

Reaching Gender Parity in North Carolina: Best Practices in Female Political Candidate Recruitment

Prepared for: Lillian's List of North Carolina

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Executive Summary

Policy Question: What are the most effective strategies for recruiting women to run for public office in North Carolina?

Client: Lillian's List of North Carolina

Introduction:

Lillian's List has expanded its commitment and role in targeting and recruiting female candidates by creating a new committee entitled "Candidate Recruitment and Training Committee". Given this expansion, I have researched academic studies on recruitment efforts and tested those theories and ideas with local recruiters, Lillian's List Board Members, successful and unsuccessful candidates, and prospects who declined to run. Through my interviews, I sought feedback on the effectiveness of various recruitment strategies and solicited new ideas from interviewees.

Background:

Women represent over 50 percent of the US population, but only 20 percent of the US Congress (US Census Bureau 2011, Center for American Women and Politics 2015). In North Carolina currently 44 counties have no female representation on the Board of County Commissioners (McLennan 2015 p. 7). The lack of female representation in elected office is troubling for a variety of reasons: it sends a message to young women that power and leadership are reserved for men, it deprives our nation of the talents and expertise of many women, and it deprives the political process of the cooperative and consensus building approach to leadership that women often take. (Rinehart 1991, Kathlene 1994, Fox and Schuhmann 1999).

Discussion and Recommendations:

Through extensive research and interviews with Lillian's List Board Members, recruiters, women who were recruited for office and ran, and women who were recruited for office and did not run, I have identified 15 best practices for recruiting women to run for office. These best practices have been divided into four categories:

1. Overcoming Psychological Barriers

The first category addresses the myriad psychological barriers that prevent women from considering themselves leaders. Through trainings, encouragement and recruitment women can overcome these barriers (Lawless and Fox 2013, Preece et al 2012). Specifically, I focus on assuaging the fear of losing, assuaging the fear of being under-qualified, stimulating 'progressive ambition', and bridging the psychological gap from community servant to public servant.

2. Hunt Where the Ducks Are

Good recruitment begins with good targeting. That is why my second section focuses on effective targeting methods. Using researchers' Nicolas Pyeatt and Alixandra Yanus's analytical model, I identified North Carolina's legislative districts most hospitable to female candidates. Next, I identified the different reasons and motivations of running for office for both women and men.

Most women are not intrinsically motivated by political ambition, but rather are motivated through a relationally embedded model (Carroll and Sanbonmatsu 2013). Therefore, recruitment efforts should reflect this reality. Finally, there are specific cohorts of women more likely to serve in public office (older, without familial responsibilities, etc) and thus, targeting efforts could be improved by understanding and better targeting those demographics.

3. When Running is Not an Option

Sometimes nothing can be done or said to convince a woman to run for office. In my third section, 'When Running is Not an Option' I identified four strategies to make the best of these situations: recruit such women instead to serve in party leadership, on a local or statewide board, or to serve on the fundraising committee for candidates who ultimately run. It is also always helpful to ask these women for suggestions of other potential female candidates.

4. Creating a Long-Term, Self-Sustaining Pipeline

Finally, my last section focuses on building a candidate pipeline over the long-term. Studies show that at current rates, it will take nearly 90 years for the US to reach gender parity in elected office (Kanthak and Woon 2012). Worse, the gender gap in political ambition is actually growing so much that gender parity may be becoming less likely (Lawless and Fox 2013). The most effective way to ensure gender parity tomorrow is to engage tomorrow's leaders today. My recommendations include establishing a youth-engagement committee on Lillian's List's Board and partnering, or encouraging, Running Start (A non-profit that train's young women to run for student government in college) to expand its program in North Carolina.

