

So you're thinking of standing up for Green principles by running for elected office. Great! But you want to know how the process works. All you ever hear about candidates qualifying for the ballot involves collecting lots of signatures on petitions, or paying \$100 fees. What do you actually have to do to become a Green Party candidate?

First, be a Green: Contact the Green Party of Michigan . . . the state party (especially the Elections Coördinator) and the local in your area – or, in places where there's no local yet, the County Coördinator. Find out who is in charge of nominating candidates for the office you want to run for, and when and where that will happen: if it's a local office (up to the county level, generally) nomination will probably be done at a county caucus; otherwise, a Congressional-district caucus, the statewide convention, or the State Central Committee will make the decision.

But what about the primary? What about those petitions? Well, as a "minor party" under state law, GPMI isn't allowed to take part in (or share in the publicity of) the primary. This makes it harder for Green candidates in some ways – sometimes we're not seen as being quite as *official*, somehow, as candidates for the Big Two parties – but there are a few advantages. One benefit to the caucus/convention method is that we don't have to accept as a nominee just anyone who collects enough signatures or pays \$100. If you want to run as a Green in Michigan, you have to convince other Greens you're worth nominating – worth more than **NOTA (None Of The Above)**, at least.

If you're not a member of the Green Party already, please join us! You can even be a member of another political party, as long as you agree to support Green values: the Four Pillars and/or the Ten Key Values. But the more involved you are in Green activities, the better chance you have of being accepted by other Greens as the party's nominee for your desired office.

Join your friendly neighborhood Greens at local meetings and actions, too. Local Greens may have some experience with campaigning under the Sign of the Sunflower – and some other resources you can also benefit from, not least a bunch of supporters committed to the same principles you are. They may be able to help you plan ways to embody and support those principles as a candidate. And, if they can't help with it themselves, they can get help from the state party. GPMI may not have lot of money to put where its mouth is on campaign-finance reform: we accept no corporate or PAC donations, we raise only small donations, and we're completely transparent about donors. But there are many benefits of running as a party . . . such as a co-ordinated campaign with shared literature, teaming up to go door to door, and a consistent message founded on a common platform.

If you're running for an office nominated at the state level, you'll be asked to fill out a questionnaire, and probably to meet with a nominations committee. Local candidates may face the same steps in what amounts to an interview for the job of Green Party candidate – depending on what the local party decides; Greens are decentralized. A nominations committee will recommend to the appropriate caucus or the convention that the assembled members nominate you – or not.

Contact your county and/or local clerk: The party can make you its nominee, but it can't make you a candidate. For that, you go to City Hall – or the County Building – or the Bureau of Elections.

Unless you are running for an office serving constituents in two or more counties (including statewide offices), the county clerk is your "filing official" – the person who gets all your paperwork, including all campaign-finance reports. So it is important to make contact, and get all the information you can to stay in contact: mailing address, phone, fax, e-mail, Web site, office hours, and the name of the particular person at the clerk's office who deals with elections.

Your county clerk should have all the forms and manuals you need to register as an official candidate. City, township, and village clerks may have them, too. And most of them are also available in Adobe Acrobat format on the Bureau of Elections Web site:

**[http://www.michigan.gov/sos/
0,1607,7-127-1633_11473---,00.html](http://www.michigan.gov/sos/0,1607,7-127-1633_11473---,00.html)**

NOTE: When you get forms and manuals, make sure they're the latest versions; these documents get updated at irregular intervals.

Should You Run?

Questions to ask yourself:

- What are the specific changes you want to make in your community?
- Is running for this office the best way to make these changes? What powers does a person in this office have to create these changes? How else could you work toward your objective?
- Are you the best person for the job? Is yours the face you want on your local Green Party? Is it the face the local wants for itself?
- Do you really want the job?
- Are you absolutely healthy and sane? (You will be under tremendous pressure.)
- Does your partner think it's a FANTASTIC idea? (Don't even think about running if the answer to this is not "yes".)
- Do you have the support of a Green Party local?

— from "How to Run a Political Campaign",
Massachusetts Green Party, June 2001.

