



Take Action: Run a Feminist Student Government Campaign

Once you've made the commitment to run – or to help another feminist student run – for a position in student government, it's time to get prepared! You don't want to invest your time and resources in a campaign that is ineffective. You'll need to carefully examine the campaign rules and policies on your campus, winning messages from successful campaigns by past candidates, student communities where you expect support, and the number of votes needed to win. With a strong campaign plan and campaign team, you'll be unbeatable at the polls!

Understanding the System

Every campus has its own set of rules and policies regarding student government elections. Typically, candidates have to gather a set number of student signatures to qualify to be on the ballot. Candidates also must abide by budget rules limiting the amount and type of money that can be spent on everything from advertising to campaign materials. There can also be other necessary qualifications for candidates, such as GPA or level of enrollment. Check with your school's Office of Student Life or Student Activities for more information.

Important questions to ask:

- When are student government elections?
- Who is eligible to run?
- When must candidate applications be submitted?
- What, if any, are the budget restrictions?
- What can cause a candidate to be disqualified?

Write a Campaign Plan

Once you have an understanding of how the election process on your campus works, you'll want to develop a campaign plan to guide the campaign activities. The most important step in this process is asking and answering the question "Why am I running?" This will help you focus on your priorities and goals throughout every phase of the campaign. The next most important element of the plan is determining how many votes you'll need to win the election, which can be learned by looking at past voter participation and votes for winning candidates. Your campaign plan should also include a timeline for developing a budget, building a campaign team, developing your campaign message, and identifying potential bases of support for your candidacy.

Important questions to ask:

- Why am I running for student government?
- How many students typically vote?
- How many votes do winning candidates typically receive?
- How much time do I have before campaigns kick off?
- How much time do I have before the election?

Determine Your Budget

After determining the budget guidelines for campaigns on your campus, you'll need to break down your budget into major categories of expenses. These categories include: advertising (newspaper ads, flyers, posters, sign boards, etc.), promotional materials (buttons, stickers, t-shirts, etc.), campaign materials (pens, paper, office equipment, etc.), and special expenses (for any special events or programs you're planning as part of the campaign). You'll also need to write a time table for spending your money. You don't want to run out of money with two weeks left in the campaign!

Important questions to ask:

- How much money do I want to spend on different campaign needs?
- How much money will I require each week for these needs?
- How much extra money should I set aside for unforeseen expenses in the last week of the campaign?

Build Your Campaign Team

Whether you have fully defined campaign team roles or a small informal group of supporters, you're going to need help winning the election. Pick one or two close allies whose opinions you trust to serve as your campaign manager(s). Turn to them for advice on spending money, setting campaign priorities, developing your campaign themes, and other important questions. Next, develop a core group of supporters who can either take on formal roles, such as treasurer or communications director, or informal roles to help you reach the voters. Think strategically about who can help you build a coalition of voters. Enlist the help of people who will give you access to groups to which you would not otherwise have access—for example, RAs, athletic team members, departmental organization leaders, etc.

Important questions to ask:

- Who do I typically rely on for support? Are they willing to support my campaign?
- Who are the most reliable activists involved in the same organizations as I am?
- Who has experience working on student government campaigns?
- Who will help connect me to other student organizations with similar priorities?



Set Your Theme and Message

If you have made the decision to run a feminist student government campaign, you already know some of the important reasons you are needed in office. It is time to turn those reasons into core campaign themes and messages to explain your candidacy to student voters. Your campaign theme should tell voters why you are the best person for the job, and your message is a set of facts that reinforce your theme. Campaign messages should be clear, concise, and consistent, and should highlight the differences between you and your opponents. Consider feminist and/or other progressive issues that have been important to students recently, but that have not received enough attention or been solved by the administration. Consider other issues that you think students would respond to strongly if only they knew about them – be sure to test these ideas first with your supporters.

Important questions to ask:

- Which feminist issues are the most important to our student body? Which ones have resonated the most in the past? Which ones will resonate if students are given more information?
- What are the similarities between my core issues and messages in past winning campaigns? Were the promises in these campaigns delivered? If so, how do I add to them? If not, how do I convince voters they will be this year?
- What are the most important issues for my potential bases of support? Which organizations have missions that align with my principles, but have not been heard/supported by student government or the administration in the past?
- How can I spread my messages in a fun, engaging way? What is capturing students' attention these days?

