



Running an election campaign

2019 Local Government Elections - Fact Sheet 6

This information is designed to assist people who have never campaigned for a local government election before. There are many ways to campaign. This is merely an introduction to the subject.

Tip: You may not need to run a campaign (as there is always a possibility of being elected unopposed) so it may be unwise to spend money before nominations have closed.

Tax deduction for campaign expenses

Under the *Income Tax Assessment Act 1997* (Cth), councillors are entitled to claim the first \$1,000 of their campaign expenses as a tax deduction.

Unsuccessful candidates are also entitled to claim the first \$1,000 of their campaign expenses as a tax deduction.

Preparing for a local government election campaign

To begin organising a campaign, a candidate needs information about the electorate and about whether voting in the election is 'in person' or postal.

Tip: Your formal campaign should begin at least as soon as notice is given to hold the election.

The returning officer (person running the election) can provide details of electors in ward or district boundaries, while the Australian Bureau of Statistics can provide demographic information on the population living in the area. Each candidate, when nominating, will be supplied free of charge with the relevant electoral roll identifying all voters in their electorate.

As a candidate you will want to become familiar with the election processes and with your local government's existing policies, activities and latest initiatives because many questions are likely to be asked about these matters. For example, you could have a look at your local government's strategic plan, policy register, budgets and minute books.

You would have also already completed online training prior to nomination, which provided an outline of the rules of campaigning.

Planning your campaign

It is worth remembering that voting in local government elections is voluntary. Before you can convince people to vote for you, you must first motivate them to vote.

When organising a campaign, three key points need to be remembered:

- Voting is voluntary, and people are more likely to vote if they believe that you can achieve something for the district.
- Local government is locally based and personalised, so a campaign should reflect this.
- You may need assistants.

There are many methods of campaigning, including:

- telephoning people you know;
- distributing leaflets and pamphlets;
- doorknocking;
- contacting local organisations;
- meeting people in public areas like shopping centres;
- preparing articles for local newspapers;
- paying for press advertisements;
- providing a profile of your background to the local paper;
- building a social media presence;
- addressing public meetings; and
- giving interviews to local radio stations.

The methods used, and the type of campaign you choose to run, will depend on several factors, including:

- the likely strengths of opponents;
- the most effective media for reaching voters in the district;
- time availability;

- the number of assistants who can be organised;
- the size of the district to be covered;
- the funds available for the campaign;
- the type of election (voting 'in person' or postal); and
- the structure of your local government, i.e. is it divided into wards or do elections cover the whole district?

Campaigning techniques

Doorknocking

Apart from nominating, doorknocking is usually the most important pre-election task for a candidate. Although it may be the most effective form of communicating, it can also be the most frustrating. It is a slow process and you will be lucky to cover 15 houses in an hour and many of these will be unattended.

It can also be disappointing. Many people will show no interest whatsoever, some may be abusive, while others will have little knowledge of anything to do with local government.

Tip: When you find a home unattended do not announce this fact to potential thieves by leaving visiting cards or election material on the door step, tucked into screen doors or under doormats – anywhere visible. Potential voters will not view such actions favourably. If you or your assistants wish to leave any messages or election material, it might be best to place it in the letterbox.

To doorknock effectively, try the following steps:

- Be positive – you are offering to perform a voluntary service for the people of the community.
- Briefly explain the purpose of the call – if the person is busy, ask for a time to call back.
- Be friendly and listen to the issues people want to talk about – do not push ideas on to people.
- Write down details of the person's concerns and reactions to the visit – assistants could phone back supportive electors to remind them to vote for you on election day.
- Limit the time spent at each dwelling or business.
- Be prepared for complaints and be able to suggest ways in which people can pursue them through the current council.

- Explain who can vote and try to speak to everybody in the household who is eligible to vote.
- Finish the conversation by seeking support.
- Leave a handout or a leaflet behind – this will serve as a reminder of the visit.

Tip: Respect the privacy of people who have expressed concerns or ideas to you. Discussing ideas and concerns with other residents can be an effective means of gauging public feeling on important issues. This can be done without revealing the identities of people who have previously commented.

When doorknocking, be cautious about making promises which require the support of others. You can only assure people that you will endeavour to keep issues of concern on the council's agenda. Additionally, you should not be afraid of saying that you do not have an answer to a question. In such situations, you should subsequently research the issue and provide the elector with any information requested as soon as possible.

You are unlikely to be able to visit all the houses in your electoral area. You might target suburbs or groups within the community which are most likely to support you. You may also consider using assistants to cover suburbs which you cannot. However, they need to be well informed and briefed on your views as they are speaking on your behalf.