The form you need to pay most attention to right away is the Statement of Organization. This one-page form is what you file to officially declare your campaign committee. More about it below.

Got the forms and manuals? Don't leave yet. The clerk's office has more information you want. Find out who else is running for your chosen office, and ask if anyone else is making noises as though they might run. Find out what offices are to be elected this year – there's the general election in November; the major-party primaries in August; and school, city, and village elections at various times in the year. Ask if there are any recall drives, efforts to put referendum or initiative questions on ballots, or special elections coming in your area. Get an election timetable with deadlines for filing as a candidate, registering to vote, voting absentee, and reporting campaign finances.

And, speaking of campaign-finance reporting, ask about copies of the state's reporting software. (If you're running for Congress – US Senator or US Representative – you'd use the Federal Election Commission's program instead, to report to them.)

Other less-mandatory but more useful information you can often get at a clerk's office includes population, numbers of registered voters, and demographic data for the cities, villages, townships, and precincts in your county. Some of that is available from the Census Bureau's Web site as well, but it may be handier to ask the clerk – and it can be just as free. Maps showing the precincts in the area you want to be elected to serve will probably not be free, but will be very useful. Polling places may be shown and/or listed on the maps; if not, you need to get these, too.

And then there is the Qualified Voter File or QVF. That's the statewide database of everyone who is or has been registered to vote, with a history of when they voted (in which elections) and when they voted absentee. It has some basic demographic information: gender and year (but not date) of birth. Each county, city, township, or village can offer you the QVF file for its own jurisdiction – at a price related to their costs . . . but they may put their own figure on that cost, so it may not hurt to shop around a bit. The QVF can be a very valuable tool for a campaign; it can be turned into mailing labels, or a walking list for your door-to-door campaigning, or many other things.

NOTE: Some places may only offer the information on who voted, and who voted absentee, as a separate file for each election – and charge you separately. So be sure to check this . . . and go with some idea of what voting-history information you want, how much you can afford, and how much time and effort you have available to crunch the data.

Your Green friends may well have some, perhaps even most, of this information. On the other hand, it can be very important to be on good terms with your filing official – going to the clerk's office and asking intelligent questions usually can't hurt.

Create and register your campaign committee: The step that officially registers your candidate committee (for anything but Congress or President) is turning in a Candidate Committee Statement of Organization form. Your filing official should have copies – or, again, you can find one via the Bureau of Elections "Publications and Forms" Web page:

[http://www.michigan.gov/sos/
0,1607,7-127-1633_11473---,00.html](http://www.michigan.gov/sos/0,1607,7-127-1633_11473---,00.html)

This should be done within ten days after you form the committee – and *that* must happen within ten days after the first time you announce your candidacy, or spend or accept money for it. To complete the form, you need the following vital information:

- * A name for the committee. Include your name and the office you're running for; that way, even the disclaimer (the "Paid for by" part) will promote your candidacy. The office – and the district number, if any – also go on the form.
- * You also have to name the financial institution or "depository" where the committee's money will be deposited and list its address and phone number.
- * The name, address, and phone number of the campaign's "depository" – the bank, savings and loan, or credit union where you'll deposit donations to the campaign. Contributions would go into (and expenditures would come out of) an account there, in the campaign's name, separate from any accounts you have.
- * Most financial institutions will require an employer identification number (EIN) to open a campaign account. EINs come from the IRS – and you can get one on-line at:
[http://www.irs.gov/businesses/small/
article/0,,id=102767,00.html](http://www.irs.gov/businesses/small/article/0,,id=102767,00.html)
or call 800-829-4933 between 7am and 10pm.
- * A treasurer for the committee. It can be you, but if it's someone else you need to fill in their name, address, and phone number.
- * A record-keeper . . . if it's not the treasurer. (Even if it's you.)

You can change any or all of these details later – by filing another Statement of Organization with the changes marked on it.

IMPORTANT: Check the box on the form asking for a waiver of campaign-finance reporting requirements. That way, you won't have to file campaign-finance reports until and unless you reach \$1,000 in spending or funds raised. But you do still have to keep track of both contributions and expenses in case you cross the \$1,000 threshold. And even if you have a waiver, you need to report "late contributions" of \$200 or more within the last 15 days before an election.