Identify and Reach Out to Potential Allies

Every winning campaign depends on allies. Make a list of all the student organizations and communities with which you and your supporters are involved. Next list any other organizations whose missions are similar to your priorities for student government (other progressive groups, women's groups, academic groups, etc.). Ask the leaders of these groups if you can make a brief presentation at their next meeting and/or if they will consider formally endorsing your candidacy. Be sure to explain your reasons for running and how they align with the group's priorities. Take time to listen to their

concerns and ideas for improving student government. If they formally support your campaign, ask if you can publicize your candidacy on their listservs or recruit volunteers from their membership. Make sure to ask members to suggest other organizations or people you should talk with as part of your voter outreach effort.

Important questions to ask:

- What organizations am I part of that will support my candidacy?
- What organizations are my friends/supporters part of that will support my candidacy?
- Which organizations have missions that align with my principles? Which of these are underrepresented in student government right now?
- Who are the influential leaders of these organizations?
- What are important ideas I need to convey in a conversation, presentation, or email to these leaders and organizations?
- If I win their support, how can they help me build on that support?

Kick Off Your Campaign

You'll want to let your friends, student group members, and potential allies know about your candidacy as soon as possible. Consider holding two kick-off events for your campaign—one informal discussion session for your supporters and potential allies; one formal campaign event that is more social and open to the entire student body. Be sure to share your most important ideas and messages first when engaging potential supporters and voters.

Important questions to ask:

- Whose support do I need most in order to run a successful campaign? (Contact these people first!)
- Who will need/want to know about my candidacy early on? (Bring these people to your first meeting.)
- What kind of kick off event will interest students I don't already know?
- What do I want to tell these students when they meet me for the first time?



In order to elect feminist leaders to your campus student government, you must reach as many student voters as possible during the campaign. The more students hear and value your candidate's message, the more students will turn out to vote for your candidate at the polls. Make sure every student has heard from your candidate before election day.

Maximize Voter Outreach Across Campus

Make voting the thing to do

- Table for your candidate in active campus locations with campaign literature. Be sure to include the date, time, and location of student elections on all materials.
- Create a line of signs with one word per sign, such as “Give-Women-A-Voice” so people driving or walking by will have to slow down and read them. Have other volunteers pass out palm cards with your candidate's goals and election information.

Give Students Many Chances to Hear From Your Candidate

Bring your candidate's message directly to students whenever possible

- Ask professors if you can make announcements about your candidate and the upcoming elections in their classes. Be sure to discuss your candidate's top priorities for student government and how they will help all students.
- Organize teams of students to walk door to door in every dorm on campus with campaign literature. For students who are not home, leave a flyer. Make sure the materials also tell them who to contact for more information and when and where they can vote.

Campaign on campus in visible, highly trafficked areas of campus

- Distribute campaign literature and announce campaign events over listservs to bring more people to your campaign activities.
- Set up a table with your candidate on your college green or main walk at a regular time every day or week.
- Leave candidate and election information at popular stops for students such as libraries, coffee shops, students health center, the bookstore, laundromats, etc.

Connect campaigning to special events

- Attend campus wide events to hand out campaign literature and recruit volunteers. Examples include sporting events, concerts, and festivals.

Use the Press to Reach More People

Submit a **letter to the editor** on the importance of your candidate's goals to all students on your campus. Call your FMF Campus Organizer to get a sample letter.

Submit **press releases** to your local and campus media about your campaign activities. Include information about the problems on campus your candidate plans to address and how she will address them.

Create a **Public Service Announcement** for your campus radio or TV station. Include information about one of your candidate's main goals — such as increasing the number of tenured women faculty and how that will improve campus academics. Call your FMF Campus Organizer to get a sample script.

Celebrate Your Candidate's Ideas

- Host social events where students can not only learn about your candidate's ideas, but also be entertained and hang out with other students.
- Invite campus and local celebrities (student body president, school mascot, local band) to join your campaign events. Keep events upbeat and brief.

Places to Outreach to Voters

- Campus quad, mall, or green
- Cafeterias and coffee shops
- Sporting events
- Campus concerts or other special events
- Your classrooms
- Online (websites and listservs)
- Computer labs and libraries
- Dorm lobbies
- Greek Life—progressive sororities and fraternities