

WIN THE RIGHT WAY

WIN THE RIGHT WAY
How to Run Effective
Local Campaigns in California

Christine Trost and Matt Grossmann, editors

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The Institute for Local Self Government (www.ilsg.org) is the non-profit research arm of the League of California Cities. Its mission is to serve as a forward-thinking source of research and information for California's local officials. A key focus of the Institute's efforts is promoting public confidence in local government and those who serve in local government.

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Preface

Majorities of Americans believe that “negative, attack-oriented campaigning is undermining and damaging our democracy” (82%), that “there is too much money spent on today’s campaigns” (86%), that unethical practices in campaigns occur “very” or “fairly” often (58%), and that “in terms of ethics and values, election campaigns in this country have gotten worse in the last 20 years” (53%).¹

In an effort to improve the state of campaigns in the United States, The Pew Charitable Trusts awarded the Center for Campaign Leadership at the University of California’s Institute of Governmental Studies a generous grant to study elite and public opinion about political campaign practices; identify strategies and tactics aimed at encouraging voter participation in campaigns and elections without creating a competitive disadvantage for the candidate; and develop a series of campaign training seminars that teach these “best practices” to candidates and aspiring political consultants.

From March 2002 through October 2003 the Center for Campaign Leadership offered campaign training seminars in different regions of the country to young professionals who were planning to run for office or interested in pursuing a career in campaign politics. The training consisted of four sessions dedicated to the key elements of a winning campaign—message development, message delivery, campaign fundraising, and grassroots mobilization—and panels on ethical and effective campaign practices, media coverage of political campaigns, and the profession of political consulting.

This book seeks to capture and convey the lessons of the research and training that we have conducted over the past three years and share these with a wider audience.

The research presented in this book is based upon findings drawn from a telephone survey of 2000 adult California residents and a series of

¹ These figures come from a November 1999 survey conducted by Lake Snell Perry & Associates for The Pew Charitable Trusts and the Institute for Global Ethics, and from a September 2000 survey conducted by Yankelovich Partners, Inc. for the Center for Congressional and Presidential Studies at American University.

focus groups. In the fall of 2002, we worked with the Public Policy Institute of California to design a survey that would assess voters' attitudes about political campaigns in general and, more specifically, towards best practices in campaigns. The survey was conducted in the final eight days leading up to the 2002 gubernatorial election (October 28–November 4) and included interviews in both Spanish and English.

We also designed and conducted six focus groups in three different regions of the state (Walnut Creek, Fresno, and Los Angeles). Each two-hour focus group session had nine to thirteen participants who were diverse with respect to education, income, ethnicity, and party identification. The purpose of the focus groups was twofold: to aid in the design of the statewide survey of California residents, and to provide a closer look at both the range of opinions and beliefs surrounding political campaigns in the United States and California and the processes of evaluation, judgment, and attitude formation that contribute to shaping these opinions and beliefs.

Many hands have contributed to the ideas and advice included in this book, and we wish to acknowledge all of them, beginning with The Pew Charitable Trusts; without its financial support, this book would not have been possible.

We extend our thanks to Dan Schnur, who authored the grant proposal, provided valuable guidance in the development of the statewide survey, led the training seminars, and is codirector of the Center for Campaign Leadership; to Darry Sragow, who was a regular speaker at our training seminars and is codirector of the Center for Campaign Leadership; and to Bruce E. Cain, Robson Professor of Political Science and director of the Institute of Governmental Studies at UC Berkeley, who also served as the principal investigator of the research project. We thank JoAnne Speers, executive director of the Institute for Local Self Government, who is our partner in the publication and distribution of this book and author of "Campaigning Effectively for Local Office: Good People Can Finish First," which we relied on heavily when writing portions of the book. Any success that we may claim in capturing the fruits of our research and the lessons of our training in the pages of this book is due to the leadership and insight that these individuals provided.

