

RUN FOR SOMETHING

Relaunching Your Campaign: Messaging and Communications

About the author: this resource was compiled based on a workshop facilitated by **RFS Mentor Joshua Karp**, an experienced strategic communications leader who has worked with numerous campaigns and elected officials.

*****If, after reviewing this guide, you have additional questions, [sign up to talk](#) to a Run for Something Mentor. Mentors can offer specific expertise regarding press relations, public speaking, media appearances, and more.*****

Goals

1. Find your unique path to running again for office
2. Tell a compelling, original story about your first run that moves people to support you now
3. Connect with allies, supporters, and opinion leaders in an authentic way

This guide is geared towards RFS Alumni who are planning to launch another campaign, either for the same seat or a different office. Even if you're just considering a run, you can still pursue all of these goals, just on a slower time frame. This can help keep doors open for yourself.

I. Running a Second Time: Consider Your Record

Running a second time is sure to bring up a range of challenges -- you have your work cut out for you, but now you know exactly what that looks like:

- Fundraising
- Volunteer recruitment
- Canvassing
- Media

This time, you have a better sense of what you're up against.

Here's the secret: Running a second time is just like running the first time -- except now, you have a record.

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- Whether you won or lost, you have a record: positions you took, issues you championed, strategies you employed that people praised you for, and campaign tactics that some people didn't like.
- People want to hear you explain your record - both the good and the bad

Explain what happened in the past, in a way that points towards the future: the path that you're on and the path that voters are on with you. Voters want to hear two things:

1. A compelling story about your last race
2. A vision for the future that's new

II. Self Assessment

Think about your last race, and take an objective look in the mirror:

- 1. What is positive about your record? Did you...**
 - Come close to winning?
 - Win any major endorsements?
 - Take a courageous stand?
 - Raise an overlooked issue?
 - Mobilize or engage new voters?
- 2. What is negative about your record? Be brutally honest with yourself. Did you...**
 - Fall short by a lot?
 - Take any unpopular positions that cost you some votes?
 - Lose a major endorsement to another candidate?

Example: A 2018 candidate didn't focus any of his communications on healthcare in the final month of the campaign (despite it being the top issue in the state), and lost narrowly. This is a negative part of his story, but it works for him -- he can point to things he did right on the campaign but also include a note of self-reflection.

→ **A little bit of public self-reflection helps people think more highly of you.**

III. Update Your Vision

Campaigns are a balance of:

- 1. Strategy** - how you'll win

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2. Policy - what you'll do

You have to innovate on both in a second campaign, and tell people what you're doing.

You don't need to revamp because your first campaign's strategy or policies were bad or outdated. But in order to persuade people to buy into your new campaign, you need to take your self-assessment and translate it into "here's how I'm going to win this time."

Example: In her first campaign, a candidate's core policy message was "I'm running to ensure our children have a world-class education, that teachers get paid what they deserve, and to finally get the damned roads fixed."

- She can run on these issues again, but she should also incorporate new knowledge about her district into a new vision for the campaign, and what she would do when elected.
- **An updated message:** "I'm running because our community still needs new leadership, the kind of leadership that's bold enough to demand more for our kids, better pay for our teachers, and to diversify our economy in Smith County."
- Now, she's not just running for three policy reasons, but because she's offering bold leadership. During her first campaign, she might not have known that voters were looking for bold leadership more than particular policy positions.

IV. Your Story

Figure out the story you want to tell. What is the best version of your last campaign?

Find a **compelling story** that ties your last race to what your community needs right now, and what you're going to do about it.

- You don't have to change all of your views, but you do need to react to new issues that are part of the public conversation or changing circumstances.

Compelling stories:

- **Are Unique** - a story only you can tell
- **Are Brief** - short enough to hold your audience's attention

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- **Have a Hero and Villain** - you're the strong hero, of course. The villain may be a policy position, the establishment, your opponent, or the existing city council. It should be someone or something that your community is also fighting.

Example:

"When that new toll road started charging my neighbors \$30 each way, I was outraged just like all of us. That's why I decided to do something about it and run for County Commission and put a stop to these sky-high tolls. Thanks to support from all over Smith County, we got close — but we weren't able to cross the finish line. But that's okay, because this was never about me: this was about those tolls, and let me be very clear, we sent a loud message last year that we're not going to take it anymore. Now, I'm running to finish what we started."

Break it down:

- The first sentence is a rationale for your whole candidacy - your neighbors were upset, and you wanted to fight for them
- The second sentence shows that you took action - you're the hero
- The worst thing you can do is bellyache after a loss - no one wants to hear you complain. Tell a story of your loss that feels compelling to your listener ("we got close, but that's okay because it wasn't about me")
 - People want to hear that you're okay and you're still fighting.
- Claim success/victory in defeat - "we sent a message, people heard us, and we're still fighting." It's inspiring and shows you've got the fire to run and win.
 - Voters often shy away from losers in politics when they act like losers. Nothing in politics feels as good as being a part of a winning team. Present a version of events that lifts up your supporters and makes them feel like winners.

V. Take Your Story on the Road

Use your story to make a case for your next run. Use it as a tool that pulls people back in.

Audiences - who needs to hear from you?

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- **Allies** - need to hear how you can win (donors, political leaders, former endorsing organizations)
- **Volunteers** - need a reason to work for you again
- **Disengaged voters** - need a reason to care
- **People who didn't vote for you** - why is this time different (you will need to make a strategic decision of whether to prioritize talking to some of these voters)
 - There are voters you didn't reach last time but are now aware of you

Where can you reach them?

- Club meetings (Democratic clubs, Chambers of Commerce, Kiwanis club)
- 1-on-1s with key supporters
- Social media (stay active)
- Press - don't hesitate to engage
- You can still do routine campaign activities even if you're no longer an active candidate - showing up to community events and political meetings is expected

Media Options to Reach Your Audiences - different forms of media are useful for different kinds of communication

- **Television:** if you're lucky enough to get an opportunity on TV, you're talking to the most number of people possible
 - Inspire them, remind them of your name and brief bio, and remind them of the heroes and villains - you don't need to dwell on specifics, focus on the clear 1-2 sentences of who you are, who the other guy is, and why you deserve to win
- **Social Media:** more time to pick your own battles, focus on key issues
 - Thrives on two key emotions: strength and energy
 - Strength pulls people in
- **Print:** Options are more limited, because a reporter has an agenda, and you don't want to give them a menu of options to choose from.
 - Keep it brief! Focus on your story, your strategy and viability, a key issue you want to talk about
 - A letter to the editor is another way to keep yourself available to people, remind them of the power of your voice that they believed in last time

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→ Find more [Media and Communications resources](#) for candidates and campaigns

VI. Moving Forward

The longer you're running, the more you can leave the past behind. After several months of sharing your story of the past, a lot of your key audiences will have heard this story and (hopefully) internalized it. They will know your record, on your terms, and you can start to talk less about the past campaign and more about your vision for the future!