



Starting an election campaign

A primer for CPAs
interested in running
for political office

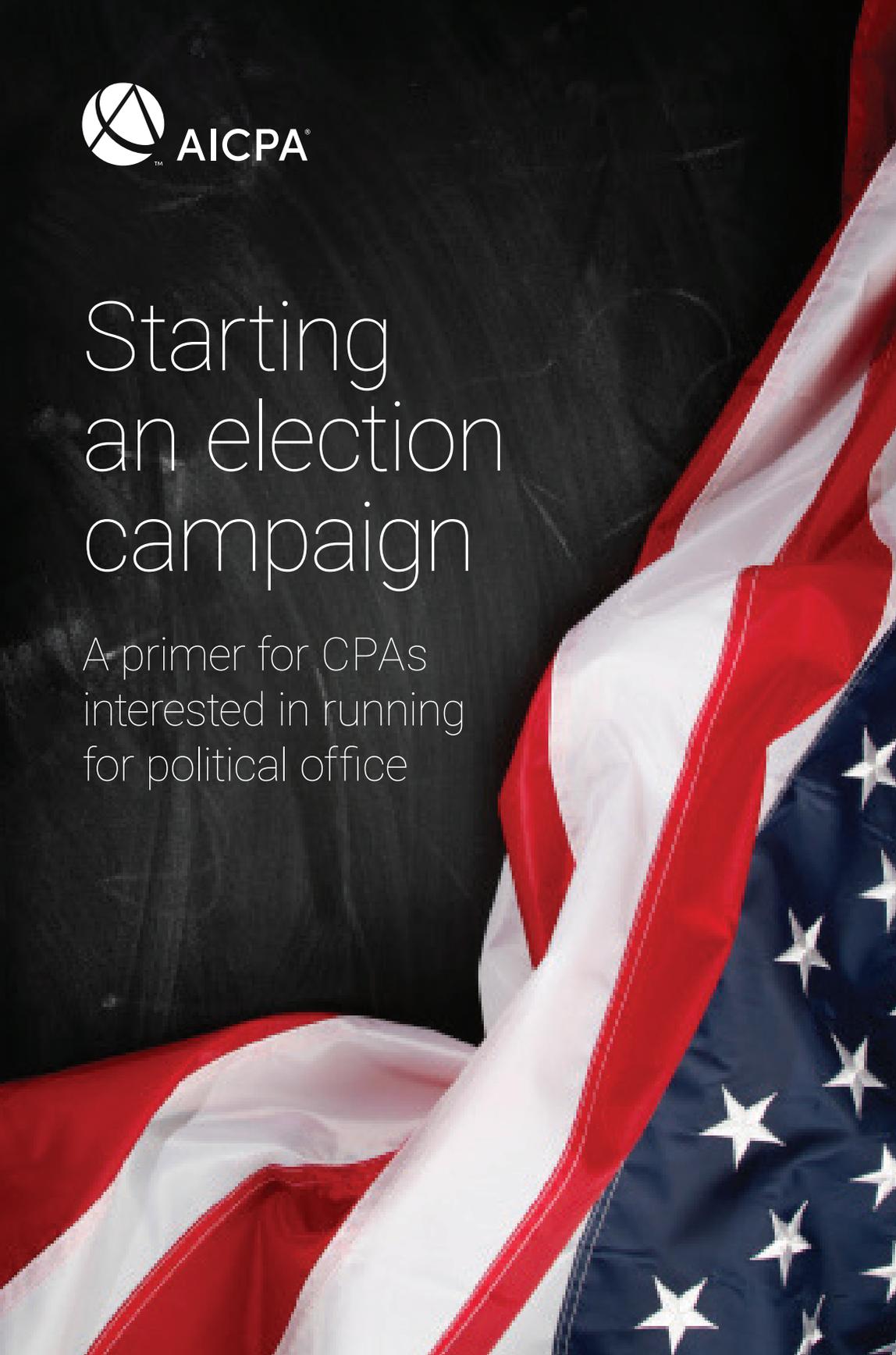


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Why CPAs are prime candidates

CPAs have unique experience and expertise in issues such as taxes, the economy, small businesses, budgeting, financial literacy and the long-term impact of financial decisions. This background uniquely qualifies CPAs to serve as key thought leaders in government, helping draft policies that best reflect the needs of the community and protect the public interest.