Although this guide provides an overview of the relevant law, it is not intended to be legal advice, and it cannot substitute for legal counsel. Also, this guide describes various campaign and election laws, but for

brevity's sake, it is not comprehensive and it does not cover every detail and nuance. In short, it should be used as a guide only.

Much of the advice included in this book is drawn from presentations made at the training seminars. We thank the dozens of political consultants who generously shared their time and expertise with our students. We also thank Julia Mitchell and Suneeti Shah, who helped recruit our speakers and students, coordinated the training seminars, and, along with Marc Levin, assistant director of the Institute of Governmental Studies, oversaw the smooth operation of the administrative aspects of the program.

We are especially grateful to Joanne Davis, Mitchell Englander, Jarryd Gonzales, Mary Hughes, Michelle Maravich, Phil Paule, Dan Schnur, Bob Wickers, and Jonathan Wilcox, who, in addition to serving as speakers at our training seminars, wrote essays for this book. JoAnne Speers, Mary Hughes, Dan Schnur, and Bob Wickers also reviewed chapters of the book and provided helpful suggestions for improvements.

We thank Polly Armstrong, Katie Burke, Valerie Hyman and Shaun R. Lumachi for their essays, which add to this book the perspectives of other actors who are involved in political campaigns (candidates, volunteers, donors, and journalists). We are especially grateful to Karen Getman for writing Chapter 8 on the legalities of running for office, and to James Harrison, of Remcho, Johansen & Purcell, for reviewing the entire manuscript to ensure its legal accuracy. We also thank Jerry Lubenow and Maria Wolf, who prepared the book for publication, and Eden James, who proofread the manuscript on a moment's notice.

Finally, Keena Lipsitz and John Sides were vital members of the research team. Together we designed and analyzed the statewide survey of 2000 California residents and designed and conducted the focus groups of California voters. We feel fortunate to have worked with such gifted scholars, and we share equal credit with them for the research findings presented in this book. We also thank Mark Baldassare, Jon Cohen, Lisa Cole, and Dorie Appollonio of the Public Policy Institute of California, who helped design the statewide survey and were responsible for its implementation. Jon Cohen and Lisa Cole also helped conduct several of the focus groups.

Christine Trost
Matt Grossmann

Introduction and Overview

- 2 What is an ethical campaign?
- 3 Why should candidates be concerned with ethics?
- 4 Thinking about the long-term consequences.
- 4 Organization of this guide and chapter summaries.
- 6 The special features of this guide.

Conventional wisdom suggests that candidates for local office must sacrifice their principles to win elections. The only way to win, the story goes, is to skirt the issues and concentrate instead on delivering the lowest blows to your opponents. This perception of what it takes to win turns potential candidates away from running for office and turns potential voters away from the polls. Fortunately, unethical campaign practices do not guarantee victory. Instead, they breed dissatisfied voters and disreputable candidates.

Winning candidates combine ethical campaign practices with effective planning, skillful organizing, and a clear message. They learn about the concerns of their community, the nuts and bolts of organizing, and the intricate rules of financing. They know that campaigning is not easy and they work hard to demonstrate their skills and deliver their message to voters. In doing so, they prove that there is no substitute for careful consideration of local issues, patient coalition building, and painstaking efforts to mobilize supporters.

This book gives you the tools you need to build an effective campaign—without forsaking your values and principles. It is based on new research conducted by both the Center for Campaign Leadership at the University of California, Berkeley, and the Institute for Global Ethics on the concerns of voters. The research shows that voters yearn for candidates who campaign truthfully and fairly, as well as candidates who eschew the dishonest attack-style campaigning that sometimes can seem too prevalent in elections today. The guide also includes advice from leading professionals in every field of campaign strategy and observations from those with experience on local campaigns. Rather than perpetuate the conventional wisdom that negative campaigning is the way to win, this guide shows you how to win *the right way* by adopting tested strategies that allow you to run for office with your principles intact.

What Is an Ethical Campaign?

