

Valencia County Candidate Guide

Running for Local Office in New Mexico

Section 1: Welcome & How to Use This Guide

Why This Guide Exists

Running for local office should not feel confusing, scary, or only for “insiders.”

This guide was created to help **Valencia County candidates** understand the basics of running for office in **New Mexico**, step by step, in clear and simple language. It is meant to help you:

- Follow the law
- Avoid common mistakes
- Stay organized
- Focus on serving your community

You do **not** need to know everything before you start. You just need to start in the right order.

Who This Guide Is For

This guide is for:

- First-time candidates
- Candidates returning after time away
- Candidates running for:
 - County offices
 - Municipal offices
 - School boards
 - Soil & Water Conservation Districts
 - Judicial offices

Some rules are different depending on the office you are running for. When that happens, this guide will clearly say so.

How to Use This Guide

- You do **not** need to read it all at once
- Use it as a checklist
- Take it one section at a time
- Ask questions early—before mistakes happen

Running for office is a learning process. No one expects perfection.

Section 2: Before You File — Are You Ready to Run?

Before filing paperwork or raising money, take time to prepare.

Understand the Time Commitment

Running for office takes time. This may include:

- Meetings
- Community events
- Door knocking
- Phone calls
- Fundraising
- Paperwork and reporting

Some weeks are quiet. Other weeks are very busy, especially close to the election.

Talk with your family, employer, or support system early so expectations are clear.

Know the Office You Are Running For

Before moving forward, make sure you understand:

- What the office does
- Length of the term
- Whether the position is paid or unpaid
- How often meetings are held
- Whether the office is partisan or nonpartisan

If you are unsure, talk to:

- The Clerk's Office
 - Current or former officeholders
 - Local government staff
-

Check Eligibility Requirements

Each office has basic requirements set by **New Mexico law**, such as:

- Residency
- Voter registration
- Age
- Professional qualifications (for judicial offices)

Always confirm eligibility **before** setting up a committee or filing.

Important Note About Judicial Races

Judicial candidates must follow **very strict rules**.

If you are considering a judicial race:

- You **must** have a campaign committee
- You **cannot personally handle fundraising**
- You must keep a clear separation between yourself and campaign finances

This guide includes special sections for judicial candidates later on.

Section 3: Setting Up to File in New Mexico (Correct Order Matters)

In New Mexico, there is a **required order** to becoming a candidate. Following this order will save time and prevent compliance problems.

Step 1: Set Up Your Candidate Committee

Before you file or register with the Secretary of State, you should:

- Establish your candidate committee (More information in Section 4)
- Name your committee ie. “Randel Testerson for County Coroner”
- Appoint a campaign treasurer

 **In New Mexico, the candidate committee must be established *before* registering in CFIS and before filing.**

Most candidates should have a committee. Some offices **require** one.

This guide will explain committees and treasurers in detail in the next section.

Step 2: Prepare to Register in CFIS

Once your committee and treasurer are identified, you will be ready to:

- Create a [Campaign Finance Information System \(CFIS\) account](#) with the New Mexico Secretary of State
- Register your candidate and committee correctly

CFIS is where:

- Campaign reports are filed
- Contributions and expenses are tracked
- Compliance is monitored

You should not raise or spend money until CFIS is set up as a best practice; however, by statute you must comply with the [N.M. Admin. Code 1.10.13.8 - Candidate Campaign Committee Registrations](#).

Step 3: File for Office

After your committee is established and you are ready for CFIS, you may file for office.

Filing officially makes you a candidate and starts campaign finance reporting requirements.

Where Filing Happens

Depending on the office, filing is done with:

- **New Mexico Secretary of State** for Statewide Offices and Congress
- **Valencia County Clerk** for local offices including State House and Senate

Always confirm **where** to file for your specific office.

Filing Periods (General Guidance)

In New Mexico, most filing periods occur:

- **February** for primary elections (**2026 it is February 3rd for Statewide Offices and March 10th for Local Offices including State House and Senate**).
- **June or July** for some local and nonpartisan offices

Exact dates change by election year and office.

 **Always check the Secretary of State or Clerk's Office for current deadlines.**

Missing a deadline means you **cannot run**, no exceptions.

Why Compliance Matters

Campaign finance laws exist to:

- Protect transparency
- Ensure fairness
- Build public trust

Most violations happen because of confusion, not bad intent.

Setting things up correctly from the start will:

- Reduce stress
- Prevent fines
- Protect you and your campaign

When in doubt, **ask before acting**.

Coming Up Next

The next section will cover:

- Campaign committees
- Choosing a treasurer
- Roles and responsibilities
- Special rules for judicial candidates

Section 4: Campaign Committees & Treasurers

What Is a Candidate Committee?

A candidate committee is the official group that handles campaign finances and reporting for a candidate.

Candidate committees are governed by the Campaign Reporting Act

[NMSA 1978, Sections 1-19-25 through 1-19-36](#)

Your campaign committee is responsible for:

- Receiving contributions
- Paying campaign expenses
- Keeping financial records
- Filing required reports

Even small, local campaigns must follow these rules.

Why Campaign Committees Matter

Campaign committees exist to:

- Protect candidates from financial mistakes
- Ensure transparency for the public
- Make sure campaign activity follows the law

Most committees are small. Many consist of just:

- The candidate
- The treasurer

What matters is that the committee exists and functions properly.

Step 1: Set Up Your Campaign Committee

Before filing for office or registering in CFIS, you must:

- Establish your campaign committee
- Choose a committee name
- Appoint a campaign treasurer

👉 In New Mexico, the campaign committee must be established before CFIS registration and before filing.

This order is required and helps prevent compliance problems.

Step 2: Name Your Campaign Committee

Your committee name must clearly identify the candidate.

