



# **Keys to Elected Office**

## **THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE FOR WOMEN**

**BARBARA LEE FAMILY FOUNDATION**

**BASED ON 25+ YEARS OF RESEARCH**

*Governors Guidebook Series  
2023 Update*

“Despite what many say, women do continue to face unique obstacles when running for office. Having the tools and knowledge about what it takes to run a campaign and win will be a valuable tool for all women candidates.”

**New Jersey Governor Christine Todd Whitman, 1994-2001**

“The Barbara Lee Family Foundation’s unique research provides women candidates and elected officials the tools to be effective. The Foundation’s research is an indispensable resource for all women in politics.”

**Kansas Governor Kathleen Sebelius, 2003-2009**

“Barbara Lee is the leading expert on women’s campaigns for governor. She has taken her unique expertise, combined it with her passion for women in politics, and created a pragmatic go-to guide for all women elected officials, candidates, and their staff. We know women face barriers on the campaign trail. But with Barbara Lee Family Foundation research in hand, women also have the tools to break those barriers.”

**New Hampshire Governor Maggie Hassan, 2013-2017**

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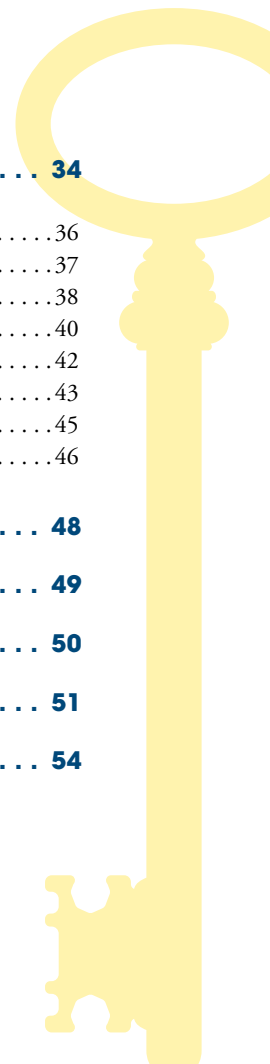
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# FOREWORD

When I established the Barbara Lee Family Foundation in 1998, only 16 women had ever served as governor in the entire history of the United States. I strongly believed that electing a woman president would transform our nation and advance women's equality in every arena. And because the governor's office was so often a steppingstone to the White House, electing more women governors would mean more women in the pipeline to the presidency! I wondered what it would take to elect more women to the top executive office in each state. We were determined to find out.

Over the years, my Foundation has published a series of practical manuals informed by our cutting-edge, nonpartisan research into the specific challenges that women candidates face, as well as the strengths and advantages that women have. Our research each cycle has looked at women's campaigns for governor across the country. We analyzed what worked, what didn't, and why. With each new election cycle, we ask new questions to revise and update our findings. For example, we found that campaign strategy had almost always been based on the experiences of male candidates and male advisors, while our research has shown how important it is for women candidates to have experienced women advisors. We have been proud to share our research and insights with women candidates and elected officials running at every level.

Now, 25 years later, 49 women have held the Governor's office in 32 states. Twelve women currently serve as governor and this nation has elected our first female Vice President, Kamala Harris. We know so much

more about what it took and what it will continue to take for women to run powerful, meaningful campaigns, win, and govern successfully!

This updated Guidebook contains direct, strategic advice for women candidates and women elected officials—across states, policy issues, and party lines. How can you cut through the stereotypes, and convey both your qualifications and your likeability? How can you recover from mistakes, and demonstrate poise and skill as a leader? This guidebook offers comprehensive, research-backed answers to these questions and more.

I hope you think of this Guidebook as an invitation. If you are already running for office, use our research to shape your strategy; and if you are thinking of running, I hope that our research provides you with the encouragement and inspiration to go for it! Look at how far we've come in the past 25 years: Progress is possible—and it all starts with women who have a vision for change and the determination to achieve their goals.

Please pass along my invitation and this Guidebook to other strong, smart, inspirational women you know. Together, we can and will create a brighter future for ourselves, our nation, and our planet!

Onward! And as the Suffragists famously said: "Forward into light!"