There are several important elements of an ethical and effective campaign. As a candidate you should ask voters to support you based on your plans to address the issues facing your community. You should treat your fellow candidates with fairness and respect, and avoid personal attacks

or mischaracterizations of their positions. Being honest about your views and the kinds of decisions you will make when in office will help, rather than hurt, your chances of election. Using campaign methods that meaningfully engage the public in debate about local policy issues will appeal to voters, encourage them to participate, and help restore their faith in our elections and government.

Ethical campaigning includes more than candidate conduct, however. Unethical campaign strategies can arise from third party mailings and whispering campaigns. Ethical campaigners disavow these inappropriate messages, surround themselves with individuals who do the same, and are vigorous about setting an example for proper behavior on the campaign trail.

Half of the battle is won by creating an environment in which ethical campaigning is expected. You can do this by making your expectations known to your supporters, the media, and your fellow candidates. Set up a series of candidate forums that set the tone for an ethical campaign and encourage follow-up conversations with the media about whether the candidates did indeed walk the talk. Encourage local organizations and voters to hold candidates accountable for abiding by their commitment to conduct ethical campaigns.

Why Should Candidates Be Concerned with Ethics?

There are several reasons candidates should adopt ethical campaign strategies. First, ethical campaign practices can help candidates win elections. It is not necessary to choose between winning and waging an ethical campaign. Professionals have developed a series of best practices for campaigns (presented throughout this guide) that are both ethical and effective. Second, studies show that unethical campaign techniques run a significant risk of backfiring against the candidate who uses them. Even when some unethical tactics may seem to provide political advantage, these unsavory strategies also have the potential to backfire more than others. Third, in most elections voters have little information about the candidates' qualifications or issue stances. The way candidates campaign can send an important signal about how they will govern, which voters can refer to when casting their vote.

Thinking about the Long-Term Consequences of Campaign Strategies

When considering which campaign strategies to adopt, candidates are wise to think about their campaign within the context of their broader political goals. First, political reputations are built over time. Many successful political leaders, including the last three presidents, lose the first time they run for office. It may take longer than one campaign for voters to get to know you. The reputation that you develop, as a good campaigner or as a nasty one, will stick with you—and reputation is everything in local politics. Even if you win, the reputation that you developed in your last campaign can affect how voters perceive you in your next race.

Second, ethical campaigning protects your ability to govern successfully. When you get into office, it is likely that you will need more than your supporters to enact the policies you favor. If you develop a reputation as an ethical politician, even among your political opponents, you will be better prepared to build coalitions in office.

Third, ethical campaigning contributes to increasing voter participation and support for government. Messages that denigrate government and those who serve in government reinforce negative public perceptions about government—perceptions that do not disappear once a candidate leaves the campaign trail and enters public office. Conversely, campaign strategies that engage the public in meaningful debate and dialogue about community issues can help to create more informed citizens and restore the public's trust in democratic government.

Organization of This Guide and Chapter Summaries

This guide contains information on all of the major aspects of running a successful campaign. Here is a chapter-by-chapter breakdown of its contents:

Chapter 1: Before the Campaign

Your campaign should not be the start of your political involvement in the local community. Before you run, learn more about the issues and concerns of your community, the demands of the office that you are in-

terested in seeking, and what it will take to wage a successful campaign. This chapter shows you how.

Chapter 2: Planning Your Campaign

Successful campaigns are well planned from the beginning. Rather than make important decisions as they arise in the campaign, you will need to build a winning strategy and then devote your energies to implementing it. This chapter provides instruction on how to develop your plan of action.

Chapter 3: Building Your Campaign Organization

A candidate cannot win without the help of others. This chapter shows you how to build a solid campaign organization. It covers identifying and recruiting volunteers, hiring paid staff, and building coalitions with other organizations.

Chapter 4: Developing Your Message

Candidates must give voters a reason to vote for them. This chapter explains the components of a winning campaign message. It shows you how to formalize your rationale, develop a convincing theme, and incorporate your issue positions into a message that differentiates your candidacy from others.

