COLLECTION II — CIVIC PARTICIPATION & VOTING

How to Run for Local Office

An introductory guide to candidacy requirements, petitioning, and campaign basics in New York State.

By Daniel P. Devine · Civest Sphere · November 2026

Why run

Local offices like town board, county legislature, school board and village trustee shape daily life, and many races are decided by a few hundred votes. Some go uncontested. Running is one of the most direct ways to put the 12 Points into practice.

1. Choose an office and check eligibility

Requirements vary by office, but generally you must be a registered voter, meet a minimum age, and live in the district you want to represent. School board candidates file with the school district clerk, not the Board of Elections, and school elections are held in May.

2. Learn the ballot access rules

Most candidates for town, county and state office get on the ballot by **petitioning**:

- **Designating petitions** put you in a party's primary. Signers must be enrolled members of that party who live in the district.
- **Independent nominating petitions** put you on the November ballot on an independent line. They're filed later in the year and any registered voter in the district can sign.

The number of signatures and the filing windows are set by state Election Law and published each year in your county Board of Elections' political calendar. Gather more signatures than required, because some are usually challenged and thrown out.

3. Set up your campaign properly

- Form a campaign committee and register it with the NY State Board of Elections before you raise or spend money.
- Open a separate bank account for the campaign.
- File campaign finance disclosure reports on schedule.
- Candidates for State Senate, Assembly and statewide office may qualify for the state's Public Campaign Finance Program, which matches small contributions from residents.

4. Build your campaign

- **Talk to voters.** Door-knocking remains the most effective tactic in local races.
- **Recruit volunteers.** Friends, neighbors and civic groups.
- **Know your numbers.** Find out how many people voted in this race last time, and how many votes you'll need.
- **Talk to local party committees and civic groups** about endorsements.

5. Mind the calendar

Petitioning for June primaries usually starts in late winter. Get the official political calendar from your county Board of Elections early, and work backward from the filing deadlines.

This guide is general information, not legal advice. Election Law is technical: confirm every requirement with your county Board of Elections.

OFFICIAL SOURCES

- NY State Board of Elections — Candidate Information (https://elections.ny.gov)
- NY State Public Campaign Finance Board (https://pcfb.ny.gov)

Last reviewed November 2026. This guide is general information, not legal advice. Laws, deadlines and procedures change, so confirm details with the official source before you act.

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