CPAs protect the public interest and the public trust.





Making the decision to run

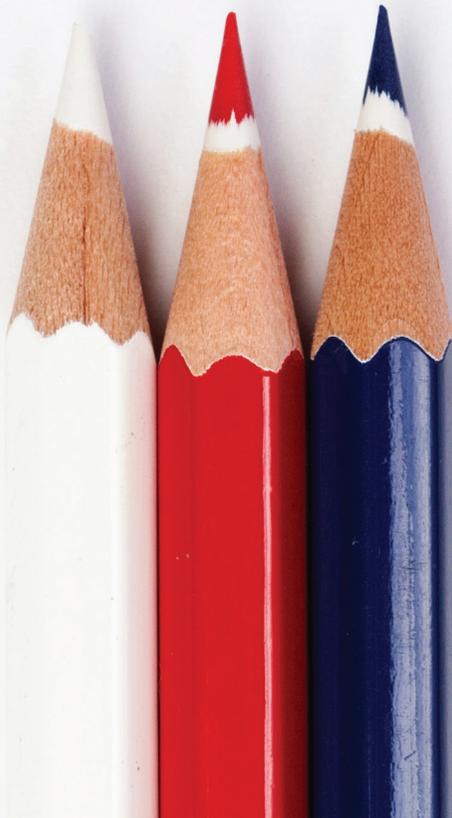
Here are a few important issues a CPA should consider:

- Why do I want to run?** About which issues am I most passionate?
- How will serving in office affect my career path?** Will I be able to maintain CPE and other requirements while also serving in office?
- How will I balance work, family and other obligations?**
- Does my family support my decision to run?** Will they be okay with being in the spotlight?

Serving as an elected official is one of the most rewarding decisions an individual can make, but CPAs need to ask themselves several questions before making the decision to run.

Compliance laws

Every state and jurisdiction has slightly different election laws, so it is critical that a candidate research laws pertaining to getting on the ballot, gaining petition signatures and reporting campaign income and expenditures. A good campaign manager will know the campaign laws of your state and will help ensure that you meet all reporting requirements, but candidates should also hire a CPA who is experienced in campaign finances. Many CPA candidates might not have expertise in this area, and even the ones who do will most likely not have the time to be a full-time CPA and a full-time candidate.



Hiring a campaign manager

A campaign manager helps “brand” and “sell” his or her clients to voters. To do this, the campaign manager becomes intimately familiar with the candidate, learning not only about the candidate’s political viewpoints and aspirations, but also about the candidate’s family life, personal history and finances. As such, a candidate’s campaign manager should be someone they can trust completely and with whom they can be completely candid. How does a candidate find someone he or she can trust to always have the candidate’s best interest at heart? CPAs can get recommendations from elected officials, as well as party and community activists whom they admire.

CPAs should interview several campaign managers, talking to them at length to learn as much as possible about the managers’ experience and methods. How does each campaign manager respond to negative press, false accusations made by an opponent, or criticism on the candidate’s social media sites, for example? How does the manager build a budget and develop messaging? While a campaign manager may offer advice that the candidate isn’t expecting, their values should always align. Campaigns can be a very stressful time, and a good campaign manager will serve as both a teammate and a coach, helping the candidate achieve their goals.

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Crafting a campaign plan

Before starting on a campaign plan, a prospective candidate should first spend time developing position statements. While candidates don't need to be an expert on every topic, they should do their research to be familiar with the key issues.

A candidate's goal during his or her campaign is to talk to and gain the support of as many voters as possible. While a candidate should have already developed their list of key issues prior to making the decision to run, now it is time to consider the voter profile for their district. What are the main concerns of district voters? How can a candidate best communicate with those voters? How will the campaign pay for the candidate's outreach? What are the targeted demographics to build a coalition that will get at least 51% of the vote?