Chapter 5: Funding Your Campaign

Running for office requires resources. This chapter tells you what you need to know about developing a fundraising plan, identifying donors, and asking for money. It outlines basic steps involved in raising money for political campaigns and provides practical suggestions for getting your fundraising off the ground.

Chapter 6: Delivering Your Message

Voters will not be persuaded by a message that they never hear. To inform voters and convince them that you should be elected, you will need to use a variety of free and paid media. This chapter outlines the most effective ways to get your message out, including how to speak to the media, how to use advertising and direct mail effectively, and how to set up live opportunities to talk to groups of voters.

Chapter 7: Contacting and Mobilizing Voters

Successful candidates for local office must make direct contact with voters. This chapter shows you how to identify your target populations, contact them by phone and door-to-door canvassing, and develop a get-out-the-vote plan that will get your voters to the polls on Election Day.

Chapter 8: Complying with the Law

Winning elections requires that you avoid illegalities that can sink your campaign. Campaign laws have a number of traps for the unwary and, as a candidate, you will need to learn how to avoid them. This chapter, written by Karen Getman, of counsel to Remcho, Johansen & Purcell and former Chairman of California's Fair Political Practices Commission, shows you how.

Chapter 9: Conclusion—Winning the Right Way

This chapter provides key points for you to review before you start and offers some final thoughts on the challenges and rewards of taking the “high road” to public office.

The Special Features of this Guide

What makes this guide unique is the combination of academic research on what voters want, advice from leading campaign consultants, and descriptions of field-tested strategies from those who have experienced local campaigns. You can expect to see these special features throughout the guide:

Advice from Professionals

We have solicited advice on a range of topics from a distinguished group of California-based professional campaign consultants. Our contributors are respected strategists who help candidates win elections at all levels of government across the state and nation. In their essays, they offer insights gleaned from years of experience working on campaigns, giving readers the benefit of professional advice without paying thousands of dollars in consulting fees.

Advice from the Front Lines

In these sections, you can read about what campaigns are like from those who have spent time on the “front lines.” A candidate talks about what it takes to win a local election, a reporter offers tips on how to prepare for interviews with local media, a volunteer describes her reasons for joining a campaign, and a first-time donor explains what motivated him to give to a local candidate.

What Do Voters Want?

This feature highlights what voters want from political candidates and campaigns. It summarizes the results of our statewide survey of 2,000 California residents and in-person focus groups with California voters, in addition to other surveys of voters. We translate the results, giving you recommendations for how to run an effective campaign that will respond to the concerns of voters.

Best Practices and Bright Ideas

In addition to a broad overview of campaigns, we have included specific suggestions for ethical and effective campaign practices in the form of “Best Practices.” We also share some specific “Bright Ideas” for implementing the strategies we recommend.

Learn More on the Web

We could not fit all the information that you might need in this book. Throughout the guide, we point you to our Web site (campaigns.berkeley.edu) for more in-depth information, including worksheets, links to important Web sites, campaign calendars, and tips for following the specific laws that apply to campaigns in your area.

Resources for Further Reading

The goal of this guide is to provide candidates for local office with an overview of the elements of a campaign, rather than a complete step-by-step campaign plan. For some campaigns, candidates will want more detail on one or more of these topics. We include “Resources for Further Reading” at the end of the guide to meet this need.

In 1975, California's Institute for Local Self Government published a manual on running for local office: The then-executive director of the Institute observed:

More importantly, the Institute shares the concern of many Americans over the mounting distrust and disgust with "politicians." We, too, are shaken at the prospect of public disinterest [in politics] because of the failings of a few...Local government is the base upon which this great republic was built and from which it continues to draw its leadership.¹

The need for strong local leadership provided by people of integrity and principle is no less imperative some thirty years later. This guide is intended to assist you in fulfilling this role. Good luck with your campaign!

¹ Bob Norris and Ken Rowe, *How to Take Over Your Local Government*, (Institute for Local Self Government, 1975), vii-viii.