

Inventory in Exploring a Run for Office

This is a checklist of things to consider before you decide to run for office. Think of the worst-case scenario for each question as well as how you might mitigate any risks.

What is the worst that can happen if you run for office and are you prepared for the consequences?

What office are you thinking about? Local, state, or federal office. Is it the right time or situation?

Why are you thinking about running for this office? You will be asked to share your “why” throughout your campaign. You need to be able to clearly convey your motivating factor(s) as well as differentiate yourself from your opponents in experience, background, policy ideology or demographic differences.

Do you have the support of your family? Family will have to sacrifice a substantial amount of time with the candidate. There are plenty endorsement and campaign events that last hours upon hours. Ensure you communicate commitments, availability, and obligations.

Are you financially stable? Will your current employer provide flexibility? Will your campaign require all your time? Are you the sole source of income for your family, or can you rely on a partner? If you win, will the position you are seeking pay the bills?

Are you running a primary election or a general election? How far out is the election? Understand the timeline and how long the campaign commitment will be.

Who are your constituents? How partisan is the area to be represented? Are you a Democrat running in a ruby red district or is it a toss-up? Research past races and look at the margins. Be realistic on what it would take to win.

Who are your opponents? Size up your competition: is there an incumbent; are there candidates that have already declared their intentions; are there others who may jump into the race? Do they have name recognition? Do they have political experience? Are they holding another political office? Do they have financial resources to pump into a campaign? What is their political party and ideology? What is their experience and background?

Do you have money to jumpstart the campaign? You will need money to get the campaign off the ground. Set a budget for how much money you are willing to put into your campaign.

How much money needs to be raised? Research the incumbent’s past financial performance or how much campaigns usually raise for this office. Do an inventory of your network and set up a rolodex. Be honest about how much you can raise, and how you will compensate for any deficit.

Are you prepared to take on negative comments and feedback? You will need to use social media and trolls will always attack. Prepare emotionally: You will need to keep your cool—as if there is always a camera or live microphone on you.

Prepare for opposition research and things that will be used against you. Be aware that even the most minimal infraction in your past can and will be used. Think of how it might impact the campaign and your future; be prepared to defend yourself or explain the situation.

Have you talked to someone that has run a campaign? A sherpa is needed to summit Mount Everest. Consult with someone who has had a similar experience.