



10 Things to Know When Running for Office as a Humanist

Ready to be a changemaker?

Running for office can be one of the most exacting yet rewarding acts of service one can perform for the Humanist movement... and not just if you win. As a candidate, you'll bring Humanism into the public eye and play an inestimable role in mainstreaming our values. You'll be an ambassador of Humanism to your community and help inspire the next wave of openly non-religious candidates.

Many first-time candidates are amazed to discover how available the political system is to them, yet grapple with some hidden challenges and misconceptions. While it won't replace the expertise of a professional political consultant, we've compiled a list of some of the top considerations when entering the political arena as a non-religious candidate.

1. Pick the Right Race

Running for office is a serious commitment and must be done with appropriate planning and personal resolve. **Make a realistic and thoughtful decision about the right office for you.** Do you fully understand the position's duties? Do you have the proper background, credibility and temperament to be considered seriously?

Take an inventory of your experience and talents. What office suits you best? Where can you make the most impact? Talk to your family, professional and political contacts, and friends. Gauge their reactions. See if they can help you determine the best position and time to run.

Humanists can make an impact running at all levels of government. Many immediately think of federal and high-ranking races, but you can also make a difference running for school boards, state legislatures, city councils... even offices like state water board or corporation commission.

Take a survey of your resources, especially time. Review the deadlines, forms, and processes that are necessary for you to become a candidate, and calculate the amount of your personal time and resources you will be able to contribute to the campaign. **Remember: the higher the office, the more time and commitment is necessary.**

2. Pick the Right Goals: Are You A Contender or an Trailblazer?

Choose the best objective for your campaign. Are you running as **competitive** or **trailblazer** candidate? Both candidacies are hugely valuable.

As a **competitive** candidate, your goal of course is to win, or to get close enough that you can win in the near future.

As **trailblazer** candidate, you enter knowing you have *little or no chance*, but you're providing an enormous service in normalizing Humanism in politics.

A trailblazer race is a PR opportunity: you can bring media attention to the issues you care about. You'll also help build the future of our movement by mobilizing more people to get politically active in your area. You could inspire the next generation of leaders and embolden future candidates to be more open about their Humanist identity.

Be optimistic yet realistic with your chances. If possible, research the “win numbers” that determine your statistical likelihood of winning and how many voters you will need to reach to do so. This could help determine what kind of campaign you're running and how you'll approach your message. This information may also help you present yourself more professionally to backers.

3. Pick the Right Team

This is possibly the most important political decision you can make: building a skilled, passionate team that's on board with the goals you've set.

Is somebody trying to talk you out of your goals? Do they keep moving the goalpost? **Don't work with them.**

If you have the funds or volunteers, consider picks for a treasurer, campaign manager, financial director, and field organizer. Skilled PR professionals can also play a critical role in developing your public image. (More about that below.)

In some geographies, it may be difficult to find political circles that are comfortable with your Humanist identity. **Don't hesitate to use people outside your local area** like [Spectrum Experience](#) who are willing to stand by your values.

4. Build a Professional Brand

A credible brand could be *the* factor that decides whether or not you're worth the media's time. Your brand is your avatar to the public, so prioritize your professionalism on these key elements:

- **Photos:** Get a high quality photo shoot immediately! **First impressions really matter in politics!** Your unique personality needs to shine: a quality photographer should capture something special about you, not just take a yearbook-style photo in something that looks like a department store portrait studio. (Nothing says “boring” like one of those gross colored fabric [backdrops!](#))
- **Web design:** This will be your first contact with thousands of constituents. **Do not underestimate the importance of its quality!** While almost anyone can make a website these days, many people will certainly write you off if your website looks [delusionally amateur](#). Make it easy to navigate. Web surfers should easily be able find links to donate, volunteer, read up on your core issues, and contact you. Also, make sure your web content can be seen by all by double checking your site is accessible to people with vision and hearing impairments.
- **Logo and printed materials:** **These can decide your credibility within milliseconds.** You want them to look like the real deal placed side-by-side with other contenders, even if you are a long shot with little hope of winning the election. Start with a quality business card and a walk piece (a piece that you'll hand out while canvassing), then grow from there.

