, League of Women Voters of Richmond Metro, etc.)
- Political committees (ex. Local, county and state parties)
- Unions and Labor Organizations
- Non-profits with political aims (HomeAgain Richmond, RVA Community Fridges, etc.)
- Places of worship
- Homeowners associations

Many groups and organizations have regularly scheduled monthly meetings. It can be helpful to reach out in advance to the leader and introduce yourself and inform them you'll be attending the next meeting; oftentimes, local neighborhood groups will even give you a few minutes to speak and share that you are running to represent them. Should you get an opportunity to speak, be sure to prepare in advance what you're going to say and be ready for any questions about your campaign or hot button issues. However, when attending these meetings, many members will be eager to tell you about the issues important to them and to their organization. These meetings are a great opportunity not just to inform them of your policy platform, but to allow them to inform you of the most prescient issues on the ground of your district.

It's important to build relationships, so if there are any groups that are large or influential, reach out to the main point of contact and ask about setting up a "get to know you" meeting to build rapport.

Use your judgment, but if you believe you have established a good relationship with any individuals, inquire to see if they would publicly endorse you. Having local community leaders as validators can be impactful for your campaign.

VENDORS AND CONSULTANTS

Your campaign will likely need the services of all sorts of different vendors to be successful. Between mail, graphic and web design, ad placement, polling or any other campaign related services, there will be a plethora of different vendors to consider for your campaign. These vendors are often referred to as consultants, and most are experts in their campaign niche. They will be invaluable for their knowledge and guidance on the best design for your mailer, the layout of your website, or TV channel to air your shiny new ad.

If you're in a competitive district, the party will likely either communicate with these vendors for you, or refer a specific set of consultants that they expect you to work with. If you need recommendations or further assistance on finding the best vendors for your campaign, we are more than happy to be a resource.

FILING FINANCE REPORTS THROUGH COMET ACCOUNT

COMET is operated by the Virginia Department of Elections and it is the system in which you (or your treasurer) will be submitting your statement of organization and campaign finance reports.

By the online submission of your Statement of Organization, you have created a COMET account. Once your Statement of Organization is approved by the Department of Elections, you will be granted access to the financial reporting system of COMET for your specific campaign. It is recommended that once access is granted, you can create separate user profiles for other members of your team, if necessary.

The State has created a handy and well laid out manual for COMET, which details how to add users, submit reports, and so forth.

How-To User Manual for COMET

TIDY SOCIAL MEDIA

Before launching your campaign, it is highly recommended you review all your social media accounts from the beginning of time. Delete any posts, shares, photos, or articles that could be even remotely considered offensive or used against you by an opponent (whether that be in a Primary or General Election). Many candidates have been derailed due to years- or even decades-old postings coming back to haunt them.

If you are in a competitive election, odds are high that your opponent will hire an opposition research firm to scour your online presence to look for this type of material. Removing it now before it becomes an issue keeps the focus on the positive aspects of your campaign. In fact, if your campaign can afford to, it is recommended that you hire an opposition research firm to look into your own campaign. They may be able to find things you have long since forgotten or failed to consider, and could allow you to inoculate yourself against any related attacks. In addition to reviewing your accounts, it is recommended you change your privacy settings to the most secure setting.

REGISTER DOMAINS

You will need a domain for your website and campaign email. GoDaddy and SquareSpace are generally one the easiest sites to search and register domains. Below are best practices when securing a domain:

Where possible, choose something short and simple as you're going to be printing this on materials and it will be used as your email address:

- **Bad:** www.johnsmithforhouseofdelegates25.com
- **Better:** www.smithforhod25.com
- **Best:** www.smithforva.com
- **Best:** www.johnsmith.com

Register all the variations of your name and district so that your opponents can't. If you end up in a contentious race, your opponents could go negative and create a hit site against you; don't make it easy for them by leaving a prime domain available.

It's generally recommended to use broad terms instead of the specific seat because you may run for higher office one day or the seat number may change or a multitude of other scenarios; it's better to create something now that will work forever instead of just one campaign.

It's generally best practice for all photos on your website to be easily downloadable so that supportive PACs and endorsing organizations have easy access to the photos you would most like them to use in their communications.

HEADSHOTS AND PHOTOS

You will need professional, quality photos for your website and campaign roll out. While many folks think they are skilled amateur photographers, often they are not. This is an area that you want to have top notch assets as for many folks this will be the first impression of you. A grainy, out of focus photo from a weird angle will not do you any favors. Contact the Clean Virginia team about photographer resources and recommendations that may be available.

If you have recently had professional family photos or headshots taken, these can be considered but will not entail everything you need. It is critical that you get shots of you in the community or doing everyday things to personalize you and convey warmth. Examples include: walking down the street, talking to neighbors, chatting with friends in a group, dropping into the local coffee shop, visiting a business, etc.

DEVELOP POLICY PLATFORM

What issues are you fighting for? What does your community care about? These are things you will need to formulate and articulate for your website and other campaign materials. Remember those conversations you had at the monthly meetings of local organizations? Now would be a good time to consider the issues that were brought to your attention.

The most obvious ones are generally affordability, healthcare, education, jobs and economy, social justice, environment, women's rights, public safety, and housing. This list is by no means exhaustive but a helpful starting point. When developing your issues in the beginning, broad is better. Ideally, you want 2-3 sentences tops for each subject. For example, instead of getting into the weeds about healthcare policy, keep it high level that you believe everyone deserves access to affordable and quality healthcare.