Common Naming Formats

- *Friends of [Candidate Name]*
- *[Candidate Name] for [Office]*

Your committee name:

- Must not be misleading
 - Must be used consistently
 - Will appear on all public reports
-

Step 3: Appoint a Campaign Treasurer

Every campaign committee must have a treasurer.

This requirement comes from the
Campaign Reporting Act

[NMSA 1978, Section 1-19-26](#)

Treasurer Responsibilities

The treasurer is legally responsible for:

- Tracking all contributions and expenses
- Keeping receipts and records
- Filing reports on time
- Correcting errors if they occur

The treasurer should be organized, reliable, and willing to ask questions.

Can the Candidate Be the Treasurer?

Yes — non-judicial candidates may serve as their own treasurer under NM law.

However, this is not recommended for first-time candidates, as it adds stress and risk.

Judicial Candidate Sidebar

Judicial candidates may NOT serve as their own treasurer.

Under the [New Mexico Code of Judicial Conduct](#)
[Rule 21-407 NMRA](#):

- The candidate may not personally solicit or accept contributions
- The treasurer must be someone other than the candidate
- All fundraising must be done by the committee

This separation protects both the candidate and the integrity of the judicial system.

Step 4: Understand Treasurer Authority & Liability

The treasurer is responsible for the accuracy and timeliness of reports.

This means:

- Mistakes can result in fines
- Late reports can lead to penalties
- Corrections must be filed when needed

Candidates should:

- Stay in regular contact with their treasurer
 - Review reports before they are filed
 - Treat compliance as a shared responsibility
-

Step 5: Be Ready Before CFIS Registration

Before registering in CFIS, you should already have:

- A committee name
- A treasurer
- Contact information for both

Only after these steps should you move on to CFIS registration and filing for office.

Common Mistakes to Avoid

- Raising money before the committee exists
- Waiting until filing day to choose a treasurer

- Assuming compliance is “automatic”
- Not reviewing reports

Most campaign finance problems happen because of confusion, not bad intent.

Coming Up Next

Next, this guide will cover:

- Opening a campaign bank account
- Keeping campaign funds separate
- Basic financial rules
- Common banking mistakes

Section 5: Campaign Banking & Financial Setup

Why Campaign Banking Matters

In New Mexico, campaign money must be kept **separate from personal money at all times**.

This rule exists to:

- Protect candidates and treasurers
- Prevent confusion and errors
- Ensure transparency for the public

Campaign banking rules come from the

[**Campaign Reporting Act**](#)

[**NMSA 1978, §§ 1-19-25 through 1-19-36**](#)

Step 1: Open a Campaign Bank Account

Every campaign committee must open a **separate campaign bank account**.

You may **not** use:

- A personal bank account
- A business account
- A joint family account

All campaign money must go **into** and **out of** the campaign account.

When to Open the Account

Open the campaign bank account:

- **After the campaign committee is established**
- **Before raising or spending any money**
- **Before filing or registering in CFIS**

Do not accept contributions or pay expenses until the account is open.

Step 2: What You Need to Open the Account

Most banks will require:

- Campaign committee name
- Candidate name and office sought
- Treasurer name
- Photo ID for signers
- Employer Identification Number (EIN) from the IRS (*recommended*)

Some banks may allow a Social Security Number, but using an **EIN is strongly recommended**. *If your financial institution requires written confirmation that you are in fact a candidate for office, the Candidate Campaign Committee Registration form is the only item available to demonstrate the campaign is active until the declaration of candidacy is filed.*

Getting an EIN

An EIN can be [obtained from the IRS](#):

- Free of charge
- Online (the link above will open the application, choose “View Additional Types” under Legal Structure and then “Political Organization”)
- Usually issued immediately

Using an EIN:

- Protects personal information
 - Makes banking easier
 - Looks more professional
-

Step 3: Choose Authorized Signers

The campaign committee should decide:

- Who can sign checks
- Who can use debit cards
- Who has online banking access

At minimum, the **treasurer should be an authorized signer**.

Judicial Candidate Sidebar

For judicial campaigns:

- The **candidate should not be an authorized signer**
- The **treasurer controls the account**
- The candidate should avoid direct access to funds

This separation is required under

[Rule 21-407 NMRA](#)

to prevent ethical concerns.

Step 4: How Campaign Money Must Be Handled

All campaign money must:

- Be deposited into the campaign account
- Be spent only on campaign-related expenses
- Be recorded accurately and promptly

Examples of campaign expenses include:

- Printing
 - Signs and mailers
 - Event costs
 - Advertising
-

Prohibited Practices

You may **not**:

- Deposit campaign money into a personal account
- Pay campaign expenses with personal funds and “pay yourself back” without proper reporting
- Use campaign funds for personal use

Misuse of campaign funds can result in **finances and penalties**.

Step 5: Keeping Good Records

Good records protect both the candidate and treasurer.

The treasurer should keep:

- Bank statements
- Deposit records
- Receipts for all expenses
- Copies of checks or payment confirmations

Records should be kept for **at least one election cycle after the election**.

Step 6: Cash Contributions (Be Careful)

Cash contributions are allowed, but they carry risk.

Best practices:

- Limit cash whenever possible
- Issue receipts immediately
- Deposit cash quickly
- Keep clear records of who gave the money

Large cash amounts can raise red flags and increase the chance of mistakes.

Judicial Candidate Sidebar

Judicial candidates should be **especially cautious** with cash contributions.

