

# Campaign Planning: The Lay of the Land

Version 1.0



# Campaign Planning: The Lay of the Land

To create your strategic path to victory, start with the “lay of the land”— the ins and outs of the district, the candidates, the community, and this particular election cycle.

## Analyze your district

Use the following list of questions as a starting point to understand what types of factors and background information you need to create your strategy. This is not a comprehensive list of all questions that you need to research and answer, and they may not all apply to your district and race. Think about what other questions you need to answer for your particular district and campaign.

### The district

- What is the district’s geography and make-up?
  - Is it urban, rural, suburban, exurban, or a mix?
  - Does it have unique geological or environmental features such as rivers, mountains, forest, or coast?
  - Does it have farmland, dense neighborhoods, suburban or exurban sprawl?
  - Does it have prominent human-made features, such as trains, robust public transportation, solar or wind farms?
  - Does it border another state, a body of water, or other districts?
  - Are there any other unique features to this district?
  - Are there areas that are easily walkable for canvassing and others where voters are much farther apart and require driving between them?
  - Are there many multi-unit apartment buildings or single family homes?
- What is the district’s economy?
  - Are there dominant businesses, sectors, or industries?
  - Is there a university, hospital, or prison or other major or dominant employer or industry?
  - If it’s a mix, what is the mix?
- What is the district’s political lean? Has it changed significantly in the most recent redistricting? Has the party registration or turnout changed in recent years? Is it a swing district?

### Demographics

- What are the actual demographics of the district’s residents?
  - Race, gender, socioeconomic level, age, renters vs. homeowners, education levels, non-English speakers, families with school-age children, seniors, immigrants?
  - What are the district’s education levels?

## Voters

- How many people are registered to vote in the district?
- What party do they belong to? (if voters register by party in your state)
- What is voter turnout typically like in the type of election you are running—primary, general, Presidential vs. non-Presidential year?
- How many candidates ran in the last election for this particular position?
- How many votes did they receive?
- If your candidate is an incumbent, did they have an opponent last time? What was their margin of victory?
- If the district is different because of redistricting, what changes are there in terms of voter demographics, geography, party make-up? In other words, did your district gain more voters in your candidate's party? Or did it lose them? Did the district change geographically, did it become older or younger? Were there other changes?

## Election and political history

- What is the district's political history?
  - Who has served in this district in the last several years? What party were they?
  - Were the last several elections competitive?
  - What was the voter turnout in the last 2-3 elections?
  - What were the percentage of votes by party?
  - Have third party candidates run in this district? How did they do?
- How much do races in this district typically cost?
- Are there campaign contribution limits? What are they?
- Who are the major contributors to state legislative campaigns (or this level campaign) in this district or state? e.g. the political parties and their entities, other elected officials, particular issue or trade PACs, unions, or other prominent donors?

## Leaders and influencers

- Who are the movers and shakers in your district, the leaders or figures whose voice and opinion carry weight?
- Whose endorsements are important?
- Who can actually turn out votes? Elected officials, the party, organizations?
- Which organizations and entities tend to get involved in state legislative campaigns like this one, providing doorknocking and phonebanking volunteers, contacting their members, running voter registration drives, or other election activities? e.g. issue advocacy groups, labor unions, neighborhood groups.

### **What is unique about your candidate?**

- How is she known in the community? /Is she known in the community?
- What are her strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats? (SWOT)
- Where and how does she show up online? What's her social media presence?
- What's her voting record as a citizen voter? If she's an incumbent, what votes has she publicly taken?
- Is there any publicly available information that could come up that she may need to address, such as criminal background, unpaid taxes or child support, lawsuits, debt, liens, or foreclosure? (These aren't necessarily reasons to not run, but opponents and the media will find these things out. That's why it's important to know about them and be ready to talk about them, rather than be blindsided if someone else raises them.)

### **What about her opponent(s)?**

- How are they known in the community? *Are they known in the community?*
- What are their strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats? (SWOT)
- Where and how do they show up online? What's their social media presence?
- What's their voting record—as citizen voters and if incumbents, what votes have they publicly taken?
- Is there any publicly available information that could come up, such as past votes or lawsuits?

### **Is there anything else unique about your candidate, this district, and/or this election that could impact your campaign plan and strategy?**