Many people are suspicious of strangers and will not unlock security screen doors to speak to you. Respect their right to that security and ensure that you and your helpers wear prominent identification.

For 'in person' elections, you may wish to offer transporting electors to the polling place, particularly if the voters are aged or infirm.

Printed election material

In addition to the candidate profile, it is common for candidates to distribute other forms of election material to inform voters they are running for council. This material can take the form of pamphlets, posters, 'how to vote' cards and letters. Campaign material needs to be authorised for use in an election campaign. To appropriately authorise campaign material, you must include the name and street address (not a post office box) of the person who authorised the material to be printed. Usually, though not always, that will be you. You also need to include the name and business address of the printer (this includes someone who photocopies election material for you).

There are offences associated with the printing and publication of defamatory or unauthorised electoral material.

Tip: Although the candidate profile must be printed in English for nomination, there is nothing to prevent you from producing additional promotional material in other languages if you believe it would be beneficial.

Any printed material should contain a wide variety of information in a concise and readable form. This must include your name and could include some personal details such as your occupation and involvement with community groups; issues of concern and suggested ways to address these. It may also be useful to include your photograph on the printed material. You should note that, before having any documents printed, it is advisable to ask a friend or supporter to read and check the information for clarity.

Ideally, every household in your electorate should receive a leaflet. If your ward or district has many absentee property owners, you may wish to send pamphlets to them along with instructions for postal and absent voting.

Distributing these leaflets can be time consuming and you should try to get supporters to deliver the leaflets where possible. Your time will be better spent in personal contact with electors. Advise your helpers to respect the 'No Junk Mail' signs on letterboxes.

If your budget allows, you may wish to use a professional distribution company to deliver your leaflets.

Personally addressed letters, either from yourself or other people in the local community can also be an effective way to gain support for your campaign. However, before deciding on whether you will use somebody else to send a letter on your behalf, you will need to seriously consider whether it will be of benefit to you.

Posters are also a useful way to publicise that you are standing for council. In general, posters are only allowed to be placed on private property. However, if you are in any doubt, check with your council before affixing any signs.

Newspaper advertisements are commonly used by candidates. Advertisements must be authorised. However, the name and business address of the printer of the newspaper should be on the newspaper, so it does not need to appear in the advertisement.

Important to note: If a person photocopies a printed advertisement, this person is "printing" and is required to put his or her name and address on the photocopy.

Names and addresses of authorising people and printers do not have to appear on car stickers, clothing, lapel badges, pens, pencils, balloons and other similar promotional material.

Social media

Social media has revolutionised the way people communicate and interact with each other. For candidates, it can be a powerful tool for communicating ideas and policy platforms directly with the community.

However, care (and common sense) should be exercised when posting material on Facebook and other social media platforms. The *Local Government Act 1995*, *Local Government (Elections) Regulations 1997*, and *Defamation Act 2005* apply in the virtual world of social media, just as they do in real life.

The nature of social media commentary and the widespread availability of these platforms is accessible to anyone. That means your detractors in the community as well as supporters. Consequently, there are inherent risks for candidates who feel the need to 'speak their mind' on social media, in response to an inflammatory or critical comment from a member of the public or political opponent. A retaliatory post written on Facebook in the heat of the moment about a contentious issue, could end up being shared with an audience of hundreds or even thousands.

Tip: The test is whether you would feel comfortable saying something on social media that could still be said in a public forum, or on the front page of a newspaper. Does it add any value to your public role? Would you appreciate someone else using the same language about you? Always be courteous and respectful of current council members, local government staff, members of the public and other candidates – even if they have opposing views. Consider the best approach to get your message across.

Important to note: According to best practice, if social media is used to create election material, the name and address of the authorising person should appear. However, it is not necessary to include the name and address of the "printer".

But if a person downloads and prints your election material with the intent of distributing it, then the name and business address of the "printer" (e.g. Facebook) should also be included.

Where can I get more information?

For more information visit the Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries website at: www.dlgsc.wa.gov.au or contact your local government.

This publication was prepared by:

Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries

Gordon Stephenson House, 140 William Street, PERTH WA 6000

GPO Box 8349 Perth Business Centre WA 6849

Telephone: (08) 6551 8700

Freecall (Country Only): 1800 620 511

Email: info@dlgsc.wa.gov.au

Web: www.dlgsc.wa.gov.au

Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS) – Telephone: 13 14 50

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