For candidates for Congress (House or Senate), the threshold is \$5,000 and the forms come from (and go to) the FEC. Their candidate FAQ page is:
www.fec.gov/ans/answers_candidate.shtml
It has links to Statement of Candidacy Form 2, which you file before Statement of Organization Form 1(!).

Should You Run?

Forming your exploratory committee:

You're not going to run for office alone – so don't *decide* to run for office alone. Involve others in that decision – the people you'll be relying on to work on the campaign if you run. A good way to do this is to host a small gathering in your home, pitch the idea, and see what kind of support you get.

It's very important to get the right people at this meeting. Don't just invite friends. Invite people who will be critical of the idea. And make sure that someone present has managed a campaign before.

What you're listening for: If they want you to run, the people at this "exploratory committee" meeting should ask you very tough questions, be very impressed with your answers, and express their enthusiasm about your campaign without hesitation. As the prospective candidate, you will want to hear this. Be very careful not to convince yourself that you hear this if you don't. Ask someone you trust if they are hearing the same things you are.

What you may hear: The people in the room like you. If they come to the meeting, it's because they care enough about you to give a little of their time. They don't want to hurt your feelings. So when they voice concerns, assume their reservations are even bigger than they say. Listen for hesitation and doubt in people's voices. What they may want to say is that they don't think you should run.

Also be aware that people will feel flattered to have been invited to this kind of "inner circle" meeting. Some will advise you to run because it will make them feel important to be part of your campaign. The support you want is the kind that comes from a shared commitment to the goals of the campaign, not to glory – yours or anyone else's.

Who comes to the meeting?: If someone isn't at the meeting, it's probably safe to say they don't think your candidacy is worth their while. But don't assume that, if people come, they *do* support you.

A rule of organizing is that only about half of the people that commit to something will actually come through. Things happen in people's lives, and some people you are counting on *will* drop off the campaign. Make sure you aren't relying on too few people to get this big job done.

So, before people leave, *ask* them if they think you should run, yes or no. And ask if they're willing to make a sizeable commitment to your campaign.

— adapted from "How to Run a Political Campaign", *Massachusetts Green Party*, June 2001.

Prepare to be a nominee: Think about who can and will and might help you, and who can and will and might vote for you. What groups (and constituencies) do you belong to? With whom do you share residency/hometown, interests, hobbies, etc.? Think also about who your opponents' likely supporters are.

This kind of thinking feeds into planning a campaign. With it, you can identify key issues in your race, plan campaign activities around schedules of events in the district, consider different ways to reach your voters – and how much each method may cost in money, materials, and volunteer time. Studies show that it can take up to seven contacts with a candidate's name to have it "stick" in the mind of voters; word of mouth, ads, literature, speaking engagements, personal contact, and door-to-door volunteers can all be crucial to your becoming known to the public.

But don't just plan – start campaigning . . . if you haven't already. Talk with friends and acquaintances, and community groups, and the folks at the coffee shop and the greasy spoon and the laundromat. Attend public meetings on issues related to your target office. Talk about the three most important issues in your race. Get them into your conversations and your stump speeches – early and often, as the saying goes. You don't need to mention *only* these issues, but you should focus on them . . . so that you become identified with them.

And speaking of meetings, you need to meet with Greens – now that you're a candidate, they're the ones to decide whether or not you're a nominee.

Easy being Green – on the ballot: Keep track of the nomination process for your desired office. If it's done at a local caucus, know when and where that is, what the rules and procedures are, and what you have to do or say or turn in by what date. If you need help with this, contact me, Elections Coördinator John Anthony La Pietra (info below).

If your race is for a multi-county office or there is no local caucus for your county or district, come to the state nominating convention. It's easier for people to pick you over NOTA if they see you – and know you're somebody.

By the time you get to a convention or caucus, you should already have faced questions about you, your views, your campaign plans, and a lot more. Prepare to answer questions again – your fellow Michigan Greens tend to want to know about their candidates.

