

How to Run for Local Office

The following information is provided for general reference and does not constitute legal advice. Interested parties should refer to the Florida Statutes and applicable case law.

Who is a candidate? A candidate is anyone interested in running for office who seeks to appear on the ballot or to receive write-in votes. Candidates collect campaign contributions to pay for campaign expenditures and appoint a person or themselves to serve as their treasurer of campaign funds. Candidates must first file to run for office, then qualify to seek nomination or election to office.

Can I announce that I want to run for office before filing any paperwork? You may announce your intention to become a candidate before filing any paperwork. However, you cannot open a campaign bank account, collect contributions, make expenditures, or collect petitions until you officially file to run for office.

How do I file to become a candidate? First, you must file the Appointment of Campaign Treasurer and Designation of Campaign Depository (Form DS-DE 9). This form lists your candidate information, including the office you seek, your political party affiliation (as appropriate), the bank that will hold your campaign account, and the name of your campaign treasurer. Upon filing this form, you become a filed candidate. You may then open a campaign account, collect contributions, make expenditures, and collect petitions.

Next, you must file the Statement of Candidate (Form DS-DE 84) within 10 days of filing Form DS-DE 9. This form affirms you have read and understand Florida campaign finance laws and rules. If you are seeking judicial office, you must also file the Statement of Candidate for Judicial Office (Form DS-DE 83) within 10 days. This form affirms you have read and understand the requirements of the Florida Code of Judicial Conduct.

You may file all of the initial forms at the same time.

Where do I file forms and documents? Candidates for local offices in Gadsden County file with the Supervisor of Elections:

Shirley Green Knight, Supervisor of Elections
16 South Madison Street
P O Box 186
Quincy, FL 32353
Phone: (850) 627-9910
Email: info@gadsdensoe.com

Candidates for federal, statewide, and multi-county offices file with the Division of Elections:

Division of Elections
RA Gray Building, Room 316
500 South Bronough Street
Tallahassee, FL 32399-0250
Phone: (850) 245-6200

I filed to run for office; now what happens? Filing to run is only the first step. After you become a candidate, you must submit regular campaign finance reports. You also must qualify during the qualifying period to seek nomination or election.

What is qualifying? Candidates must qualify to seek nomination or election to office. During qualifying, you will finalize ballot readiness by submitting required forms and fees. Please visit www.gadsdensoe.com for more information about specific qualifying requirements. Candidates may submit qualifying forms during the pre-qualifying period, 14 days before the start of qualifying. You must complete the qualifying process by noon on the last day of the qualifying period. If you fail to qualify, your candidacy will end and you will not make the ballot.

Does it cost anything to qualify? It depends on the method used to qualify. You may pay a qualifying fee, which is determined by the office you are seeking. If you are running for office with a party affiliation, there is a party assessment fee you must pay as well. You can waive qualifying fees by gathering the signatures of voters on candidate petitions. There are no fees to qualify as a write-in candidate.

However, as a write-in candidate your name will not appear on the ballot. Instead, there will be a blank space for voters to write your name.

What is the candidate petition process?

1. Gather petitions. To waive qualifying fees, you may gather a minimum number of petition forms signed by voters. The number depends on which office you are seeking. Voters must live within the district for your office to sign your petitions, except after the census in a year of apportionment.
2. Submit petitions. Submit your petitions to the Supervisor of Elections for verification. Our office will verify that your petitions are complete and correct. If a petition form contains incorrect information or it is not complete, it will not count towards qualifying. The deadline to submit petitions for verification is noon, 28 days before the start of qualifying. **You should submit your candidate petitions well in advance of the deadline.**
3. Pay verification fees. You must pay a fee of \$0.10 per petition to the Supervisor of Elections for verification. The fee is due at the time you submit your petitions. If you are unable to pay the petitions fee, you may file an Affidavit of Undue Burden (Form DS-DE 19A).

What are campaign finance reports? Campaign finance reports list any contributions you collect and expenditures you make as a candidate. You must submit these reports on a continuing basis from the time you file to run for office until your candidacy ends. Campaign finance reports are public records and available to view on www.gadsdensoe.com.

When are reports due? State law sets a strict schedule of due dates for campaign finance reports. Initially, reports are due monthly. Closer to the election, reports are due biweekly after the qualifying period, and then weekly just before the election. When your campaign ends, you must file a final termination report. This report shows how you disposed of any remaining campaign funds. It is due 90 days after the date your candidacy ends.

What happens if I file reports late? You may be fined if you file a late report. Fines must be paid using your personal funds, not campaign funds. These fines

can become expensive. The amounts are based on how late the report was filed and the amount of funds reported.

How do I file my reports? You must file campaign finance reports through the online system on www.gadsdensoe.com. Our office will issue your credentials to access the online system after you file to run for office.

You must enter any contributions or expenditures that fall within the reporting period. You must submit a waiver if you have no contributions or expenditures during a reporting period.

What if my reports are incomplete or contain errors? You are responsible for filing complete and accurate campaign finance reports in compliance with all election laws. If your campaign finance report is incomplete, or contains errors, our office will notify you of the issue. You will then need to file an amended report fixing any issues.

How can I avoid reporting errors? If you have any questions, contact our office to ask for assistance.

- File reports on time. Begin working on reports early and keep track of deadlines.
- Gather required information from all contributors, including name, address, and occupation. List accurate descriptions of the occupation when required.
- List each individual contributor separately.
- Know the contribution limit per contributor per election. Do not accept contributions which exceed the limit.
- Maintain a positive campaign account balance. Total contributions must exceed total expenditures.
- Use campaign funds directly from the campaign account to make purchases. Be careful when using petty cash or reimbursements.