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Starting Off on the Right Foot

(Answers to Questions Frequently Asked by First-Time State, Local, and Judicial Candidates)

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• What Starts the Whole Process?

Becoming a candidate. According to the disclosure law, you become a candidate when you do one of these things: raise or spend money for your campaign; reserve space or purchase advertising to promote your candidacy; authorize someone else to do any of these activities for you; state publicly that you are seeking office; or file a declaration of candidacy.

• Once I Become a Candidate, Then What?

Within two weeks of the date you become a candidate, you must file a Personal Financial Affairs Statement* (Form F-1) and a Candidate Registration form (Form C-1) with the PDC, if required.

*An incumbent officeholder who has filed an F-1 earlier in the year does not need to file a second F-1 in the same year after becoming a candidate.

• Do I Have to File Disclosure Reports?

One of two things determines what a candidate discloses. For most candidates, it's the number of registered voters in the jurisdiction where the candidate runs for office. How much money a candidate raises or expects to raise determines what reports are filed by someone running for office in a very small jurisdiction (less than 5,000 registered voters).

File a Personal Financial Affairs Statement and campaign disclosure reports if you are:

- a state office candidate
- a county office candidate (or political subdivision that encompasses an entire county)
- a local or judicial office candidate in a jurisdiction with 5,000 or more registered voters
- a candidate who raises or expects to raise $5,000 or more in the aggregate regardless of the number of registered voters (this includes the candidate's own money)

File just a Personal Financial Affairs Statement if you are:

- a candidate for local or judicial office in a jurisdiction with 1,000 or more but less than 5,000 registered voters and you do not raise or expect to raise $5,000 or more

A candidate seeking election to an office in a jurisdiction with less than 1,000 registered voters who does not raise or expect to raise $5,000 or more does not file any reports with the Public Disclosure Commission.

• Do I Have to File Electronically?

All required PDC reports can be filed electronically. A candidate that expects to spend or actually spends $5,000 or more must E-file contribution and expenditure reports. Free E-filing software, ORCA, is available from the PDC. The PDC staff offers free ORCA training – the schedule is available at www.pdc.wa.gov/filers. Some of the training segments have been videotaped and posted on the PDC's Facebook page. NOTE: Candidates must register E-filing accounts and submit passwords to the PDC *before* sending reports.

To work properly, campaign data from the start of the campaign must be entered into the ORCA software.

For assistance with electronic filing of campaign finance reports, go to the PDC web page at www.pdc.wa.gov/filers or call toll free 1-877-601-2828.

• Where Do I Get Instructions?

Brochures, manuals, and training videos are available online at *www.pdc.wa.gov* under Filer Resources. Blank forms are also found under Filer Resources, but most candidates will electronically file their campaign reports. Contact the PDC at 360-753-1111 or toll-free at 1-877-601-2828 if you do not have Internet access. The PDC offers free compliance training; the schedule is at *www.pdc.wa.gov/filers*. Training videos are also posted on the PDC's Facebook page.

• I Suspect There's More to Reporting . . . Right?

Probably. It depends on how much you're going to raise and spend on your campaign.

If you choose Mini Reporting (limiting what you raise or spend to $5,000 and no one other than the candidate contributes more than $500), the C-1 and the F-1 are the only PDC reports you have to file. Be sure to access and carefully review the Mini Reporting manual found at http://www.pdc.wa.gov/filers.

If you're going to raise and spend over $5,000 to get elected (or less than that, but you want to accept more than $500 from a contributor), you must select the Full Reporting option. You'll be required to file frequent and detailed contribution and expenditure reports (Forms C-3 and C-4, respectively).

The PDC realizes that candidates are not always able to forecast campaign costs accurately, and may need to switch reporting options. Changing from mini to full reporting must be done by the deadline before the election and approved by the PDC staff. A candidate who needs to change from mini to full reporting must notify all opponents in writing, amend the registration, file contribution & expenditure reports from the start of the campaign, and send a letter to the PDC confirming that these steps have been completed before exceeding the mini reporting limits. The change in reporting options will be approved only if all of these steps are completed at least 30 business days before the election. The general election deadline is August 31.

The approval to change reporting options from mini to full reporting by the deadline of the election is not automatic and will only be granted under circumstances outlined in WAC 390-16-125.

• May I Serve as My Own Treasurer?