The candidate should:

- Not handle cash
 - Not be present during solicitation
 - Let the committee manage all transactions
-

Step 7: Credit Cards, Debit Cards, and Online Payments

Campaigns may use:

- Debit cards linked to the campaign account
- Online payment systems (with proper tracking)

All transactions must:

- Be traceable
- Be reported accurately in CFIS

Avoid:

- Using personal credit cards for campaign purchases
- Mixing campaign and personal subscriptions

Step 8: Regular Bank Review

The treasurer should:

- Review bank statements monthly
- Match bank activity to CFIS entries
- Catch errors early

Candidates should:

- Review reports before they are filed
- Ask questions if something looks wrong

Common Banking Mistakes to Avoid

- Opening the bank account too late
- Using personal funds without tracking
- Allowing too many people access to the account
- Forgetting small expenses

Most problems come from **lack of organization**, not bad intent.

Coming Up Next

Next, this guide will cover:

- Registering in CFIS
- Understanding reporting schedules
- What must be reported
- Common reporting mistakes

Section 6: CFIS Registration & Campaign Reporting

What Is CFIS?

CFIS stands for the [Campaign Finance Information System](#).

CFIS is the online system run by the **New Mexico Secretary of State** where:

- Candidates and committees are registered
- Campaign finance reports are filed
- Contributions and expenses are publicly disclosed

CFIS is required under the

[Campaign Reporting Act](#)

[NMSA 1978, §§ 1-19-25 through 1-19-36](#)

If it involves campaign money, it goes through CFIS.

When You Register in CFIS

You should register in CFIS **only after**:

- Your campaign committee is established
- Your committee name is finalized
- Your treasurer is appointed
- Your campaign bank account is open

 **Do not accept or spend money until CFIS registration is complete.**

Who Sets Up the CFIS Account?

Usually, the **treasurer** sets up and manages the CFIS account.

The treasurer will:

- Create the committee profile
- Enter candidate information
- File all required reports

Candidates should still review reports before they are submitted.

Judicial Candidate Sidebar

For judicial candidates:

- The **treasurer should handle CFIS**
- The candidate should avoid direct involvement with reporting
- This separation helps protect judicial independence

This is required under
[Rule 21-407 NMRA](#).

Step 1: Create the CFIS Account

To register in CFIS, you will need:

- Committee name
- Candidate name and office sought
- Treasurer name and contact information
- Campaign bank account information

The CFIS system will guide you step by step, but it is not always intuitive. Take your time.

Step 2: Link the Candidate and Committee

CFIS requires that:

- The candidate profile is linked to the correct committee
- The office sought is entered correctly
- The election cycle is accurate

Mistakes here can cause reporting problems later.

Step 3: Understand Reporting Responsibilities

Campaign finance reports must be filed:

- On specific dates set by law
- Even if there was **no activity**
- Even if the campaign is small

If nothing happened, you still file a **“No Activity” report**.

Failure to file is a violation.

Reporting Deadlines (General Guidance)

In New Mexico, reports are usually due:

- Periodically during the election cycle
- Before the election
- After the election

Deadlines depend on:

- The type of office
- The election year

 **Always check CFIS for your exact reporting schedule.**

[2026 Campaign Finance Reporting Schedule](#)

Missing a deadline can result in fines.

What Must Be Reported

CFIS reports include:

Contributions

- Who gave money
- How much they gave
- When they gave it

Expenditures

- Who was paid

- What the expense was for
- When it was paid

Every dollar in and out of the campaign account must be reported.

Accuracy Matters

Reports must be:

- Complete
- Accurate
- Filed on time

If a mistake is found:

- File an amended report as soon as possible

Honest mistakes can be corrected, but ignoring them can lead to penalties.

Treasurer and Candidate Roles

Treasurer

- Enters data into CFIS
- Files reports
- Maintains records

Candidate

- Reviews reports
- Communicates with treasurer
- Supports compliance

Compliance works best when both stay involved.

Judicial Candidate Sidebar

Judicial candidates should:

- Avoid reviewing donor names if possible
- Let the treasurer manage reporting
- Focus on campaign messaging and outreach

This helps maintain ethical distance from fundraising.

Penalties for Non-Compliance

Under New Mexico law, penalties may include:

- Late fees
- Civil fines
- Enforcement action by the Secretary of State

Most penalties result from:

- Missed deadlines
- Incomplete reports
- Poor recordkeeping

Good systems prevent most problems.

Common CFIS Mistakes to Avoid

- Registering before the committee exists
 - Entering the wrong office or election cycle
 - Forgetting “No Activity” reports
 - Waiting until the deadline day to file
 - Not reviewing reports before submission
-

Coming Up Next

Next sections will cover:

- Fundraising rules and ideas

- Community outreach and listening
- Campaign messaging
- Speeches and materials

Section 7: Fundraising in New Mexico

First: What Fundraising Really Is

Fundraising is not begging.

Fundraising is **inviting people to support the kind of community they want to live in.**

In New Mexico, campaign fundraising is allowed—but it is regulated. Understanding the rules early will help you raise money confidently and legally.

Fundraising rules come from the

[Campaign Reporting Act](#)

[NMSA 1978, §§ 1-19-25 through 1-19-36](#)

When You Are Allowed to Fundraise

You may begin fundraising **only after**:

- Your campaign committee is established
- Your campaign bank account is open
- You are registered in CFIS

Do **not** accept money before these steps are completed.

Accepting money too early is a common violation.

Who Is Allowed to Fundraise

Non-Judicial Candidates

Non-judicial candidates **may**:

- Ask for contributions

- Attend fundraising events
- Send fundraising emails or letters
- Thank donors directly

All money must still go through the campaign committee and be properly reported.

Judicial Candidate Sidebar

Judicial candidates **may NOT personally solicit or accept campaign contributions.**

Under the **New Mexico Code of Judicial Conduct**
Rule 21-407 NMRA:

- Fundraising must be done by the campaign committee
- The candidate should not ask for money
- The candidate should not handle contributions
- The candidate should avoid knowing who donated when possible

Judicial candidates may attend events but should allow others to handle fundraising conversations.

