

Want to Run for Office? These Boot Camps Will Teach You How

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ALEXANDRA WHITTAKER Aug 25, 2017 @ 4:15 pm

The day after Donald Trump won one of the most heated presidential elections of our time, thousands of women—many of whom had never expressed a professional interest in politics before—declared that they wanted to run for public office. In the months following, that number jumped to tens of thousands.

In the face of political tension and an increasingly polarized country, individuals have two choices: turn inward and avoid talking about sensitive issues or get in the ring. A cultural movement has emerged encouraging people to pursue the latter, not just as volunteers, organizers, and thought leaders but as elected officials too. And at the forefront that movement? Women. Organizations that train candidates to run campaigns for local offices and federal positions alike are reporting more inquiries from interested female candidates than ever before.

The number of Democratic and pro-choice hopefuls has increased particularly rapidly, as many women considered Hillary Clinton's defeat a loss for women and felt they needed to double down in order to advance women-centric and left-leaning agendas. EMILY's List, a pro-choice women's PAC, reports that more than 11,000 women in all 50 states have contacted them to inquire about the process of running, an "unprecedented" number. But women have been inspired to action on both sides of the aisle, and there are similar bipartisan and right-leaning groups taking charge, like the National Federation for Republican Women, which was not available for comment on this story but offers a leadership development program focused on empowering female Republic candidates. (For this reason, you'll see more left-of-center organizations listed below, but there are great nonpartisan options included as well.)

Running for public office is a huge decision, one that takes consideration and commitment. But what groups like EMILY's List and NFRW do is answer another important question many politicians-in-the-making have: *How?* Acting as incubators, these groups help their members decide where in public service they might be a great fit and how to run a campaign, from fundraising to public speaking to agenda building.

We spoke to seven leading incubators for the low-down about how they work, who they are, and how to get involved. Think you might want to throw your hat in the ring? Or just learn more about the campaign process? Scroll down to see how these organizations are empowering women everywhere.

Run For Something

Who They Help: Run For Something works exclusively with progressive millennials ages 35 or younger who are first- or second-time candidates running for local offices (school board, city council, county commissioner, etc). "We work with both men and women, which is a little different from the women-only orgs. We're also brand new. We launched on inauguration day. We've already recruited more than 10,000 young people who say they want to run for office," said cofounder of Run For Something Amanda Litman. "We thought it would be small with 100 people the first year, but we're packed."

Cost: Free

Process: "The first thing we do is a weekly conference call with all our candidates. Most first-time candidates have similar questions; we knock those out right away," said Litman. Run For Something has a couple hundred volunteers who screen candidates to identify how serious they are about running for office. "Once you pass in and become a member, you'll get referrals to other organizations, connections to the state party, and a whole network of state leads who will reach out and be a mentor to you to help you navigate the local landscape," said Litman. "Members are coached with speech, given help with social media, and are connected to campaign alums and operatives who volunteer for candidates."

Get Started: Check out their website. If you want more information before deciding whether or not running is right for you, read Litman's book, *Run for Something: A Real-Talk Guide to Fixing the System Yourself*, for guidance.

VIDEO: The Importance of a Personal Brand

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Emerge America

Who They Help: Democratic women who want to run for an office. "What is really unique about our program is that it's six months long," said president and founder of Emerge America Andrea Dew Steele. "We take Democratic women through this six-month training program, one weekend a month. So it's the most in depth training program out there. It's really like going to school to learn how to run for office."

Cost: "This is like the gym," said Dew Steele. "If you don't pay, you won't take it seriously." The cost of Emerge America varies by state, and there are payment plans and scholarships available, but the ballpark given to InStyle.com was about \$500 total for the six-month program.

Process: "We're one of the only organizations that is state based, so every single state has staff, an advisory board, and people on the ground to support them 365 days of the year," said Dew Steele. Program members are given opportunities to create and expand a political network while following a curriculum designed to teach them how to run. Participants go over fundraising, media, public speaking, leadership, and campaign strategy, among other things. Emerge America currently has locations in 22 states, but for people out of state, they hold a series of three-day boot camps to teach the nuts and bolts of running.

Get Started: Join Emerge America's network to get regular updates, nominate a woman to run, or apply to the program yourself. You can also donate to the organization here.

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She Should Run

Who They Help: Any woman who wants to run for office. She Should Run is nonpartisan, so regardless of whether you're a Republican or a Democrat, they can (and will) help you.