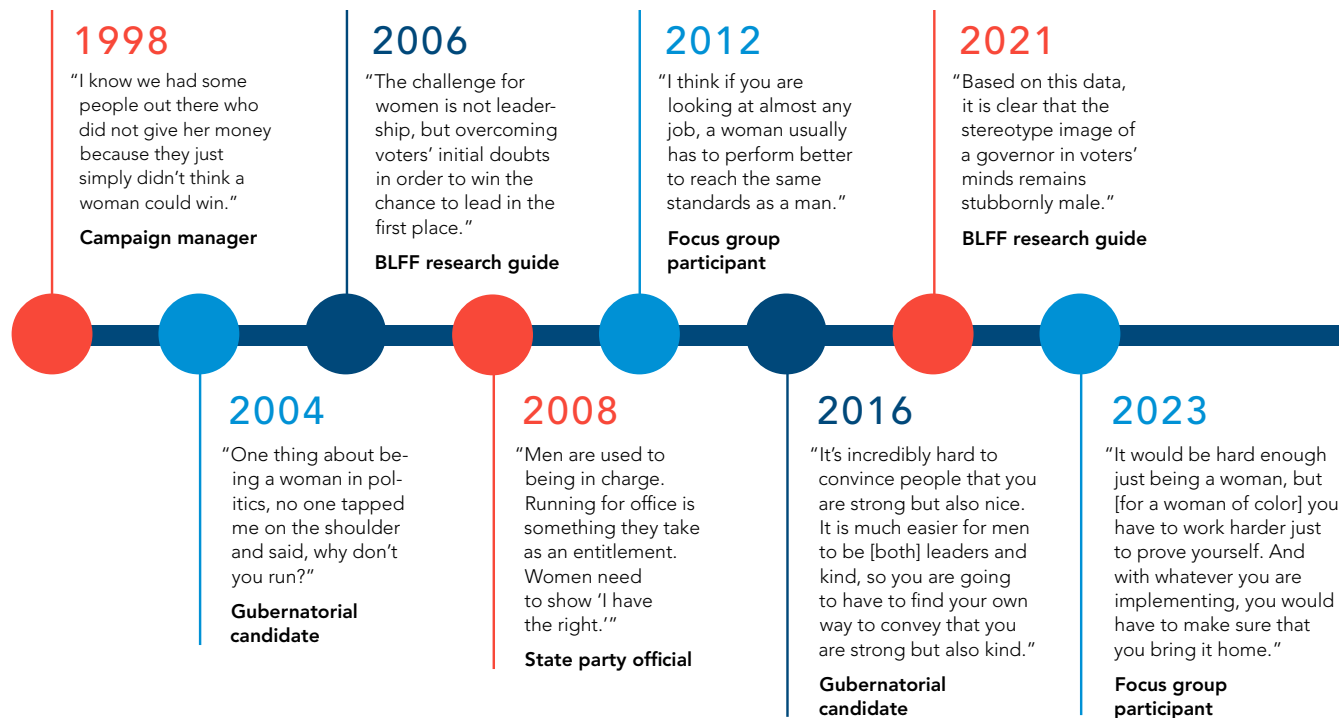
*Barbara Lee*

Barbara Lee  
Founder and President  
Barbara Lee Family Foundation

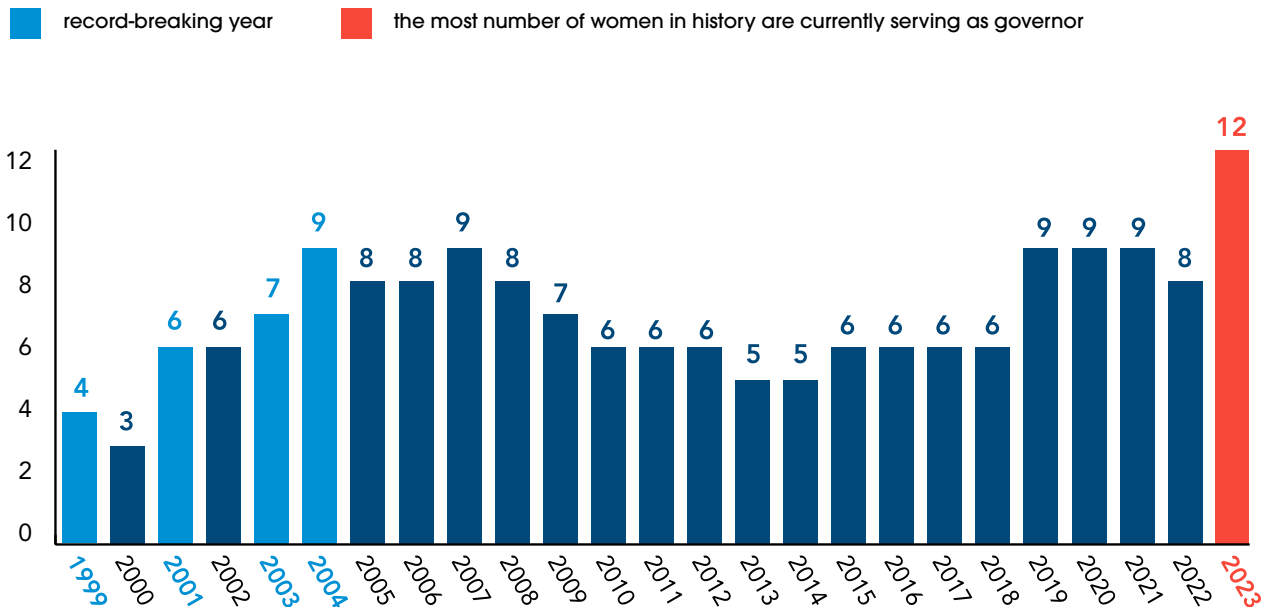


# 25+ YEARS OF RESEARCH

We're taking a moment to look back at how the campaign trail has—and hasn't—changed for women since the Barbara Lee Family Foundation first opened its doors.