If/when you are approved as a GPMI nominee (by consensus or a 2/3 majority), you need to sign another form – the Affidavit of Identity – to show you accept the nomination. The party has until the end of the next business day after the convention or caucus to file this and other documentation with your county clerk (or the Bureau of Elections). And the Affidavit must be notarized – so ask the people organizing the caucus to be sure there will be a notary there . . . or, if that's impossible, find out if your bank has a notary. Better yet, pick up your own

GPMI Candidate Questionnaire

approved by the State Central Committee

The following is a set of questions for everyone seeking nomination by GPMI. We are looking for prepared and articulate candidates who share and understand the values of the Green Party.

A simple text reply, in the form of a text file if possible, should be provided to the GPMI nominations committee (the body organizing the nominating convention or caucus) a week or more before the meeting at which you will seek nomination. Your reply will be circulated within the Green Party and printed copies will be distributed to all voting members at the nominating meeting.

Please use the first line for your full legal name, the address at which you reside, your date of birth, and the office for which you wish to be nominated.

Please provide the names and contact information for three references who have known you for at least three years.

Are you a member of GPMI and, if so, when did you join and why?

What political activities and organizations (parties) have you been involved with recently?

Have you run for office before? If so, when and for what office?

Are you a qualified elector of the district in which you want to run? What is the name and number of the precinct in which you vote (in November general elections)?

When did you file to create a candidate committee with the Michigan Secretary of State or county clerk (as required by Michigan election law)?

Please describe the campaign organization you already have, and how you hope to improve it.

Most candidates come up with some sort of "campaign biography," from a few sentences to a few paragraphs explaining briefly who the candidate is. What's your short bio?

Please say something about your understanding of the four pillars or the ten key values of the green movement, and how they will apply to the campaign issues in your area.

Will you pledge to run a financially clean campaign – no corporate donations, no PAC money, full compliance with laws about candidate committees and record-keeping?

Are you agreeable to having "Green Party of Michigan" and "www.migreens.org" appear prominently on all your campaign literature, lawn signs, buttons, etc.?

Will all your campaign literature, lawn signs, buttons, etc. be produced at a union print shop and have the union bug displayed or, if produced by donated labor, display the phrase "labor donated"? If not, please explain.

Will you include a GPMI membership form with your standard campaign literature?

Is there is any portion of the GPMI Platform with which you disagree, and if so, how will you handle questions about these issues during your campaign?

copy of the Affidavit ahead of time from your Clerk, and bring it to the convention all ready to be notarized. The chair and/or the secretary of the caucus needs to keep a copy of the Affidavit, too.

There. That's it. It's official. You're the Green Party of Michigan's candidate for Stormwater Board Commissioner, District 3. (In fact, it's so official that, once the paperwork is in, you can't withdraw.)

Non-partisan races and special elections:

Maybe the Stormwater Board is elected on a non-partisan basis. In that case, some of the previous section can be ignored; you don't need official Green Party approval to run if you're not running as a Green (unless you're running for a seat on the Michigan Supreme Court). Of course, you can still ask for support from your fellow Michigan Greens – and you're likely to get it if your campaign promotes your Green values and positions. We do, after all, believe in grassroots democracy. (National-party rules may not count you as an elected Green for all purposes . . . but we will.)

A different special case is the special election – usually used to fill a vacancy caused by death or resignation. If the office in question is partisan, the special election will be, too; the big difference is the time frame – which state law generally keeps quite short once the election is called. Because of the compressed schedule for special elections, the power to nominate rests with the State Central Committee, which will probably interview you and decide whether to nominate you.

If, after reading all this, you're still interested in running for office as a Green, please contact me right away. I can be reached at 269-781-9478 (or e-mailed at jalp@triton.net). If you read all this, understood a bunch of it, and are still interested – but **not** in being a candidate – GPMI still needs you . . . to manage someone else's campaign, to help co-ordinate the statewide campaign, and for lots of other tasks. ☐

Thanks to Pete Schermerhorn for his help in getting the facts straight

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