Cost: Free for their Incubator program

Process: “One of She Should Run’s most prominent campaigns is our Incubator, which is tailored to women who are exploring a run for office. The Incubator offers e-courses focused on leadership development, network building, communication skills, and other key skills needed to run for office. The Incubator community includes a supportive Facebook group where thousands of women offer peer support and encouragement,” said She Should Run founder and CEO Erin Loos Cutraro. “We recognize there is no one path to elected leadership and we work with Incubator members to identify their unique qualifications and path.”

Get Started: “Join our newest campaign, #250Kby2030, to get 250,000 women running for the over 500,000 elected offices by 2030, and take one of the six actions to move us forward,” said Cutraro. “Ask a woman to run. Research shows that if women need to be asked to run, so if you know a great woman ask her to run! It's good for everyone! But don't discount running yourself. Check out our Incubator, and see if it is right for you. There are even more ways on our website.”

RELATED: This Campaign Aims to Get 250,000 Women to Run for U.S. Elected Positions by 2030

Wellstone

Who They Help: Progressive leaders with a focus on racial, gender, and economic justice. "We have seen since our inception great numbers of young women and people of color participate because we work with partnerships on the state-level ground floor," said Wellstone communications and marketing director Deepa Kunapuli.

“For us, it's important that folks who come through Wellstone stay true to who they are and understand that running for office means holding that authenticity while inspiring others to build with them,” added Britney Whaley, Wellstone's principal of public and political leadership. “It’s time we do the work to elect bold, authentic, and beautifully diverse leaders who work hard and show up for their communities.”

Cost: The price varies depending on which program you choose. There are some free online classes. In-person programs range from \$450-\$1800 and include Camp Wellstone, its flagship program, as well as a week-long data-and-technology session, among others. Scholarships are available for those who can't afford the programs' full costs.

Process: Through online classes and in-person trainings around the country, Wellstone helps people run for office, work on campaigns, work on ballot initiatives, organize in local communities, and learn to use data and digital tools for social change. Camp Wellstone, one of its programs, focuses on practical electoral skills by focusing on public policy, how to approach grassroots community organizing, and how to influence policymakers. Camps are held on weekends.

Wellstone also offers an Advanced Campaign Management School, which is a four-day training designed for people with past electoral experience who want to up their game. “Wellstone has been training progressive candidates to run for public office since our founding 15 years ago. Our theory of change (the way that we believe we'll make a change in the world) includes investment in communities, centering our trainings around our users' needs, and partnering with local organizations to build leaders that reflect the communities they serve,” said Whaley. “We operate with the understanding that our goal is not just to win elections but to build a lasting movement of progressive leadership. We are here for the long game.”

Get Started: Check Wellstone’s training and events calendar to find programs in your area. For online resources, visit Wellstone's (very helpful) tools page. You can also simply donate to the cause. [Click here](#) to inquire about Camp Wellstone.

VIDEO: President Trump Participates in a Jobs Announcement

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Running Start

Who They Help: Young women. Running Start is nonpartisan and works with interested women from all political parties. “The focus on young women is important because just one in four elected leaders are women. That is true at the international, national, state, large city, and even college student body president levels,” said vice president of Running Start Melissa Richmond. “Women win at the same rates as men when they run, but there aren't enough women running. Research shows that there are a lot of factors that hold women back from running, but the biggest seems to be a lack of self-confidence relating to qualifications.”

Cost: All of Running Start's programs are free to participants, have a nominal fee, or include scholarships for more than half of the participants (offered on a need basis).

Process: Running Start provides online tools as well as annual programming. Annual programs include a week-long high school training for 50-75 students in Washington, DC, where participants meet with members of Congress and talk about how to run for office. Running Start also has a daylong college training program called Elect Her to help college women run for student government. More than half of the women in Congress started their political careers in college student government, according to Running Start, which makes this program particularly important. “In the past 11 years, Running Start has given 12,500 young women the skills and inspiration they need to run and win,” said Richmond.

College students can sign up for Running Start's Star Fellowship semester-long internship, which pairs college women with Congresswomen. The program includes housing, a stipend, and a weekly training on how to run for office. Running Start has placed almost 100 Star Fellows in the offices of more than half of the women in Congress. For college graduates, Running Start offers Young Women Run, a two-day training for professionals on how to use technology to run for office. According to

statistics provided by Running Start, more than half of alumnae are women of color, a quarter are first-generation college students, a third are low income, and a third are LGBTQ.