Contribution Limits (General Guidance)

New Mexico law sets **contribution limits** based on:

- The office sought
- Whether the donor is an individual or organization
- The election cycle

Contribution limits can change by law or court decision.

 **Always verify current limits through the Secretary of State before fundraising begins. [This is the link to the current Campaign Contribution Limits.](#)**

Your treasurer should monitor limits closely.

What Information Must Be Collected From Donors

For most contributions, campaigns must collect:

- Full name
- Mailing address
- Amount given
- Date of contribution

Some contributions also require:

- Employer
- Occupation

Incomplete donor information can make a contribution **unreportable** and risky.

Fundraising Ideas That Work Locally

House Parties

House parties are one of the most effective local fundraising tools.

How they work:

- A supporter hosts the event
- Guests are invited personally
- The campaign shares its message
- Contributions are requested

House parties build both **funding and relationships**.

One-on-One Asks

Personal asks are powerful.

This can be:

- A phone call
- A coffee meeting
- A short conversation at an event

People are more likely to give when:

- They understand why you're running
 - They feel personally invited
-

Small-Dollar and Recurring Donations

Not everyone can give a large amount.

Encourage:

- Small donations
- Monthly recurring gifts

Many small donations add up and show broad community support.

Community Events

Candidates may raise funds at:

- Community gatherings
- Campaign-hosted events
- Local meet-and-greets

Always ensure:

- Contributions are tracked correctly
 - The treasurer receives funds promptly
-

Judicial Candidate Sidebar

For judicial candidates:

- Fundraising events should be run by the committee
- The candidate should focus on meeting people, not asking for money
- Avoid language that pressures or suggests obligation

Judicial fundraising must always protect impartiality.

Learning Before Asking: Community Listening

Strong fundraising is rooted in **listening**, not talking.

Before or during fundraising, candidates should:

- Meet with local nonprofits
- Talk to service providers
- Listen to unions and worker groups
- Ask community leaders what they see as urgent needs

This builds trust and leads to better messaging.

What You May NOT Do With Campaign Funds

Campaign funds may **not** be used for:

- Personal expenses
- Family bills
- Groceries or rent
- Personal travel unrelated to the campaign

Using campaign funds for personal use is a serious violation.

Thanking Donors (This Matters)

Thanking donors is:

- Good manners
- Good politics
- Good relationship-building

Thank-yous can be:

- A call
- A note

- A message
-

Judicial Candidate Sidebar

Judicial candidates should:

- Let the committee send thank-you messages
 - Avoid personal expressions that could suggest favoritism
-

Common Fundraising Mistakes to Avoid

- Asking for money too early
- Forgetting to collect donor information
- Accepting contributions over the legal limit
- Handling cash casually
- Mixing personal and campaign activity

Most mistakes happen because of misunderstanding, not intent.

The Democratic Party of Valencia County is very happy to help you connect with folks to set up events, house parties, and other fundraising avenues. While we don't fundraise directly for candidates, we have a lot of resources to help so please ask!

Coming Up Next

Next sections will cover:

- Community outreach and relationship building
- Crafting campaign messaging
- Writing a stump speech
- Creating a 30-second elevator speech

Section 8: Listening to the Community & Building Relationships

Why Listening Comes First

Good campaigns start by **listening**, not talking.

In Valencia County, people want to know that candidates:

- Understand local challenges
- Respect lived experience
- Are willing to learn

Listening builds trust. Trust leads to support.

This section focuses on how to connect with the community **before** asking for votes or donations.

What Community Listening Means

Community listening is about:

- Asking open-ended questions
- Learning from people doing the work
- Avoiding assumptions
- Taking notes and following up

You do not need all the answers. You need curiosity and respect.

Who to Listen To

Strong candidates talk to a wide range of people and groups.

Local Organizations & Service Providers

Consider meeting with:

- Food banks and mutual aid groups

- Housing and homelessness services
- Domestic violence and family support programs
- Senior centers
- Youth programs
- Disability advocates

These groups often see problems before they become public.

Workers & Labor Organizations

Labor groups understand:

- Job conditions
- Wages
- Workplace safety
- Local economic pressure

Listening to workers helps candidates speak honestly about economic issues.

Community Leaders & Residents

This includes:

- Neighborhood leaders
- Faith leaders
- Small business owners
- Parents and caregivers
- Students and young voters

Every voice matters, especially those that are often ignored.

Judicial Candidate Sidebar

Judicial candidates **must be especially careful** during community outreach.

Judicial candidates may:

- Listen to concerns about the justice system
- Learn about barriers people face
- Explain the role of the court in general terms

Judicial candidates must **not**:

- Promise outcomes
- Comment on pending or possible cases
- Take positions that suggest bias

This guidance comes from

Rule 21-407 and Rule 21-209 NMRA.

How to Ask Good Questions

Good questions are:

- Open-ended
- Respectful
- Not leading

Examples:

- “What issues are you seeing most often right now?”
- “What do you wish decision-makers understood?”
- “Where do you see people falling through the cracks?”

Avoid arguing or defending. This is about learning.

Taking Notes & Following Up

Listening matters most when it leads to action.

After meetings:

- Write down key themes

- Note specific concerns
- Follow up with a thank-you

Over time, patterns will emerge. These patterns should shape your campaign message.

Turning Listening Into Policy Ideas

You do not need to write policy alone.

Use what you hear to:

- Identify shared concerns
- Learn what has already been tried
- Avoid repeating past mistakes

Good ideas are often already in the community.

Judicial Candidate Sidebar

Judicial candidates should:

- Focus on access, fairness, and process
- Avoid advocacy language
- Emphasize the importance of impartial courts

Judicial campaigns are about **integrity and trust**, not policy promises.