Hire or recruit professional designers, and ask for honest feedback from your friends, family, and colleagues before you rubber-stamp anything.

5. Build Local Credibility

As you establish a credible image in visual media, establish a credible image in person. **Engage with the community.**

Introduce yourself as a candidate at as many local gatherings as possible: public forums, Legislative District meetings, union local meetings, State Party events, mixers, cultural events, etc. Speak publicly as much as you can. Get photos and videos for social media.

Dress strategically! As annoying as it is, people use your clothing to judge how seriously they should take you. Invest in outfits that you can wear at every level of campaign event, and be aware of how people perceive your image. This is how they judge if you're worth their time.

6. Build a Power Network

Learn who the big players are in your arena and meet with as many as possible. This includes (among others) Legislative District leaders, county-level leaders, precinct captains, State Party staff, local elected officials, lobbyists, and local campaign managers working on other races.

Network with other politicians running for office. Try to do co-events with them, like fundraisers and meet-and-greets.

Ask for advice from your power network. (But don't blindly take it! Their goals aren't always yours!) These people can be invaluable resources for strategy ideas, vendor suggestions, and lessons learned from their own campaigns. **Also, ask your network how to expand your network!** Your contacts might be able to point you in the direction of donors, volunteers, and additional counsel.

7. Use Social Media Effectively

Get inventive, brave, and local. Keep up with the news and comment about the issues on which you're running. Have your design team create sharable media, like picture quotes or short videos. Photoshop wizardry skills are optional: there are plenty of easy, cost-effective options for creating sharp shareables, including [Canva](#), [Piktochart](#), [Visme](#), and [Magisto](#).

Upload photo or video of any public appearances you do. Boost your posts on Facebook and ask your followers to share your messaging.

Don't undervalue your social page's look: use your professional photos and logo, and be conscious that things like background images are formatted to look their best.

Also: unless you are a billionaire celebrity with a pre-existing fanatical fanbase (cough), it's likely best for everyone if you **write like a grown-up**. Ditch the internet slang. Use proper spelling, grammar, and capitalization, and stick to topics that are appropriate for your campaign.

Create a campaign account separate from your personal. Be mindful that the contents of both reflect only details you'd be comfortable sharing with the national mainstream media.

8. Strategically Use Traditional Media

Rather than focusing on paid advertising, think about ways to use *earned media*: creatively promoting your campaign to media outlets (i.e. the news) for coverage. **This can be your most effective form of publicity.**

Think inventive and bold. Example: in 2016, group of Arizona candidates concerned with religious sexual shame in politics held a [strip club forum](#) garnering national attention, including mentions on several news outlets and the Jimmy Kimmel Show.

Another held a [braille typing party](#) to highlight political accessibility issues, and gave pro-lifers free [“anti-abortion” condoms](#) to make a point about prevention.

Become friends with reporters! PR staff like the aforementioned Spectrum Experience can create a press list and handle your releases.

9. Be Proud of Your Humanist Values

Never forget your Humanism is an asset, not a liability!

Spend some time refining what your values are. Weigh all your major campaign decisions against them, including messaging, finances, and hiring.

Because we are a marginalized political minority, we as candidates (like it or not) are hoisted into the role of having to represent the entire Humanist community. It is incumbent upon ourselves to conduct every aspect of our affairs with compassion, honesty, and dignity. We must care about the long-term impact of every decision, including ones that may affect the next Humanist that vies for office.

10. Finally... STAY POSITIVE!

Politics can sometimes be an ugly blood sport, and we as Humanists have an obligation to ennoble our democracy's highest principles. **We need you to stay strong, and model Humanist values for the world.**

This means NEVER lying to your constituents and **always aiming for the high road!** If you don't want to talk about something, find creative ways to deflect.

Don't indulge in negative campaigning just because you think it might give you a slight edge. Stay creative, and sell the hopeful future in which you believe. Run on your values. Tell your constituents how your opponent's differ, but remember **our long-term prospects depend on our ability to sell not just a critique of our rival's ideas, but a better vision for what lies ahead.**