## NUMBER OF SERVING WOMEN GOVERNORS

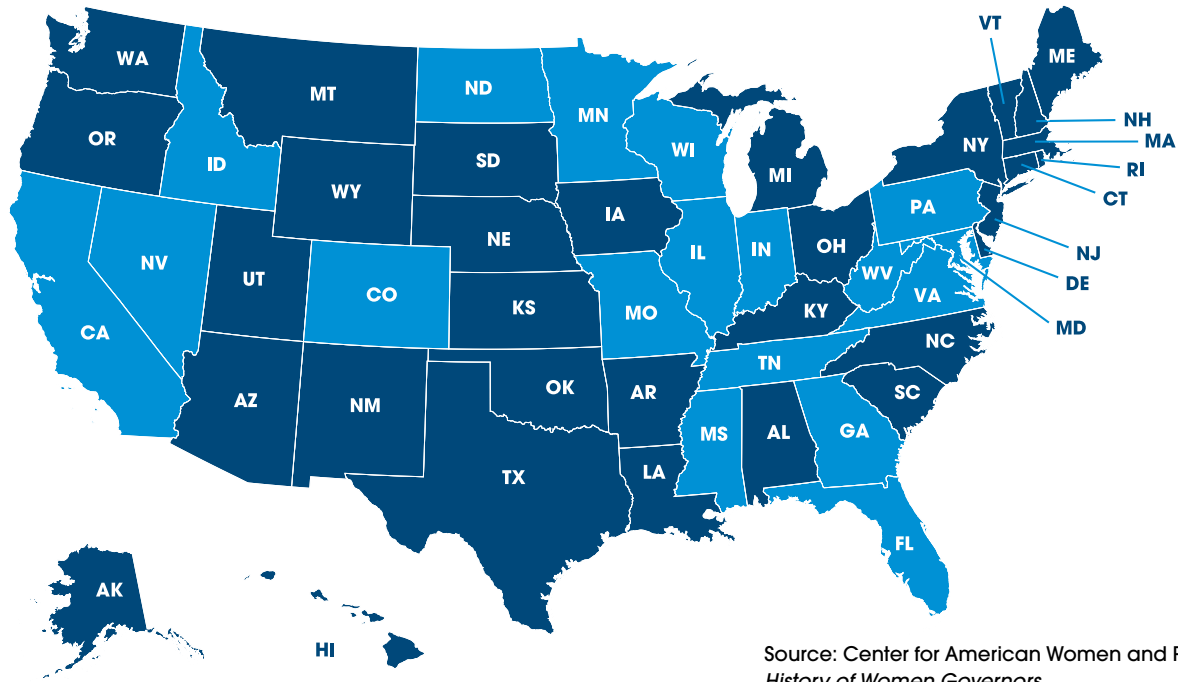


**FACT:** Only 3 women of color have ever been elected governor.  
None of those women were Black.

**FACT: 18 states have still never had a woman governor.**

■ States that have had women governors

■ States that have never had women governors



Source: Center for American Women and Politics's  
*History of Women Governors*

# INTRODUCTION

**R**unning for office as a woman is different than it is for a man. Why? Voters have higher expectations for women candidates which create obstacles and some opportunities. And even though voters say it is important to have more women in office, it doesn't always mean they will actually vote for women. Findings from Barbara Lee Family Foundation research paint the picture:

- Women candidates have to prove they are qualified. For men, their qualifications are assumed.
- Women face the double bind of needing to show competence and likeability. Voters will support a male candidate they do not like, but for women, this quality is non-negotiable.
- Voters accord women candidates a “virtue advantage,” seeing them as more honest and ethical than men. This advantage can be dramatically reversed if voters perceive a woman candidate to be dishonest or acting unethically.

- As more women run for office and are elected, a majority of voters acknowledge that sexism in politics is a problem, and they broadly support women in calling it out.

While the political landscape continues to present obstacles for women candidates, our no-nonsense, pragmatic guide helps overcome them. We study and analyze the challenges of campaigning in order to give women directive advice on how to succeed. The Essential Guide is the compilation of 25 years of research studying these complex attitudes toward women candidates, every woman's campaign for governor on both sides of the aisle, and real-time polling on voters' views on everything from words that work for women candidates to how to call out an opponent's record.

In the pages that follow, we distill the most relevant findings into three key categories, designed to be easily-digestible resources for elected officials, candidates, campaign teams, and the general public.

In **PREPARATION**, we look at what it takes for women to lay the groundwork for a run for office—the necessary traits and resources, and how to acquire and convey them.

In **SUBSTANCE**, we break down the essential issue areas to master and how to do that, from establishing qualification, to owning an economic plan, to contrasting with opponents.

Finally, in **PRESENTATION**, we lay out the importance of using messages that resonate, having a style that is professional and approachable, and possessing the ability to bounce back from mistakes or a campaign loss.

Three faint, stylized keys are positioned vertically in the background, one on the left, one in the center, and one on the right. They are light blue and have a simple, modern design with a circular head and a rectangular base.