While each campaign strategy will be unique to a candidate's district, direct mail is the most targeted, efficient form of communication for most smaller races. For larger districts, the candidate will likely focus more on television and radio communications. For all size races, the candidate should expect to make countless phone calls to raise money and should maintain an active digital presence.

Regardless of which communication tools the candidate uses, he or she must be willing to develop a strong financial plan and fundraise.

Remember, it's always better for a candidate to admit not knowing something than it is to make up policy positions on the spot.

Social media

By following some key rules, candidates can best take advantage of the medium that gives them an instant connection to voters.

- Be active** – Candidates should update voters with information on events, appearances, news articles, endorsements and position statements at least daily.
- Maintain separate personal and campaign accounts** – The candidate’s social pages should be dedicated entirely to their campaign. While personal accounts should remain private, the candidate should acknowledge that information or photos from his or her personal account are likely to appear elsewhere online.
- Reply when necessary** – A candidate should engage voters online by responding to questions and comments on social networks. At the same time, however, a candidate should not feel the need to respond to every negative or “attack” post. Most importantly, all responses should be professional and courteous, regardless of the nature of the original poster’s comments. A candidate should consider hiring an individual to maintain and monitor his or her social media accounts. A specific campaign volunteer could also handle this task.

Social media is an essential part of today’s campaign environment.

Finances

Campaigns can be very expensive, and candidates should expect to spend at least half of their campaign time asking for money. First-time candidates often have a more difficult time finding donations than more established candidates, so candidates should start the fundraising process as early as possible.

Do the research.

- Candidates and their campaign managers should look at the online financial statements of previous campaigns** in the district to determine how much the winning candidate spent. What percentage did that candidate spend on media, direct mailings, etc.? While the CPA candidate doesn't have to match those numbers exactly, knowing the dollar amount will give the candidate a better idea of what the campaign budget should realistically look like.

Find the money.

- Dial for dollars** – Candidates directly call potential donors and ask for contributions.
- Previous donors** – A review of previous campaign finance reports in the district can help the candidate identify potential donors. An experienced campaign manager will do this research for the candidate.
- PACs** – A candidate's largest donations can often come from political action committees that share the candidate's views on key issues.

Spend the money.

- Two of the largest expenses** include media and staff.
- Media** – A candidate's biggest expense often is marketing: television, radio and print advertisements; direct mailings; and signs.
- Staff** – Candidates should invest in quality professionals, including a campaign manager and a finance director, from the outset of their campaign.

Marketing yourself as a CPA candidate

Public opinion of the accounting profession is high. CPAs can tap into this by highlighting their experience:

- Relying on hard data to make sound financial decisions;
- Analyzing complex financial issues and relating that information to people on their level; and
- Understanding the impact of regulations on professions and individual citizens.

CPAs can use this experience and knowledge to help craft strong fiscal legislation, including one of the most important things that any legislative body must write and approve: a budget.

However, CPAs shouldn't assume that other CPAs will automatically support them, nor should they focus exclusively on their fiscal experience. Candidates need to be aware of all the issues affecting their district, and should be prepared to use their problem-solving skills to address each subject matter.

Candidates should be prepared to reveal much about their personal life and financial situation, including employment history, bankruptcies, marriages and divorces and more.

Getting votes

Candidates in an election of any size need to develop a strong base of volunteer supporters to help make phone calls, go door-to-door speaking to potential voters, donate money, hand out information, volunteer to run booths at events, place candidate signs in yards and much more. To identify these key individuals, the candidate should first consider the race. Is the “real” race in the district essentially the primary? Does the candidate have a primary at all? In larger races, the candidate might have to fight through both tough primary and general elections.

In primary races, base voters often are more interested in the candidate’s core ideology than they are with the details of the candidate’s plans. However, a candidate must be careful to set the right tone during the primary so as not to later alienate general election voters. During a general election, the candidate must show not only that they subscribe to a certain set of ideals, but also that they are the most competent and best able to grapple with the specific issues affecting that district. Thus, candidates need to develop a specific plan explaining how they will accomplish their goals.

Finding your base: CPA candidates should ask for the support of their local and state CPA societies, as well as other organizations with which they are already familiar or with which they have a personal interest.



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