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## Running for Office 101

William Sullivan JD

Michigan Dental Association, [bsullivan@michigandental.org](mailto:bsullivan@michigandental.org)

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# RUNNING FOR OFFICE 101



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## Things to think about if you are going to run for office

**THE CAMPAIGN:** First, you must determine the amount of time you will need to campaign based on the number of voter contacts you will need to win. Yes, mail pieces to assist in the optimal amount of contact are important, but nothing can replace the value of your actual one-on-one interactions with voters. During the course of your campaign, you will need to delegate your business obligations to your partners/managers (if you are still working) and delegate some of your family obligations to your spouse to make the equation work.

**SERVING IN OFFICE:** Yes, it is true that the Legislature is only in session for three days a week. However, once you are elected, you will quickly find out that the hours spent in legislative session are only the tip of the iceberg in terms of time commitment. Every day there are various breakfast meetings to attend, after-work receptions, and dinners. It's important to attend these functions to build relationships, make sure your constituents know you are working for/with them, and to hear everyone's concerns and issues. You will, most likely, need to delegate the responsibilities within your practice, giving your partner, associate, or manager more responsibility and authority.



# Setting up your campaign

You must have a very organized and competent person running the day-to-day operations of the campaign, because you, as the candidate, will have to spend all of your time engaging in voter contact and raising money. Your campaign manager needs to be someone hungry for experience.

Developing a campaign plan and sticking to that plan are the two most important aspects to running a successful campaign. A comprehensive campaign plan must include the following:

1. Analysis of the political environment
2. Coalition targeting and the demographics of district
3. Campaign message and issue development
4. Communications/earned media plan
5. Paid media plan (mail, TV, radio, digital)
6. Grassroots plan (door-to-door, signs, parades)
7. Campaign budget
8. Fundraising plan
9. Campaign timeline
10. Staff structure



## Campaign strategy (why you are running)

It's critical that you ask yourself why you are running for office. In the end, at least part of your motivation should be grounded in what you want to do in terms of public policy. In other words, what are a few things you want to accomplish to improve the lives of Michigan residents? You will need to make choices, because you can't do everything for everyone.

# Campaign financing and reporting (how much it is going to cost to run)

In creating a fundraising base, you will have to begin by building your list (your personal contacts, country club, professional organizations, etc.). Candidates must make fundraising calls every day and will need tools to best ensure success with these calls (i.e., effective phone script, research to ask for the proper amount, etc.) Your campaign finance plan needs to include the following:

- Direct mail
- Events
- Major donor solicitation
- Digital
- PAC
- Telemarketing
- Finance committee

In terms of raising money, the following list explains where to find background information regarding your prospects, as well as, various fundraising tactics:

- How to find prospects
  - Secretary of State
  - Federal Elections Commission
  - Open Secrets – a website that allows you to look up campaign contributors on the federal level.
- Tactics
  - Personal solicitations
  - Finance committee
  - Events
  - Direct mail
  - Email

*\*Remember to say Thank You to every donor!*

It's important to work with someone who has had prior campaign finance compliance experience. Depending on what office you are seeking, you may want to go with a professional, but if not, a smart and meticulous volunteer will work. This person will need to be knowledgeable regarding complying with state law from the importance of details regarding reporting to how to file pre and post primary reports, the significance of filing deadlines, late filing fees, waivers and reviews, contribution limits, which contribution types are prohibited, and which types of expenditures are acceptable for candidate committees. Please note that the candidate should NEVER act in this role.

**Please see the approximate cost per office below:**

- **STATEWIDE CAMPAIGN**  
\$20M to \$40M
- **CONGRESSIONAL CAMPAIGN**  
\$5M to \$10M
- **STATE SENATE CAMPAIGN**  
\$250K to \$1M
- **STATE HOUSE CAMPAIGN**  
\$150K to \$500K

## Campaign messaging

The most important things you as a candidate need to do when going into a presentation/forum are:

- Be prepared: Have your facts and know where you are going in terms of the conversation (think through how your answers are going to sound and rehearse basic answers to expected questions).
- Before the event, think about how you want people to respond and the impression you want to make.
- Know your audience.
- Establish credibility with the audience.
- If it's a difficult audience, acknowledge that first ("I know we may not always agree...").
  - Ask what the audience knows about the issue you think will be a problem (garnering their participation will build cooperation).
  - Pivot back to commonalities when it gets difficult.
  - Realize you're not going to change peoples' minds.
  - Stay rational.

Messaging is often the last thing candidates think about, and it should be the first. Messaging will inform your fundraising plan, website development, how to talk to the media, and how to talk to opponents. It's important to consider the following issues:

- Understanding your audience.
- What's your media audience (tv, radio, weekly papers, etc)?
- What is the political landscape? You're not operating in a vacuum. Follow both the local and national news because you will be asked about it.
- Who else is running? Be aware of what they are doing and saying because you will be asked about it.
- Effectively tell stories about people you have met on the campaign trail. Door-to-door campaigning is a great way to gather stories. Telling these stories gives people something to identify with and is very effective.
- As you develop your message, go out and talk to people and figure out how their stories can fit into your message.

## Crisis management/opposition research

Regarding crisis management, know your home base. When crisis comes, you want to go home. Home is your message.

- When things get thrown at you, go to your home base (i.e., if someone heckles you, or a reporter comes at you, go back to your message)
- Opposition research on yourself is key. It is critical that you are ready for whatever your opponent may throw at you.

Running for office is a big decision, and the MDA would like to help if possible. We hope this booklet has provided you with information that helps you reach a decision. Even if you have already decided to run for office or if you hold public office, please inform the MDA. This way we can work together to help patients and the profession.

Please contact Bill Sullivan, MDA vice president of advocacy and professional relations, if you have any questions or to let the MDA know about your public service. He can be reached at **517-346-9405** or **bsullivan@michigandental.org**.