# PREPARATION



**"For people to get comfortable seeing women in executive roles, they have to see women in executive roles. They have to see women run."**

CANDIDATE

# THE IMAGINATION BARRIER

## The Challenge

The Barbara Lee Family Foundation has identified a stubborn “imagination barrier” that exists for voters when it comes to picturing women in elected offices which have historically been dominated by white men. Our research shows that when voters picture a governor, a majority still picture a man. The imagination barrier makes it difficult for voters to see a woman as an executive leader, after years or even decades of exclusively seeing men in these roles. Across the country, women campaigning for governor—whether they are running to be the first woman to lead their state, or the first Black or Native/Indigenous woman governor ever—have to overcome this barrier in order to succeed.

## The Solution

We know that it isn't only winning a seat that breaks down the barrier. The more we see women candidates run for governor, the more comfortable voters get imagining women holding that seat. Women candidates demonstrating their qualifications, showing effective leadership, and highlighting their expertise (all areas we'll cover in this guide) all contribute to surmounting the imagination barrier.

As more women are inspired to run for office not only at the gubernatorial level, but also for mayoral and presidential seats, the country's collective ability to imagine women as executive-leader material will continue to grow. We've seen in states from Michigan to New Hampshire to New Mexico that when women lead as governors and as mayors, even more doors open for women in politics.



# COMMUNICATING CONFIDENCE, STRENGTH, & EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP

## The Challenge

Women must be prepared before they publicly announce their plans to run for office. Showcasing executive leadership is critical. Women must underscore prior political experience with their history of professional accomplishments. Tying experience to accomplishments helps to establish qualifications—one of the hallmarks of electability.

Women candidates for major statewide office must come across as confident, qualified, and competent in their initial presentation. They also need to maintain that confidence, as it is critical to appearing qualified. Voters immediately hone in on perceived weaknesses because women candidates have added visibility. While women candidates tend to hold on to doubts about whether they should be running, they cannot begin their campaigns looking anything but qualified and confident.

Voters punish women for on-the-job learning as a candidate and for campaigns that take time to ramp up; this erodes the sense that they are qualified. Women often start their campaigns with their personal stories and biographies, which makes them appear likeable and in touch—both important traits—but often does not do much to establish their qualifications and credibility.

## The Solution

So what's the secret? The best way for a woman candidate to establish her qualifications is to weave her experience and professional accomplishments into her narrative. To help women relay their qualifications, they must focus on both the presentation and content of their introductions. It is important for women to lead with their issue expertise and accomplishments before sharing their personal stories.

Voters believe that most women running for major office in their states are leaders, and are hard-working, qualified, confident, organized, knowledgeable, compassionate, assertive, strong. While these are all positive qualities, they do not all convey to voters that a candidate is qualified. The traits that describe women who run for major statewide office and convey qualifications are **confident, organized, and knowledgeable**.

Women candidates must have these words written into their introductions and early descriptions, including their websites, announcements, mailers, and stump speeches.

# BEST FOOT FORWARD

## The Challenge

Voters decide whether a woman candidate is ready to lead, in part, based on her personal presentation. The emphasis voters place on personal style is substantial and multi-faceted. It's important for women to have visibility early in the campaign.

Although all candidates are judged on these attributes to some degree, women have a steeper climb—they must work harder—in convincing voters to judge them on their merits.

## The Solution

**The Look:** In order to be successful in this reality, women must be well-suited for the job: dressing appropriately for campaign events, whether they are at new construction sites or at a senior center, is critical. In short, dress the part: don't wear heels to a picnic. And even casual attire must be professional. For more on clothing and style, see *Elements of Style* on page 36.

AS ONE CANDIDATE SAID:

**"Every podium in  
America is made for  
a six-foot man,"**

SUGGESTING THE WHOLE  
DEBATE EXERCISE  
IS SLIGHTLY RIGGED  
AGAINST WOMEN.



**The Sound:** Tone of voice and speaking style also factor into the candidate's presentation. Voters are in tune to whether a woman candidate sounds authoritative or bossy, serious or boring, high-pitched and unsure, or clear and steady.

**The Substance:** Voters say women convey their qualifications by:

- Being prepared
- Answering tough questions
- Speaking with authority
- Projecting confidence
- Making and maintaining eye contact
- Commanding respect

The way a woman runs her campaign is also important. It is an opportunity to showcase that she has her act together, is a good leader, and an effective manager. Because of this, candidates must choose staff members they trust to make wise decisions independently.

Positive leadership styles that work for women also include being in touch, meeting with voters, and bringing men and women together—or Democrats and Republicans together—to get results. The latter is different than traditional messaging about reaching across the aisle. **Results are key.**

## KEY TIPS FOR CANDIDATES:

### PREPARING TO ANNOUNCE

- **Set the right tone.** Make an excellent first impression on voters when you announce your candidacy. Your look, theme, setting, and staging must mirror the level of professionalism, preparation, clarity, and organization that the voters can expect of your administration.
- **Know why you can do it.** Identify the three or four reasons you will be an excellent leader and keep them in the forefront of your mind. Knowing at all times why you should be in office can help you perform confidently under adverse circumstances. Being sure of these reasons also helps you communicate them to voters.
- **Take good care of yourself.** Campaigns are notoriously unpredictable. Unexpected events and delays happen. Design your schedule to ensure there is enough time to feel rested, prepared, professional, and presentable.
- **Hire a diverse, experienced staff.** Don't pinch pennies. You are undertaking a multi-million dollar enterprise with enormous implications for the future of your state. Hire the most seasoned, experienced people you can, particularly those who have won a campaign for other women running for the same level of office. Aim to have a professional campaign manager selected soon after making the decision to run. Gender balance and racial diversity are also important. The most effective and disciplined campaign teams are diverse, according to candidates and staff.
- **Meet the professionals.** Everybody needs somebody: a voice coach, a personal shopper, a stylist, a media trainer, a make-up artist. Don't wait until midway through the campaign. Months before your announcement, do a personal inventory, and get the help you need.

# EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP

## The Challenge

Voters are more accustomed to seeing women as part of a deliberative body, such as the legislature. When a woman is running to be CEO of her state, voters need more evidence to believe she is prepared to do the job than they do for a man.

Voters want to see specific financial, crisis management, and political credentials when evaluating whether a woman could handle the complexities of running a state. For instance, voters surveyed felt more confident in a candidate who had been a state treasurer when they were told that as treasurer she got the state out of debt than they were in a candidate who did not mention her accomplishments as treasurer.

In contrast, men were assumed to be qualified to lead their state if they had a resume that simply listed positions of leadership and service. **Women must show, where men can tell.**

In the past, women held a huge advantage on being seen as change agents. That has diminished. However, as Americans express frustration with the political status quo, the perception of women as “different” in a sea of male elected officials and candidates offers them a distinctive advantage in the eyes of voters. Voters who see women as different from men when they serve as elected officials are more likely to support women.

Voters still, however, see women as outside the old boys’ network. They want assurance that women can lead and get the job done in the largely male game of politics. Women candidates especially need to tout their experience and track record, which can include taking on political insiders. It isn’t enough to merely tout past accomplishments. Voters want to know what results candidates have achieved on their behalf.

## The Solution

Women need to provide more evidence than men of expertise. The first way to relay that to voters is to make an excellent first impression — to hit the ground running and to maintain that momentum throughout the campaign.

### What exactly does that look like?

- Standing up for herself in a debate
- Standing up for voters and their interests in a debate
- Fielding tough questions from a reporter early in the campaign
- Starting the campaign with a listening tour

These are also ways to demonstrate that a candidate is in touch with voters’ lives.

# FAMILY MATTERS

**"We don't make any males running for office explain what's happening with their children."**

FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT

**"You can be tough and policy-minded and still talk to people about your kids."**

CAMPAIGN MANAGER

## The Challenge

Families in America have evolved since the 1960s, when two-parent households were the norm, most adults were married, and less than a quarter of married women with children worked outside the home. Despite sweeping societal changes, traditional gender roles remain powerful, influencing what voters perceive to be acceptable and appropriate behavior for men and women.

As more women run for office and are elected, voters question how women can serve constituents and take care of family responsibilities at the same time. Women candidates wonder whether they should talk about their families and personal lives and how to do so without alienating voters. Fortunately, there are clear ways to navigate the terrain of talking about family life.

Voters recognize a double standard for moms, but actively and consciously participate in it. They express anxiety about a woman's job in office taking a backseat to her role at home and wonder who is taking care of the children, especially if they are young. If a candidate doesn't have children, voters worry that she may not be able to truly understand the concerns of families.

## The Solution

So how do women candidates reconcile these facts with the reality of their own lives?

Women have the opportunity to be 360-degree candidates, using all of their expertise, backgrounds, and personal experiences to connect with voters. Managing a family—whether that includes a partner, children, parents, siblings, or any combination thereof—is certainly a facet of that full-life experience.

It is important for women candidates, no matter what their family situation is, to talk to voters about their personal lives. When questions arise about a woman's ability to manage personal and professional responsibilities, she must respond. If voters' doubts and concerns go unaddressed, it negatively impacts the candidate's perceived likeability and effectiveness, both of which are essential to electability for women.

## Women can successfully navigate these complexities by:

- Addressing questions about their family lives directly and confidently
- Showing how their experiences contribute to their work on behalf of voters
- Getting back to the issues that matter to their constituents

According to interviews with candidates, their staff, media consultants, and other political players, embracing one's family as part of the campaign can reveal a positive and warm dimension to a serious candidate. It is also a chance to share the role family has played in motivating a candidate to pursue public office.



## KEY TIPS FOR CANDIDATES:

### EMBRACING YOUR 360-DEGREES

- **Spin your experience.** Instead of saying where you lack experience or what you haven't done, lead with your assets. Even nontraditional experience can be leveraged.
- **Use everything.** That waitressing job you had in college may be the gateway to connecting with women who don't yet see you as "like them." Present your full range of experience—personal, professional, and in the community.
- **Tap networks.** Explore your own biography to find the overlapping networks of school friends, elected allies, professional colleagues, neighbors, and fellow sports fans in your electoral base.
- **Reference family.** Even if you choose to keep your family far from the campaign trail, you can and should let people hear your point of view. Voters expect candidates to speak about their families, but be careful: sharing too much information hurts as much as sharing too little.