If you would like to get into more granular detail regarding your policy, it is generally best to link the detailed policy proposals within the 2-3 sentence top lines on your website. That way they can be accessible for people who are looking for the information but won't confuse voters who just want to know what general issues you're fighting for. A competent web designer will be able to guide you on the best layout to make this presentable.

LAUNCH WEBSITE

No campaign is complete without a website where residents can donate, sign up to volunteer, learn about your policies, or find out how to get involved. There are many vendors out there that can assist with creating a functional yet impressive website. Contact the Clean Virginia team about website resources and recommendations that may be available.

PRESS RELEASE

You'll want to let the media know about your campaign and the best way to do so is by issuing a press release.

But who to send to? You'll need to build a press list containing all the emails of local and state reporters. The easiest way to do this is go to the various news sites in your locality and find the reporters that have the political beat. Maybe a staffer you've hired brought a good press list with them, or, if you have good relationships with other candidates or elected officials in your area, they may be willing to share their already curated press lists with your campaign. It's always good to ask. If you need help drafting a press release or creating a press list, contact the Clean Virginia team about helping with the draft and other communications resources.

ROLL OUT ENDORSEMENTS

If you were able to secure any local elected officials or community leader endorsements, highlight these individuals in your roll out. Ask them to post on social media and share why they are supporting you. Include them on your website as well.

Some campaigns like to announce all of their endorsements in one big burst so they can make the loudest splash possible when announcing their candidacy. Others prefer to post them one by one over a longer period of time, ensuring that their name and campaign stays at the top of local political discussion. Your campaign manager will advise on what works best for your campaign.

ANNOUNCE FUNDRAISING FIGURES

For better or worse, campaign fundraising figures are the best "scoreboard" that outside observers have to analyze a race before any polling is conducted. Generally, candidates who outraise their opponents in competitive Virginia districts win roughly 80%-90% of the time. If you were able to raise a decent amount of money prior to your launch, or in the days afterwards, it behooves you to share that your campaign has taken an early "lead" in the election.

The best way to go about this is by issuing another press release along the lines of "John Smith Raises $15,000 on First Day of Campaign Launch" or "Smith for HOD 25 Raises $15,000 within First Week of Campaign Launch." The goal is to show you have momentum and support.

The items listed below are required but not available to be filed until the January of the election year. Note: Traditionally, the first candidate to submit qualifying documents to the county chair is awarded first position on the ballot, although this varies by year and county.

PETITION OF QUALIFIED VOTERS

To appear on the ballot, all candidates must submit a specific number of valid signatures from "qualified voters." It is a best practice to gather at least 300% of the required number for your race. This step is extremely important; numerous candidates have had to end their campaigns early due to unintended errors or the misfiling of these forms. Consult the Department of Elections and your campaign lawyer to ensure these documents are completed and submitted without error.

STATEMENT OF INTEREST

If you are a current elected official or have run for an elected office previously, make sure you are using the correct version of this form, as they vary based on office type. Current office holders need to submit the form that corresponds to the office they are seeking, not the office they currently hold.

DECLARATION OF CANDIDACY FORM (SBE-505)

The District Chair must receive this form by the deadline (March for the Primary and June for the General in the election year). A postmark or other mailing service timestamp does not qualify.

CERTIFICATE OF CANDIDATE QUALIFICATION (SBE-501)

This is specifically the form to run for a position on the General Assembly that certifies you are eligible in the district where you are running for office. It requires you to attest that you are:

- A citizen of the United States
- At least twenty-one years of age or will be on or before the date of the general or special election.
- A resident of the Commonwealth of Virginia for the year immediately preceding the election
- Reside at the address in the district in which you seek office. If you are a current elected official or have run for an elected office previously, make sure you are using the correct version of this form, as they vary based on office type
- Current office holders need to submit the form that corresponds to the office they are seeking, not the office they currently hold

FILING FEE: Candidates for General Assembly will pay 2% of the minimum annual salary for the office.

Submit your payment to the Treasurer or Director of Finance in the locality where you live. Keep a receipt of your payment. Submit the receipt to your district party chair with your Declaration of Candidacy and petition signatures.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Running for office is one of the most challenging and rewarding things you can do. It takes courage to put your name on the ballot, ask your neighbors for their trust, and dedicate yourself to public service. Whether this is your first campaign or your fifth, remember that no successful campaign is built overnight. It is built one conversation, one volunteer, one donor, and one voter at a time.

We hope this guide has helped simplify the campaign process and given you a roadmap for building a strong foundation. While every election is different, the fundamentals remain the same: stay organized, build a great team, raise the resources you need, listen to your community, and remain true to the principles that inspired your campaign.

You decided to run because you believe you can make your community better. Hold onto that motivation throughout your campaign. It will sustain you through the long days, difficult decisions, and inevitable setbacks that come with seeking public office. Leaders who put their communities ahead of powerful special interests can make a lasting difference, and we hope to support you in that effort.

If you have questions at any point during your campaign, don't hesitate to reach out. Whether you need guidance, resources, or simply someone to point you in the right direction, we're here to help.

Thank you for your willingness to serve the Commonwealth. We wish you every success on the campaign trail, and we hope to work alongside you in the months and years ahead.

See you on the campaign trail.

The Clean Virginia Team