Showing Up Consistently

Community trust is built by presence.

Ways to show up:

- Attend local events
- Support community fundraisers (without campaigning)
- Be visible, respectful, and reliable

You don't need to be everywhere—just be genuine where you are.

Cultural Awareness in Valencia County

Valencia County is:

- Culturally rich
- Multi-generational
- Deeply connected

Candidates should:

- Respect cultural traditions
- Listen across generations
- Avoid “one-size-fits-all” messaging

Humility goes a long way.

What Not to Do

Avoid:

- Treating meetings as campaign pitches
- Talking more than listening
- Making promises you can't keep
- Using community pain for political gain

People notice sincerity.

How This Helps Your Campaign

Strong listening:

- Builds better messaging
- Strengthens fundraising conversations
- Creates long-term relationships
- Leads to better leadership if elected

Listening is not a campaign tactic. It's a leadership skill.

Coming Up Next

Next sections will cover:

- Campaign messaging
- Crafting your “why”
- Writing a stump speech
- Creating a 30-second elevator speech

Section 9: Campaign Messaging

What Campaign Messaging Is

Campaign messaging is **how you explain who you are, why you're running, and what you care about.**

Good messaging:

- Is clear
- Is honest
- Sounds like you
- Connects to real community needs

You do not need fancy language. You need clarity and consistency.

Start With Your “Why”

Your “why” is the reason you decided to run.

Ask yourself:

- Why does this office matter to me?
- What experiences shaped this decision?

- What do I hope will be better because I ran?

Your “why” should be:

- Personal
- Simple
- True

People connect to sincerity more than perfection.

Know Your Values

Values guide how you make decisions.

Examples of values:

- Fairness
- Accountability
- Safety
- Opportunity
- Respect

You do not need to list every value. Focus on the ones that show up in how you live and work.

Ground Your Message in What You Heard

Your best messaging should come from:

- Community listening
- Conversations with residents
- Meetings with local organizations

If you hear the same concern over and over, it belongs in your message.

Judicial candidates must be careful with messaging.

Judicial candidates may:

- Talk about fairness, access, and integrity
- Explain court processes in general terms
- Emphasize professionalism and impartiality

Judicial candidates may **not**:

- Promise specific outcomes
- Take positions on issues likely to come before the court
- Suggest how they would rule in cases

This guidance comes from

[Rule 21-209 and Rule 21-407 NMRA.](#)

Keep It Simple

Strong messages are:

- Short
- Easy to repeat
- Easy to understand

Avoid:

- Long explanations
- Acronyms without explanation
- Policy jargon

If someone can't repeat your message after hearing it once, it's too complicated.

Core Message vs. Talking Points

Your Core Message

This is your main message. It should answer:

- Who you are
- Why you're running
- What matters most

Example:

“I'm running to make sure our local government works for everyone, not just a few.”

Talking Points

Talking points support your core message.

They:

- Add detail
- Address specific issues
- Help you stay on track

Keep talking points short and consistent.

Stay Consistent Everywhere

Your message should stay the same across:

- Door-to-door conversations
- Social media
- Mailers
- Speeches

You can adjust **how** you say it, but not **what** you say.

Consistency builds trust.

Answering Tough Questions

You will be asked hard questions.

Good responses:

- Acknowledge the concern
- Stay respectful
- Return to your values

It's okay to say:

- "I don't have all the answers yet."
- "That's something I want to learn more about."

Honesty builds credibility.

Judicial Candidate Sidebar

Judicial candidates should respond to tough questions by:

- Explaining the role of the court
- Emphasizing fairness and due process
- Avoiding commentary on specific laws or cases

Neutrality is a strength, not a weakness.

Avoiding Common Messaging Mistakes

Avoid:

- Attacking opponents personally
- Overpromising
- Using fear-based language
- Talking down to voters

Focus on what you stand **for**, not just what you oppose.

Testing Your Message

Before sharing widely:

- Practice with trusted supporters

- Ask if it feels clear
- Ask if it feels authentic

If it doesn't sound like you, rewrite it.

Messaging and Ethics

Messaging should:

- Be truthful
- Be respectful
- Avoid misinformation

Your reputation matters more than any one election.

Coming Up Next

Next sections will cover:

- Writing a stump speech
- Creating a 30-second elevator speech
- Preparing for public events

Section 10: The Stump Speech

What a Stump Speech Is

A **stump speech** is a short speech that explains:

- Who you are
- Why you're running
- What matters to you
- What you hope to do if elected

It is called a “stump speech” because it is the speech you give **over and over**—at events, meetings, and gatherings.

A good stump speech is usually **2 to 3 minutes long**.

Why the Stump Speech Matters

Your stump speech:

- Sets the tone for your campaign
- Helps people understand you quickly
- Builds trust and connection

You do not need to sound like a professional speaker. You need to sound like **yourself**.

Basic Structure of a Stump Speech

A simple stump speech has four parts:

1. Introduction
2. Your “why”
3. What you care about
4. A clear close

Keeping this structure helps you stay focused.

Part 1: Introduce Yourself

Start with:

- Your name
- The office you’re running for
- A brief personal detail

Example:

“My name is Jordan Smith, and I’m running for Valencia County Commission. I’m a lifelong resident of this community and a parent.”

Keep this short and friendly.

Part 2: Share Why You're Running

This is the heart of your speech.

Talk about:

- What motivated you to run
- A problem you want to help solve
- A value that drives you

This should connect to real experiences, not slogans.

Judicial Candidate Sidebar

Judicial candidates should frame their “why” carefully.