**"We were talking about policies, but we were also very cognizant of wrapping that into who she is as a person, to communicate it in a more compelling way."**

POLLSTER

# FUNDRAISING SAVVY

## The Challenge

Although women now often regularly raise and spend money in their campaigns on par with their male opponents, women candidates still report being excluded from financial circles that include the wealthiest and best-connected donors.

These circles are often based around corporate associations and specific industries—talk about old boys’ clubs—and rarely include many women executives or board members. As a result, there are fewer women to make introductions and open doors.

Women may also find they need to wage a “campaign of belief” with donors, and spend time highlighting their path to victory. Women candidates report having to spend more time raising money than their male counterparts.

## The Solution

Well before a decision to run, women should be meeting with key allies and honing their campaign skills. This will enable them to hit the ground running, which we know is critical for women’s success with voters.

Women’s campaign teams should be sure to over-budget the time spent fundraising, and the candidate should be prepared to convince donors that she is worth the investment. A note: while focusing on the historic nature of a campaign may appeal to donors, voters want to see a woman candidate focused on local issues.





## KEY TIPS FOR CANDIDATES:

### FUNDRAISING BASICS

- **Do the homework.** Know the fundraising centers and party's major donors in the state. Join another candidate's finance committee and learn firsthand what you will be asking of others. Develop a network of women within key fundraising circles and ask for introductions. Lock down substantial financial support before announcing a run.
- **Build a fundraising and powerbroker network early.** Assemble a dozen veteran fundraisers, meet with them regularly, and make them a part of the campaign's permanent political operation.
- **Develop working relationships with membership organizations.** Work with statewide, membership-based organizations on issues of mutual concern. Nurses, carpenters, chiropractors, lawyers, local chambers of commerce—these can be allies and support networks.
- **Expand, expand, expand.** Identify the 25 individuals who raise the most for the party's nominees and develop a strategy for meeting them—directly, through friends, at party events, etc. Identify women's organizations that provide financial support to women candidates and meet with their political directors, enlist their early support, and stay in touch with them.

**"As a woman, I've been pretty successful... raising money, but you still don't have access to the boys, and this is very much a boy kind of state... it takes more effort to get that access."**

CANDIDATE

Three faint, light red keys are positioned vertically in the background. The central key is slightly taller and has a more ornate, circular head. The two flanking keys are shorter and have simpler, heart-shaped heads. All three keys have a notched bit at the bottom.

**SUBSTANCE**



**"I just hope that it is boring one day that a woman is governor. I hope that breaking a glass ceiling means that somebody threw a rock through your sunroof."**

CANDIDATE

# A “QUALIFIED” WOMAN

## The Challenge

We so often hear voters hedge that they’ll vote for a “qualified” woman. In focus groups, voters explained that some people only want to vote for “qualified” women because a perception remains that women have to work harder and do more to achieve the same goals as men.

Women have to prove they are qualified. For men, their qualification is assumed. In other words, women have to prove themselves from day one.

## The Solution

The most important traits to convey that a woman is qualified include being honest, standing up for what is right, being knowledgeable, getting results, being confident, being organized, having a vision, and being in touch.

To help a woman appear most qualified, it works to show she:

- Leads with accomplishments
- Brings other leaders together to get things done
- “Stands up” in a debate

- Starts the campaign with a listening tour
- Answers tough questions from a reporter
- Issues an economic plan with specifics

Some of these examples are a matter of changing the words women use to convey their strengths as leaders. For instance, rather than illustrating how a woman candidate has worked across the aisle, it is more effective to show how a candidate brought men and women or Democrats and Republicans together to get results.

Using action-oriented language also helps convey that a woman candidate is qualified. Women must show they take action. Consider action phrases, such as:

- Started a successful business
- Refused to back down
- Answered tough questions
- Led an initiative

# THE LIKEABILITY LITMUS TEST

**“Leadership, knowledge, education, integrity, honesty all go into making a candidate likeable.”**

**FEMALE VOTER**

## **The Challenge**

Likeability is a non-negotiable quality voters seek in women officeholders and candidates.

Men don't need to be liked to be elected. Voters are less likely to vote for a woman candidate they do not like. Women face the double bind of needing to show competence and likeability.

Voters acknowledge that a woman's style and appearance are highly scrutinized and connected to her likeability. In a recent study, voters reacted to every aspect of a woman's presentation style, including her appearance, demeanor, and tone of voice. They volunteer that people are still more judgmental about a woman's appearance than a man's. Focus group participants say that if they were giving advice to a woman candidate, they would make sure her wardrobe, makeup, and appearance are impeccable.

Appearing confident is essential. In this study, voters assessed a woman officeholder's confidence in less than 30 seconds. Confidence signals both likeability and qualifications.

However, demonstrating likeability is not a one-size-fits-all proposition. All candidates must stay true to who they are. Just as each woman running for office is unique, so is the combination of factors that contribute to her likeability.

## The Solution

Voters, independent of their gender, overwhelmingly say it is important that they like an officeholder they support: 84% of men and 90% of women. There are two key components to making women candidates likeable in the eyes of voters: presentation and track record. In other words, style and substance both matter.