Get Started: Visit the Running Start website, donate to the programs, offer to mentor young women, or sign up directly here.

VoteRunLead

Who They Help: Any woman who wants to run for office.

Cost: VoteRunLead's online resources are all free. Most events they hold are too, but if they hit capacity, they ask for suggested donations to accommodate additional people. "Our national training on October 13-15 in Minneapolis (a three-day intensive for women intending to run by 2020) is \$150.00," said VoteRunLead founder and director Erin Vilardi. "We work to make sure any woman can access our networks."

Process: "VoteRunLead.org is a training powerhouse with free online trainings and a 10+ city tour this summer/fall on everything from volunteering on your first campaign to financing your own 2018 race. Our face-to-face trainings are intensive daylong and weekend-long workshops, followed by coaching sessions and regionally specific curriculum for women, such as city council leadership, rural women's leadership, or for women of color," said Vilardi. "What makes us different is that we teach individual women to "run as they are"—that the experiences and expertise they have right now are exactly what is needed in our government.

"In 2016, VoteRunLead alums shattered many firsts: Ilhan Omar became the nation's first Somali American legislator, from Minnesota, who now serves as a VoteRunLead trainer and speaker," said Vilardi. "Brenda Lopez became Georgia's first Latina in the State Assembly. Emily Larson, young woman mayor in the rural community of Duluth, Minnesota, is the first female mayor of the city."

Get Started: "VoteRunLead has several upcoming in-person events this summer and fall in Columbus, Atlanta, Minneapolis, Miami, Albuquerque, and more online

training is being added,” said Vilardi. “There are also more than 60 online resources available with videos of the workshops that can be watched for free at any time. Interested women can request to have VoteRunLead come to their own home town. Since we put that option on our website, we’ve gotten more than 252 requests from 43 states to bring VoteRunLead to local cities.” To find upcoming VoteRunLead events, visit voterunlead.org/events. Online resources are available at voterunlead.org/learn.

VIDEO: Five Times a President Issued a Controversial Pardon

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EMILY's List

Who They Help: Pro-choice Democratic women. “What makes us different is our track record. We have helped elect over 800 women at the state and local level, 139 women for Congress and 12 women governors,” said EMILY’s List Director of Strategic Communications Vanessa Cardenas. “EMILY’s List is not just a training organization; we actually provide women the political advice and support to help them win, and we connect them to our powerful network of 5 million+ members who are committed to seeing more women in office.

Cost: Candidate trainings are free. “We also just launched Run to Win, an unprecedented effort to get more women elected at every level,” said Cardenas. “These trainings are open to any woman who is Democrat and pro-choice. In the next few months we’ll offer them in over 20 states across our nation.”

Process: EMILY’s List is a 30+ year-old organization with millions of members, and the many programming options reflect its size. They send employees across the country to find, recruit, and train women who are leaders in their community to help build a pipeline of candidates, hosting local trainings that people can sign up for.

Every election cycle, they recruit women interested in running for the first time and walk them through the steps, but they also work with national candidates. “While the 2016 election was disappointing at the presidential level, EMILY’s List was

instrumental in key races: Sen. Kamala Harris, Cong. Pramila Jayapal, Sen. Catherine Cortez Masto, who made history in their respective races, are all EMILY's List women,” said Cardenas. “By the same token we elected Cong. Stephanie Murphy, Cong. Lisa Blunt Rochester, Cong. Nanette Barragan, Sen. Gillibrand, Sen. Baldwin and the list goes on and on. EMILY’s List also recruited and helped elect Sen. Elizabeth Edwards. We have also helped elect every single Democratic woman of color in Congress currently serving.”

Get Started: If you're thinking of running for office, you can sign up for the EMILY's List recruitment letter [here](#) to learn about trainings in your area. You can also learn more about candidate recruitment [here](#) or simply donate to the cause. “This is a pivotal moment for our organization and for women. Since Election Day over 16,000 women have reached out to us asking for help to run for office. This is more women than we have trained in our *entire* 32-history ... we are responding to this massive outpour by expanding our trainings, making them more accessible than ever, tripling our state and local resources and expanding our reach on every platform,” said Cardenas. “We feel that this is an unprecedented moment for women to change the face of politics for years to come, and we are going seize this moment with all we have.

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