

RUN FOR SOMETHING ACTION FUND

Running for Office in Virginia: 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.

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IMPORTANT THINGS TO KNOW AS A POTENTIAL CANDIDATE FOR OFFICE OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA

- The Virginia General Assembly consists of the House of Delegates and the State Senate. Members of the House serve two-year terms and members of the Senate serve four-year terms. Elections are held in odd numbered years.
- Virginia has 100 state delegates and 40 state senators. In addition there are 11 U. S. congressional districts. Find your legislative district [here](#).
- Virginia requires all elected officers of the Commonwealth to be qualified to vote for the office they seek and be a resident of the Commonwealth for one year immediately preceding the election. Some offices may have additional requirements as well. Read through the [Becoming a Candidate guide](#). In addition, you can [contact the Department of Elections](#) for more specific information on office requirements.

1. DO YOUR HOMEWORK

Familiarize yourself with the following resources (where appropriate) published by the Virginia Department of Elections:

- Becoming a Candidate [[here](#)]
- Candidate Forms [[here](#)]
- Candidate Calendar [[here](#)]
- Campaign Finance Information [[here](#)]
- Office Specific Guides [[here](#)]

2. COMPLETE YOUR FORMS

Prospective candidates for office must first complete and file:

- a. [Certificate of Candidate Qualification form](#). There are different forms for different offices. This form may be filed any time after January 1 of the election year and before the filing deadline of the election. It must be filed before a candidate can purchase a [registered voter's list](#).
- b. [Statement of Economic Interest form](#). There are different forms for different offices. Incumbents have different rules from new candidates. Statements may not be dated or submitted prior to January 2 but for new candidates MUST file no later than the last day to file to be a candidate for that particular office.

You may hand deliver or mail the forms but if you file by mail it must be by postage paid and certified or registered mail postmarked the due date. Keep the receipt for proof if needed.

More information on these forms can be found in the [Becoming a Candidate guide](#) and the candidate forms can be found [here](#).

3. FILE STATEMENT OF ORGANIZATION

Everyone seeking elected office of Virginia must file [a Statement of Organization](#) within 10 days of: (1) accepting any contributions, (2) spending any funds, (3) paying the filing fee for any party nomination method, (4) filing a candidate statement of qualification, or (5) appointing a campaign treasurer, designating a campaign committee, or designating a campaign depository.

To file the statement of organization in a timely fashion, you should determine who your Treasurer will be for the campaign. The Treasurer can be someone who is merely the name on the document or it can be someone who plays an active role in the campaign. The only requirement is they be a registered voter in Virginia. They will, however, sign all campaign finance reports stating that they are true so it should be someone who trusts you and who you trust.

4. GET ON THE BALLOT

Complete a [Declaration of Candidacy](#) form and a [Petition of Qualified Voters](#) form and file them on time according to the election date. Rules can be found [here](#). Your petition of nomination must contain a [minimum number of signatures](#) from qualified voters:

- **Statewide office:** 10,000 signatures, including at least 400 from each congressional district
- **State Senate:** 250 signatures
- **House of Delegates:** 125 signatures
- **County or city office, or school board of any county or city:** 125 signatures; or if from a district not at large containing 1,000 or fewer registered voters, 50 signatures
- **Office of town with more than 1,500 registered voters:** 125 signatures
- **Office of town with less than 1,500 registered voters:** no petition required

It's smart to double the number of required signatures just in case you gather signatures from people who are not registered in your district or who's signature is challenged. Having more than enough signatures can make a petition ballot challenge less of a threat. Make sure you use the proper paper for signature collection. It must be double sided.

Gathering petition signatures is one of your earliest opportunities to get your name before the voters. You can gather a small group of volunteers or do this yourself, with close friends and family.

5. PUT THE IMPORTANT DATES ON YOUR CALENDAR

Nothing derails a campaign like missing an important deadline or cutoff. Make sure to consult the [candidate calendar](#) for specific dates and deadlines. Additional deadlines can be found in the [Candidate Bulletins](#) for the specific office.

6. CAMPAIGN FINANCE REQUIREMENTS

Candidates for office of the Commonwealth must report campaign expenditures and contributions to the Department of Elections. This office has [helpful resources](#) to guide you through this process. Check out the [Candidate Campaign Committee Summary](#) for

an overview of campaign finance laws and policies. All Campaign Finance Disclosure Forms can be found [here](#). [The Department also posts a calendar of all important reporting deadlines](#).

It is **extremely important** to keep up with campaign finance requirements and be **on time** with all filings. Be sure to reach out to the [Department of Elections](#) if you are unsure of any requirements.

7. 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 proal neighborhood groups, both entities chartered by the party and independent vide 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 clubs, and reach out to them **as early as possible**.

8. 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.

9. DEVELOP A FINANCIAL RECORD-KEEPING SYSTEM

To ensure that your committee sticks to the set financial reporting schedule and is generally complying with state campaign finance laws, it is of paramount importance that you create a record-keeping system for your campaign's finances as soon as possible. Your campaign must ensure the maintenance of detailed information and original source documentation for all receipts, expenditures, and any other financial responsibilities. You also need this information so you can see what is working in

raising money and what is not. It ultimately helps with fundraising.

Sources for free and moderate priced systems can be found [here](#). Unfortunately, some of them are defunct or charging but there are still several viable options to get you started.

10. IF YOU'RE NOT SURE, ASK!

Contact the [Department of Elections](#) if you have any uncertainty, especially related to compliance with state law. The information here is far from complete or definitive.

Election laws are often re-worked and updated. Stay up to date on your candidate responsibilities!

11. 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. **Virginia Department of Elections:** (804) 864-8901
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