Previous research on women officeholders and candidates showed that many of the attributes and qualities that establish qualifications also improve likeability for women. The two were linked—they rose and fell together. More recent findings show a shift in that conventional wisdom. Some of the factors that help establish likeability do not reinforce qualifications.

Another evolutionary change for women officeholders and candidates is an expansion of how they can relate to voters. Women shown in less formal, relaxed settings have more power than they used to. For example, photos of women elected officials seated by themselves behind mahogany desks—the traditional hallmark of executive leadership—are considered the least likeable. Voters respond positively to women meeting with people and engaging in conversation. In other words, doing the day-to-day work of an elected official.

## When speaking with voters, women candidates can demonstrate likeability by showcasing their:

- Preparation
- Confidence
- Listening skills
- Sense of humor

## When preparing campaign materials, think about:

- Highlighting how the candidate has overcome an obstacle
- Connecting policies to personal elements
- Mixing team and solo credit when talking about accomplishments
- Offering a solution and acknowledging that others may not agree
- Including photos of the candidate in informal settings in the community

# ISSUE (DIS)ADVANTAGES: THE ECONOMY, EDUCATION, & WOMEN'S HEALTH

## The Challenge

Voters want to know that a woman can handle budgets, taxes, and the economy. This area is generally perceived as a weakness for women candidates and not a traditional area of female expertise. Women candidates have advantages on issues that are traditionally “women’s issues:” education, healthcare, women’s health, and fighting sexual harassment. Decisiveness and effectiveness are areas where women candidates still need to prove themselves.

Profile	Female Candidate	
	Very Qualified	Total Qualified
<b>Issues:</b> Mary Jones is known in the state legislature for her strong voting record on issues like healthcare reform, education, and economic development. She has successfully passed a number of bills to help our state including getting money to improve our schools and creating thousands of jobs while imposing tough fiscal discipline.	<b>62%</b>	<b>93%</b>
<b>Elected Office:</b> Jan Smith served one term on city council, was mayor, and is currently in her third term in the state legislature. Currently she serves as a ranking member of the Finance committee, as well as on the Governor’s Economic Task Force to create jobs.	<b>56%</b>	<b>90%</b>
<b>Work:</b> Kathy Green successfully owned her own small business before climbing the ranks of a Fortune 500 company. She knows how to create jobs, meet a payroll, and manage a company budget.	<b>39%</b>	<b>80%</b>
<b>Personal:</b> Joan Smith grew up in a working class neighborhood, the daughter of a police officer and a teacher, where she learned the value of hard work and discipline. She graduated at the top of her class from a state university.	<b>21%</b>	<b>63%</b>

## The Solution

A candidate profile that focuses on experience, including voting record and accomplishments on important issues, is the most effective in portraying qualifications to voters, followed by a profile that outlines a candidate's general previous experience in office. These profiles beat out a competing profile that focused on personal biography. This is proof positive of how critical it is to tout experience first and personal story second.

Voters are adamant that a woman elected official would be more likely to protect women's health issues, access to birth control and contraception, reproductive health issues, Social Security and Medicare, and education. Voters across parties look more favorably upon women candidates who take a strong stance against sexual harassment. Women can and should use the clear, ongoing advantage they hold on these "women's issues" but must also maximize non-traditional experience to demonstrate their qualifications.

When it comes to less traditional experience—economic development, serving on a finance committee or economic task force—highlighting accomplishments helps women candidates unlock doors to the executive office and level the playing field by establishing credibility as a leader. In a split sample, the fictional Mary Jones' profile that includes non-traditional experience did

just as well as an identical profile about a fictional man. (See the chart on page 25. "Total qualified" refers to the total percentage of voters who said this profile effectively conveyed the candidate as qualified.) Certain qualities are particularly important. Voters were likely to see a candidate as good on the economy and were likely to vote for her if they perceived her:

- To be a problem solver
- To be a change agent
- As having the right priorities
- As effective

Women also now get as much credit as men for being good on the economy when they are good on other issues. For both men and women candidates, being good on education and healthcare help them to be seen as good on the economy. Women can harness the advantage they have on these typically "women's issues" as well as kitchen-table economics, to connect with voters.





## KEY TIPS FOR CANDIDATES:

### ECONOMIC PLATFORMS

- **Be specific about jobs.** Offer specifics on the ways your state will compete for jobs. Your economic plan must attract and keep large businesses and make it easier to start and run a small business. Look for opportunities to serve on boards or commissions related to job growth.
- **Share your budget priorities.** A budget is a statement of your values. It is a proactive document that tells voters what you want to accomplish. Show where you would save, where you would invest, and why. Remember that voters accord women the benefit of “kitchen table budgeting” wisdom and experience.
- **Establish financial credentials.** If you have served as a treasurer, budget director, or on a finance committee in the public or private sector, trumpet it. If you haven't had a high profile financial position, look for other and unconventional ways you have managed a state's or business' money.
- **Learn your state budget.** Former or current Budget or Appropriation Committee chairs, staff, or budget analysts from the Governor's office are all useful resources for learning the intricacies of the state budget.
- **Weave your budget expertise into every issue, ad, and communication.** Give everyone who introduces you a prepared introduction that emphasizes your financial credentials and accomplishments. Check your strategic plan for an integrated focus on jobs, budget, and the economy.

