

RUN FOR SOMETHING ACTION FUND

Running for Office in Pennsylvania: First Steps

Run for Something Action Fund State Guides are not meant to be all-encompassing nor covering the full breadth of a campaign's lifespan. Instead, their purpose is to serve as jumping-off points for candidates so that they have an idea of how to begin to proceed at the outset of their political journey. This document is for advisory purposes, does not constitute legal advice, and each candidate should confirm that there have not been changes to election guidance since the date the document was last updated.

Important things to know as a potential candidate in Pennsylvania

Do your homework

Learn the terms

Assemble your team

File your campaign statement

Open a campaign bank account

Connect to your local party

Determine when you need to file additional financial disclosures

Develop a financial record-keeping system

Apply for an employer identification number (EIN)

Hit the ground running

IMPORTANT THINGS TO KNOW AS A POTENTIAL CANDIDATE IN PENNSYLVANIA

- The Pennsylvania state legislature is the General Assembly, composed of the State Senate and State House of Representatives.
- Pennsylvania has 18 congressional districts, 50 State Senate districts, and 203 State House of Representatives districts.
- Candidates for state legislature must have lived in Pennsylvania for 4 years, have lived in “their respective districts” for “one year next before their election,” reside in their districts during their term of service, and be of requisite established age (25 for the State Senate and 21 for the State House of Representatives). See P.A. Cons. art. II, sec. 5.
 - And no person convicted of embezzlement of public moneys, bribery, perjury or other infamous crime shall be eligible to the General Assembly, or capable of holding any office of trust or profit in this Commonwealth. P.A. Cons. art. II, sec. 7.

1. DO YOUR HOMEWORK

Download/access and familiarize yourself with the following resources from the PA Bureau of Commissions, Elections and Legislation and other helpful sources (where appropriate):

- PA Elections Important Dates to Remember [[2022 version here](#)]
- PA Department of State - Running for Office [[available here](#)]
 - [Declarations of Candidacy Filed for Judicial Retention \[2021 Version\]](#)
 - [Judicial Vacancy and Retention Chart \[2021 Version\]](#)
 - [2022 Post-Primary Withdrawal Form](#)
- PA Campaign Finance Reporting Law [[available here](#)]
- Campaign Finance Information [[2022 version here](#)]
- How to Run for School Board: A Guide for School Board Candidates in Pennsylvania [[available here](#)]

2. LEARN THE TERM

Under Pennsylvania law, the term “candidate” includes “both candidates for nomination

and election.” 25 Pa. Cons. Stat. § 2602(a). An individual is determined “to be seeking nomination or election” when he or she (1) receives a campaign contribution or makes an expenditure “for the purpose of influencing his nomination or election to such office” or (2) takes the action necessary under the laws of the Commonwealth to qualify the person for nomination or election to such office. 25 Pa. Cons. Stat. § 3241(a).

3. ASSEMBLE YOUR TEAM

If a candidate chooses to form a political committee for his or her campaign, the committee must have a treasurer and a chairman before receiving donations or making expenditures, as “[a]ll money received and disbursed by a political committee must be done through the treasurer of the committee.” 25 Pa. Cons. Stat. § 3242(a).

Candidates with and without committees should also hire campaign managers to manage the day-to-day operations of the campaign.

4. FILE YOUR CAMPAIGN STATEMENT WITH THE RELEVANT ENTITY

Your Candidate Affidavit, Statement of Financial Interests, and Candidate Nomination Petition must be filed together with the PA Bureau of Commissions, Elections and Legislation in Harrisburg with the requisite filing fee by the deadline set by the PA Department of State (consult *Important Dates to Remember* -- see above). Additionally, candidates for statewide office, the General Assembly (State Senator and State Representative), and state court judge positions must file the Statement of Financial Interests with the PA State Ethics Commission by the same filing deadline. Candidates for countywide, city, borough, township, and municipality office must file the Statement of Financial Interests with their local clerk or municipal secretary by the same requisite date.

If you choose to form a campaign committee, don’t forget to register it with the PA Department of State using *Form DSEB-500, Political Committee Registration Statement* by the requisite date!

5. PREPARE YOUR CANDIDATE AFFIDAVIT

Using the [online tool](#) provided by the PA Department of State, complete your Candidate Affidavit, print it, and have it notarized. Consult these [FAQs](#) for help in completing the Affidavit.

6. PREPARE YOUR STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL INTERESTS

Using either the [online tool](#) or a traditional [printable paper form](#), complete your Statement of Financial Interests, which requires you to fully disclose all sources of income, any creditors you may have, and any financial or real estate interests that belong to you.

7. PREPARE YOUR CANDIDATE NOMINATION PETITION AND GET SIGNATURES

The Petition is used to provide primary ballot access to candidates running for nomination of a major political party in Pennsylvania. The Petition has three parts: the preamble, which includes basic information about you as the candidate; space for signatures of “electors” (registered PA voters); and an affidavit of circulator on the bottom of each page of the petition attesting to, among other things, his or her qualified “elector” status, party affiliation, and that each signer of the nomination petition does so with full understanding of what he or she is signing. Different political offices have [different required signature amounts](#) (e.g., 2,000 for Senator, 1,000 for Representative, 500 for State Senator, and 300 for State Representative). Nomination Petitions must be circulated within a specific window of dates established by the PA Department of State (“not prior to the thirteenth Tuesday before the primary and not later than the tenth Tuesday prior to the primary”).

8. OPEN A CAMPAIGN BANK ACCOUNT

Although PA elections law does not require candidates to open a separate campaign account, we nevertheless suggest it, as it is still good practice and ensures that campaign and personal funds are kept apart.

9. CONNECT TO YOUR LOCAL PARTY

The importance of being a known quantity to your local constituency and infrastructure cannot be overstated. Local voters and groups, whose votes you’ll ultimately need in your primary (if you have one) and general elections, will be far more likely to go to bat for you and provide support if you make a concerted, clear effort to connect with them and learn what local issues they believe are important. Make a list of your local neighborhood groups, both entities chartered by the party and independent local clubs, and reach out to them **as early as possible**.

10. DEVELOP A FINANCIAL RECORD-KEEPING SYSTEM

It is imperative that you develop financial record-keeping mechanisms early on, as PA election law establishes [multiple financial disclosure points for candidates during and after the primary and general elections](#), as well as a requisite annual report and “[24-Hour Reporting](#)” windows in the run-up to the primary and general election dates.

11. APPLY FOR AN EMPLOYER IDENTIFICATION NUMBER (EIN)

An EIN, also known as a federal tax identification number, formally identifies a corporation, partnership, political committee, and other entities for tax filing and reporting purposes. An EIN is needed to open a bank account. Submit an [electronic application](#) to the Internal Revenue Service (IRS). Make sure to select “Political Organization” when asked for the type of organization. Consult [this guide](#) from Minnesota’s Campaign Finance and Public Disclosure Board for more information.

12. HIT THE GROUND RUNNING

Running a political campaign can be an exceedingly time-consuming slog, no matter how many hands you have helping you along the way, so make sure that you always keep in mind why you’re running in the first place and what things you’d be able to do for your community if you won. Make sure to keep abreast of all early candidacy responsibilities and requirements!

Being a political candidate can be stressful, so don’t shy away from asking questions or seeking advice when you need to. If you have questions...

1. **Run for Something Action Fund:** hello@runforsomethingaction.net
 2. **PA Dep’t of State, Elections Division:** (717) 787-5280
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