Judicial candidates may:

- Talk about fairness and access to justice
- Share professional experience
- Emphasize respect for the rule of law

Judicial candidates must **not**:

- Promise outcomes
- Criticize specific court decisions
- Suggest how they would rule

This guidance comes from

[Rule 21-209 and Rule 21-407 NMRA.](#)

Part 3: What You Care About

Choose **2–3 key issues or priorities.**

These should come from:

- Community listening
- Real local concerns
- Your values

Avoid listing too many topics. Focus on what matters most.

Part 4: Close With Purpose

End your stump speech by:

- Reaffirming your commitment
- Thanking people for listening
- Inviting connection

Example:

“I would be honored to earn your support, and I’m grateful for the chance to listen and learn from this community.”

Keep It Human

A strong stump speech:

- Uses plain language
- Avoids jargon
- Sounds natural

Practice until it feels comfortable, not memorized.

Practice Tips

- Say it out loud
- Time yourself
- Practice in front of a mirror or friend
- Adjust based on feedback

It's okay to evolve your speech over time.

Adjusting for Different Settings

You may need to shorten or adapt your stump speech for:

- Small group meetings
- Large events
- Informal conversations

The core message should stay the same.

Judicial Candidate Sidebar

Judicial stump speeches should:

- Emphasize professionalism
- Focus on integrity and fairness
- Avoid political language

Judicial candidates should not ask for donations during speeches.

Common Stump Speech Mistakes

Avoid:

- Talking too long
- Reading word-for-word
- Attacking opponents
- Overpromising

Short, sincere speeches are more effective.

When to Use Your Stump Speech

You may use your stump speech at:

- Community meetings
- Campaign events
- Forums or debates
- House parties

Being prepared helps reduce nerves.

Coming Up Next

Next sections will cover:

- The 30-second elevator speech
- Preparing for one-on-one conversations
- Campaign materials and printers

Section 11: The 30-Second Elevator Speech

What an Elevator Speech Is

An **elevator speech** is a very short introduction—about **30 seconds**—that explains:

- Who you are
- What you're running for
- Why it matters

You might use it:

- At the grocery store
- At a community event
- While door knocking
- When someone asks, "So, why are you running?"

You won't always have time for a full stump speech. This helps you be ready.

Why the Elevator Speech Matters

A good elevator speech:

- Makes a clear first impression
- Helps people remember you
- Opens the door for conversation

You are not trying to say everything. You are trying to say **just enough**.

The Simple Formula

A strong elevator speech has three parts:

1. Who you are
2. What you're running for
3. Why it matters

If it takes longer than 30 seconds, it's too long.

Part 1: Who You Are

Start with:

- Your name
- A brief personal connection to the community

Example:

“Hi, I’m Alex Martinez. I’ve lived in Valencia County for 15 years.”

Part 2: What You're Running For

Be clear and specific.

Example:

“I’m running for City Council because local decisions affect our daily lives.”

Avoid long explanations of the office.

Part 3: Why It Matters

End with a reason people can relate to.

Example:

“I want to make sure our community is heard and treated fairly.”

This is where values show up.

Judicial Candidate Sidebar

Judicial candidates must be careful with elevator speeches.

Judicial candidates may:

- State their name and the office
- Share professional background
- Emphasize fairness and integrity

Judicial candidates must **not**:

- Promise results
- Comment on cases or laws
- Ask for donations

This guidance comes from

[Rule 21-209 and Rule 21-407 NMRA.](#)

Sample Elevator Speech (Non-Judicial)

“Hi, I’m Taylor Reed. I’m running for County Clerk because I believe local government should be accessible, transparent, and work for everyone.”

Short. Clear. Honest.

Sample Elevator Speech (Judicial)

“Hello, I’m Morgan Lopez, and I’m running for District Court Judge. I bring years of experience, a commitment to fairness, and deep respect for the rule of law.”

Neutral and appropriate.

Practice Tips

- Practice out loud
- Keep it conversational
- Adjust based on who you’re talking to

Your tone matters as much as your words.

When to Use Your Elevator Speech

Use it when:

- Someone asks about your campaign
- You’re introducing yourself quickly
- You want to start a conversation

If people want to know more, you can move into a longer conversation or your stump speech.

Common Elevator Speech Mistakes

Avoid:

- Trying to say too much
- Using buzzwords
- Sounding rehearsed
- Asking for money right away

This is an introduction, not a pitch.

Elevator Speech and Ethics

Your elevator speech should always:

- Be truthful
- Be respectful
- Avoid exaggeration

For judicial candidates, neutrality is essential.

Coming Up Next

Next sections will cover:

- Campaign materials and signs
- Working with local or union printers
- Campaign timelines and logistics

Section 12: Campaign Materials & Local Printing

Why Campaign Materials Matter

Campaign materials help people:

- Recognize your name
- Remember your message
- Know how to find you

You do **not** need expensive or fancy materials to run a strong local campaign. Clear and consistent is better than flashy.

Common Campaign Materials

Most local campaigns use:

- Yard signs
- Door hangers or flyers

- Business cards
- Palm cards (small handouts)

Start small. You can always print more later.

What Must Appear on Campaign Materials

Under the **Campaign Reporting Act**, most campaign materials must include a **disclaimer**.

Disclaimers usually state:

- Who paid for the material
- That it was authorized by the campaign

Your printer or treasurer can help confirm correct wording. An example: For candidate-authorized signs, use: "**Paid for by [Committee Name] and authorized by [Candidate Name]**".

Judicial Candidate Sidebar

Judicial candidates must be careful that materials:

- Do not suggest bias
- Do not imply outcomes
- Emphasize professionalism and fairness

Neutral language and design are best.

Keep the Design Simple

Effective materials:

- Use large, readable fonts
- Limit colors
- Avoid clutter
- Focus on your name and office

If people can't read it from a distance, it won't work.