Yes. However, candidates who select Full Reporting are strongly encouraged to enlist the aid of a treasurer who has the time and energy necessary to keep detailed, accurate records and file frequent reports. Your treasurer does not need to be a professional accountant.

• When Do I Have to File Reports?

C-3 Contribution Reports: Before June 1 of the election year, candidates fill out a C-3 report for each bank deposit and file these reports with their C-4 reports. Beginning June 1, each deposit must be reported no later than the following Monday. Since contributions must be deposited within 5 business days of receipt, active campaigns will make at least one weekly deposit.

C-4 Summary Reports: This report, along with its attached schedules, summarizes the campaign's financial activity and shows itemized expenditures for a specific period. C-4s are due:

Monthly from the beginning of the campaign **through May of the election year**. If a campaign has over $200 in contributions or expenditures during a month, a C-4 report is filed by the 10th of the following month. **Starting in June of the election year** and continuing through the primary and general elections, C-4 reports are due 21 and 7 days *before* each election and on the 10th of the month *after* the month the election was held with the candidate's name on the ballot, even if there was little or no activity to report.

Specific filing dates are listed in the 2015 Key Reporting Dates for Candidates found under Filer Resources at www.pdc.wa.gov. All PDC reports are considered filed as of the postmark date or, if filed electronically, on the file transfer date.

• Where Do I File PDC Reports?

Most candidates will file reports only with the PDC. Copies of PDC reports are no longer filed with the county elections officer. City office candidates should check with the appropriate city clerk to determine if there is a local filing requirement.

• Must I Have a Separate Campaign Account?

Candidates must open a separate campaign account in a bank, credit union or savings and loan institution if they accept monetary contributions. A candidate who personally funds his/her entire campaign and accepts no contributions does not have to open a bank account. These candidates are required to make all campaign records, which may include the personal checkbook register and bank statements, available for public inspection during the eight days before the election.

• From Whom May I Accept Contributions?

Generally, contributions from individuals, corporations, unions and other organizations are permitted. Candidates subject to contribution limits have special contributor restrictions explained in the PDC's manuals. By federal law, no foreign corporations or citizens (unless they have green cards), national banks and corporations organized by authority of Congress and federal government contractors may contribute to or spend funds on behalf of U.S. candidates.

• Is There a Contribution Limit?

State law sets contribution limits on donations to candidates for:

- state executive office
- legislative office
- judicial office
- county office
- mayor*
- city council*
- school board
- Port of Seattle commissioner
- Port of Tacoma commissioner
- hospital commissioner in large districts

There are also limits on contributions given to bona fide political party and caucus political committees. See instruction manuals for details.

During the 21 days before the general election, no contributor, except the state committee of a bona fide political party, may give more than a total of $50,000 to a statewide office candidate or $5,000 to any other candidate or political committee (except for ballot measure committees). This restriction also applies to a candidate's personal funds.

Candidates must not accept contributions that exceed their respective limits.

*Some cities have adopted more restrictive contribution limits. A candidate for mayor or city council should ask the city clerk whether there are local contribution limits.

• Is There an Expenditure Limit?

Candidates who choose Mini Reporting self-impose an expenditure limit of $5,000. There are no expenditure limits for candidates who choose Full Reporting.

• Must I Identify All Contributors?

Anyone who donates monetary and in-kind contributions totaling more than $25 over the course of your campaign must be identified by name and full address. Plus, if an individual gives you more than $100 in the aggregate, you must show this person's occupation and the name, city and state of his or her employer.

• May I Be Reimbursed for the Personal Funds I Spend on My Campaign?

Reimbursements for the candidate's out-of-pocket campaign expenses must be made within three weeks or the reimbursement counts against the candidate's loan repayment limit. A candidate can be repaid up to $5,500 for primary election loans and $5,500 for general election loans. A candidate's contributions to his or her own campaign should be reported as loans in order to be eligible for repayment.

• Are There Laws Governing Political Ads?

Yes. Details are in the PDC's Political Advertising brochure or the Political Advertising section in the instruction manual.

For more information, contact PDC at

(360) 753-1111, toll-free 1-877-601-2828, pdc@pdc.wa.gov (e-mail), or visit PDC's Website (http://www.pdc.wa.gov).

Candidate information and training videos are available on the PDC's Facebook page.