

RUN FOR SOMETHING

Making an Effective Fundraising Pitch

Thanks to Vicky Elenowitz for her help writing this document.

First Impressions

People make up their minds to engage with you in the first few seconds. Your in-person first impression consists of your clothes and turnout, your body language, and your catchy-but-simple opening statements. When you are running for office, you are always representing yourself as a candidate! This includes the way you behave prior to meeting a donor (whether at their door, an event, or a debate), and however you were connected with that person.

As you engage with people, it's important to manage relationships so that each person you meet feels encouraged to engage with you, but that you still manage your time effectively. Without cutting people off abruptly, being mindful of how much time you dedicate to each individual conversation will allow you to build a personal connection with each potential donor while still allowing you to meet with enough people. It can be helpful to have someone help you with this!

And don't forget to take notes on your conversations! Making your conversations personal and specific will help you build a stronger relationship and will yield more.

Tailor Your Ask to Your Audience

Be clear on what are you trying to get this specific group to do and how will you plan to follow up with them. The way you engage with your local Democratic club will -- and should -- be different than the way you engage with a group of first time voters. The way you engage with a small group of potential donors is different than the way you will talk to a room full of grassroots supporters at a house party or with a former elected official whose endorsement you hope to secure. Role play with people in each category if possible and get feedback.

Knowing your audience is a matter of preparation: do research on your audience before you arrive. That will also be clear on what your ask of the audience is, too. Are you raising money in large amounts, small amounts, or are you asking for votes or for endorsements today?

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Keep it Simple and Use Your Story

People can only remember a handful of items told to them. They remember compelling stories with emotional impact. Be concise and get to the point. Focus your story on how your experiences shaped you and made you the right person to run for *this* office. Just like your ask, your story should be tailored to each audience to whom you're speaking.

It's easy to get lost in policy and statistics, but remember: people don't retain facts and figures as well as they hold onto their emotional responses. Oftentimes, donors are looking for people who inspire them. At the same time, it's important to have concrete information at your disposal as well. You want to ensure that you are well-prepared to answer follow up questions and fully engage with your audience.

Your Weaknesses

None of us are awesome at everything! Make an explicit list of challenges or weaknesses you expect to face and consider your response ahead of time. It's important to be prepared if someone asks you about these areas. Use the donor research you do to decide what, if anything, you might want to address proactively.

Get feedback on your pitch, too. If you know that you tend to make non-specific asks or that you let the conversation get away from you without making a clear ask, practice ahead of time to ensure that you address that issue.

Follow Up Cycle

Your pitch is not worth anything unless you have a clear plan to follow up afterwards and ensure that you actually get each contribution. Track each donor's commitment to your campaign and be meticulous about how and when you will follow up with them to collect their contribution. Don't leave things until the last minute, and don't leave them to chance! Have a clear, explicit plan for follow up.

Important things to consider are how quickly you are following up after making an ask and the means by which you will follow up. Ensure that you are keeping track of any fundraising deadlines. After someone contributes, it is also important to follow up with a prompt thank you.

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Building Blocks to Winning and Building a Team

Donors often want to know where their money will go. How will you show that you have a practical, winning plan? Is their contribution going to help pay for clipboards for your volunteers? Will it help make sure that you can communicate online with voters? Are you trying to open an office? Hiring staff? Be clear and concise about what you need to win, and how each individual's contribution will help you get there.

YOU CAN'T DO THIS ALONE!

Running for office is, at its core, all about asking people for the things that you need. Remember, you cannot do everything yourself. Whether you're hiring staff or using volunteers, lean on the people around you. Ask for what you need, and delegate. Surround yourself with people that are invested in your success and that you trust, and then empower them to help you get it done.