Choosing What to Print First

Recommended order:

1. Yard signs
2. Palm cards or door hangers
3. Business cards

Signs help with name recognition. Cards help people remember you after a conversation.

Working With Local or Union Printers

Whenever possible, consider using:

- Local printers
- Union printers

Benefits include:

- Supporting local workers
- Faster turnaround
- Easier communication

Ask printers:

- Minimum order sizes
 - Turnaround time
 - File requirements
-

Budgeting for Materials

Campaign materials can add up.

Tips:

- Start with small quantities

- Track all costs
- Reorder based on need

Your treasurer should record all expenses. *It is ideal to get a good quote for what you will need printed at the beginning of your campaign and then you can ask donors specifically for what you will need.*

Yard Sign Placement Rules

Before placing signs:

- Check local ordinances
- Avoid private property without permission
- Follow state and local rules

Improper sign placement can lead to fines or removal.

Judicial Candidate Sidebar

Judicial signs should:

- Avoid slogans that suggest political positions
 - Focus on name recognition and office
 - Use neutral colors and wording
-

Accessibility Matters

Good campaign materials should be:

- Easy to read
- Clear in language
- Respectful of all audiences

Avoid overly small text or unclear graphics.

QR Codes and Websites

If you use QR codes:

- Make sure they work
- Link to clear information
- Avoid broken or outdated pages

Simple websites or social pages are often enough for local races. If you need assistance setting up a website or a social media page please contact info@valenciademocrats.org, we have volunteers that are skilled in online media and marketing!

Tracking Inventory

Keep track of:

- How many signs are printed
- Where they are placed
- When more are needed

This helps avoid waste and overspending.

Common Materials Mistakes to Avoid

Avoid:

- Ordering too much too early
- Changing designs mid-campaign
- Forgetting disclaimers
- Using unapproved messaging

Consistency builds recognition.

Coming Up Next

Next sections will cover:

- Campaign timelines and planning

- Self-care and safety
- Final checklists and templates

Section 13: Campaign Timelines & Staying Organized

Why a Campaign Timeline Matters

Running for office involves many moving parts.

A clear timeline helps you:

- Stay on track
- Avoid last-minute stress
- Meet legal deadlines
- Balance campaigning with real life

You do not need a perfect plan. You need a **simple, realistic one**.

Think in Phases, Not Perfection

Most local campaigns move through the same basic phases:

1. Setup
2. Listening and outreach
3. Active campaigning
4. Final push
5. Election and wrap-up

Breaking the campaign into phases makes it manageable.

Phase 1: Setup (Before Filing)

This phase happens **before** or right as you file.

Focus on:

- Setting up your campaign committee
- Appointing a treasurer
- Opening a campaign bank account
- Registering in CFIS
- Learning the reporting schedule

Doing this early prevents compliance problems later.

Judicial Candidate Sidebar

Judicial candidates should take extra time in the setup phase to:

- Clearly separate the candidate from fundraising
- Train committee members on ethical boundaries
- [Review the Code of Judicial Conduct](#)

Strong setup protects judicial integrity.

Phase 2: Listening & Relationship Building

This phase often overlaps with early campaigning.

Focus on:

- Meeting community groups
- Listening to residents
- Attending local events
- Taking notes on shared concerns

This phase shapes your message and builds trust. *For candidates without a primary opponent, we recommend moving forward with your campaign as though you did, in a county that consistently votes red, it's imperative to get out and get noticed as early as possible.*

Phase 3: Active Campaigning

This is when most people think “campaign.”

Activities may include:

- Door knocking
- Phone calls
- Community forums
- Fundraising events
- Sharing campaign materials

Consistency matters more than intensity.

Judicial Candidate Sidebar

Judicial candidates should focus active campaigning on:

- Voter education
- Professional experience
- Fairness and access to justice

Avoid partisan language or promises.

Phase 4: The Final Push

The last weeks before the election are busy.

Focus on:

- Reminding people to vote
- Following up with supporters
- Making sure all reports are filed
- Avoiding new, risky decisions

Stick to what you know works.

Phase 5: Election & Wrap-Up

After Election Day:

- File required post-election reports
- Thank volunteers and supporters
- Close out or transition the campaign committee as required

Win or lose, closing things out properly matters.

Weekly Planning (Simple and Realistic)

A simple weekly plan can include:

- One or two campaign goals
- Time for outreach
- Time for rest

You do not need to campaign every waking hour but the more doors you knock and the more voters you speak to, the better your campaign will run and the better your chances of winning!

Staying Organized

Helpful tools include:

- A calendar with deadlines
- A shared document with your team
- Regular check-ins with your treasurer

Good organization reduces mistakes and stress.

Managing Time & Energy

Running for office can be emotionally demanding.

Tips:

- Set boundaries
- Take breaks

- **Ask for help**
- Remember why you started

Burnout helps no one.

Judicial Candidate Sidebar

Judicial candidates should:

- Be especially mindful of public perception
 - Avoid campaign activity that feels rushed or reactive
 - Prioritize professionalism at all times
-

Common Timeline Mistakes to Avoid

Avoid:

- Waiting too long to start
- Ignoring reporting deadlines
- Over-scheduling yourself
- Letting urgency replace strategy

Slow and steady is often more effective.

Coming Up Next

Final sections will cover:

- Campaign safety and self-care
- Ethics reminders
- Final checklists and templates

Section 14: Candidate Safety, Ethics, & Self-Care

Why This Section Matters

Running for office can be rewarding, but it can also be stressful.

Candidates may face:

- Public criticism
- Long hours
- Emotional strain
- Online or in-person conflict

Taking care of yourself is **not selfish**. It helps you stay grounded, ethical, and effective.

Personal Safety Comes First

Your safety matters more than any campaign activity.

General Safety Tips

- Campaign with others when possible
- Let someone know where you'll be canvassing
- Trust your instincts—leave situations that feel unsafe
- Avoid entering homes
- Keep personal contact information private

It is okay to say no or walk away.

Online Safety & Social Media

Online spaces can be difficult during campaigns.

Tips:

- Adjust privacy settings
- Do not share personal details publicly
- Avoid engaging with trolls
- Screenshot threats or harassment

If something feels threatening, take it seriously and report it.

Judicial Candidate Sidebar

Judicial candidates should be especially careful online.

Avoid:

- Engaging in arguments
- Commenting on legal issues
- Sharing opinions that could suggest bias

Judicial candidates should keep online presence professional and neutral.

Handling Conflict & Criticism

Not everyone will agree with you—and that's okay.

Healthy ways to respond:

- Stay calm
- Avoid personal attacks
- Return to your values
- Step away when emotions are high

You do not need to respond to everything.

Ethics Are a Daily Practice

Ethical campaigns are built on:

- Honesty
- Respect
- Transparency

When unsure:

- Ask your treasurer

- Ask election officials
- Pause before acting

Shortcuts often lead to bigger problems later.

Judicial Candidate Sidebar

Judicial candidates must:

- Avoid statements that suggest favoritism
- Refrain from promises or commitments
- Maintain impartiality at all times

Ethics are central to public trust in the courts.

Emotional & Mental Health

Campaigning can feel personal—because it is.

Ways to protect your well-being:

- Set realistic expectations
- Limit exposure to negativity
- Take breaks from social media
- Talk with trusted friends or professionals

Feeling overwhelmed does not mean you are failing.

Setting Boundaries

You are allowed to:

- Have private time
- Say no to events
- Rest

Boundaries help you show up better when it counts.

Supporting Each Other

Campaigns work best as teams.

Encourage:

- Check-ins
- Honest conversations
- Mutual support

No one should carry the campaign alone.

After the Election

Win or lose, campaigns end.

After Election Day:

- Take time to rest
- Thank supporters and volunteers
- Close out campaign obligations properly
- Reflect on what you learned

Your value is not defined by the outcome of one election.

Coming Up Next (Final Section)

The final section will include:

- Final checklists
- Quick reference guides
- Templates candidates can use right away

Section 15: Final Checklists & Ready-to-Use Tools

Why Checklists Matter

Running for office involves many steps. Checklists help you:

- Stay organized
- Avoid missed deadlines
- Reduce stress
- Feel confident you're doing things right

Use these tools as guides, not pressure. If you fall behind, you can always regroup.

Checklist 1: Before You File

- Confirm eligibility for the office
 - Talk with family and employer about time commitment
 - Learn the role and responsibilities of the office
 - Identify key community issues to listen for
 - Review important dates with the Clerk or Secretary of State
-

Judicial Candidate Sidebar

Judicial candidates should also:

- Review the [Code of Judicial Conduct](#)
 - Identify a treasurer early
 - Understand fundraising restrictions
 - Plan for strict separation from campaign finances
-

Checklist 2: Campaign Setup (Correct Order)

- Establish your campaign committee
- Choose a committee name
- Appoint a treasurer
- Obtain an EIN (recommended)
- Open a campaign bank account
- Register in CFIS
- File for office

 **Do not raise or spend money until all steps above are complete.**

Checklist 3: CFIS & Reporting

- Confirm CFIS login works
 - Verify candidate and committee are linked
 - Know your reporting schedule
 - File reports on time
 - File “No Activity” reports if needed
 - Review reports before submission
-

Judicial Candidate Sidebar

- Let the treasurer handle CFIS
 - Avoid reviewing donor details
 - Keep distance from fundraising activity
-

Checklist 4: Fundraising Basics

- Understand contribution limits
 - Collect required donor information
 - Deposit funds promptly
 - Track all expenses
 - Thank donors appropriately
 - Avoid cash when possible
-

Checklist 5: Community Outreach & Messaging

- Meet with community groups
 - Listen before speaking
 - Identify common themes
 - Develop a clear core message
 - Practice your stump speech
 - Practice your elevator speech
-

Judicial Candidate Sidebar

- Avoid promises or issue positions
 - Focus on fairness and integrity
 - Keep messaging neutral and professional
-

Checklist 6: Campaign Materials

- Confirm disclaimer language
 - Keep design simple and readable
 - Order small quantities first
 - Track inventory
 - Follow sign placement rules
 - Use local or union printers when possible
-

Checklist 7: Weekly Campaign Health Check

Once a week, ask:

- Are reports up to date?
- Is the treasurer supported?
- Are we listening to the community?
- Am I taking care of myself?

Adjust as needed.

Template: Simple Elevator Speech

“Hi, my name is _____. I’m running for _____ because I believe our community deserves _____.”

Template: Simple Stump Speech Outline

1. Introduction
2. Why I’m running

3. What I've heard from the community
 4. What I care about
 5. Thank you and closing
-

Judicial Candidate Sidebar

Judicial stump speeches should:

- Focus on experience and values
 - Avoid promises or legal positions
 - Emphasize fairness and respect for the law
-

When to Ask for Help

Ask for help if:

- You are unsure about compliance
- A report feels confusing
- A situation feels ethically unclear

Good sources include:

- Your treasurer
- The Secretary of State
- The County Clerk
- Trusted mentors
- Democratic Party of Valencia County info@valenciademocrats.org

Asking early prevents problems later.

Final Reminder

You do not have to be perfect to run for office.

You need to be:

- Honest
- Willing to learn
- Respectful of the law
- Grounded in your community

Local leadership starts with showing up.

Closing Thought

Running for office is an act of service.

Whether you win or lose, stepping forward matters. Your voice matters. Your community matters.

Thank you for being willing to serve.