# CONTRASTING WITH OPPONENTS

## The Challenge

Barbara Lee Family Foundation research has consistently shown that women candidates pay a higher price for contrasting, i.e. “going negative,” even though all candidates must show how they differ from their opponents—it is a necessary part of campaigning.

Some women voters say they are disappointed when they see a woman “go negative” because they hold women candidates to a higher standard. Voters expect more from women candidates and they feel that by engaging in negative campaigning, a woman is reduced to the status of a typical politician.

They feel women should use their strengths of compassion and being relatable to overcome negativity. “I expect more from a woman [candidate] than I do a man,” as one woman said in a focus group, “because it used to be a man’s world and they always bashed, and I think a woman can have more tactfulness to not stoop to a man’s level.” Some women, especially women of color, worry about whether women can maintain their “femininity” and “compassion.” As one woman noted, “I just wanted to comment on the ads from the female politicians; to me they seemed a little masculine. They didn’t look soft or feminine.”

Voters typically see women as more honest and ethical than men (read more on this advantage in *The Ethical Pedestal: Honesty and Character* on page 38). It is important for women to maintain that advantage, even when contrasting with their opponents.

## The Solution

It has long been believed that women candidates “going negative” in ads during a campaign works, but also increases their own negative ratings. There are key strategies women candidates can use that are more likely to resonate with voters. Each campaign has unique circumstances. One common thread, however, is that women candidates can and do need to use contrast ads to win.

Some of the tactics for contrasting with an opponent are not reserved for women only. However, voters remember negative ads from women candidates more than negatives from male candidates, all other things being equal.



## KEY TIPS FOR CANDIDATES:

### ADS

- **Be present in your commercial.** It is important for voters to hear your stance on issues and what you will do, not only the negative attack on your opponent. As one woman said in a focus group, “What if this is the only ad I see? Every ad should give me some information about the candidate.” Contrary to conventional wisdom, it works for a woman candidate to represent herself in an ad, confidently speaking for herself and her positions.
- **Be sure to come across as confident and warm.** In a campaign, it is important to reinforce and project that you are likeable and qualified, even when delivering the negative. We found that women can preserve voters’ perceptions of these traits. Voters want some reassurance that you aren’t a typical politician.
- **Use the disclaimer as an opportunity.** You can use the disclaimer as a chance to tell voters what you will do for them. For example, “I approve this ad, because I’ll always protect Medicare.” Voters pay attention to the disclaimer more than people realize.
- **Be simple and concise.** Do not use overly busy, distracting images or music in commercials. Voters want to be able to leave an ad understanding where you stand on issues.
- **Be genuine.** Voters want authentic facial expressions, images, and settings that are appropriate for the topic being discussed. Voters, especially women, pay close attention to how women candidates come across, even in the disclaimer at the beginning or end of an ad.
- **Use real people to deliver a negative ad by sharing their personal stories.**
- **Use a fresh or unexpected approach.** Use humor without diminishing your credibility. Voters are more inclined to view and listen to a candidate’s message if delivered in this frame. Humor works for women, but it is also important to pivot to the serious side. In effective humorous ads, women are often the serious person in the funny situation—not presented out of the role of candidate or in the comic situation themselves.
- **Call out a negative ad from an opponent.** Women candidates are particularly effective when appearing in a response, contrast, or counter-attack ad.
- **Cite sources and provide links.** Voters like being able to look at the facts and your plan. Help voters to easily learn more about you and your platform wherever possible.

# PUTTING SEXISM IN ITS PLACE

## The Challenge

Despite recent advances for women in politics, candidates for office still face sexism on the campaign trail.

Sexist treatment can take many forms—from double standards for women candidates to undue criticisms of their appearance, voice, or clothing—and a woman may only have a few moments to decide whether to respond, and how to do it.

As media outlets are increasingly attuned to gender dynamics in politics, a sexist incident also can potentially become a defining moment in a woman's campaign.

## The Solution

Our new Barbara Lee Family Foundation research shows that the conventional wisdom of remaining silent is not an effective response to a sexist comment made to a candidate. Voters see how a woman handles sexism as a leadership test she can pass. Voters support a woman in speaking out about sexism if it aligns with her core values to do so. They prefer a calm, confident, and professional response that reflects the values of equality, fairness, and what is best for all women and girls.

A woman candidate's response to sexism can demonstrate her leadership and her electability to voters.



## KEY TIPS FOR CANDIDATES:

### HANDLING SEXISM

- **Speak up about sexism if you genuinely feel you should speak up.** If you connect your response to your personal values, the authenticity will resonate with voters. Have confidence that 72% of survey respondents are concerned about the impact of sexism on female candidates and that they overwhelmingly support candidates acting authentically and in line with their values.
- **Consider perceptions of severity about the incident.** Perceiving a sexist incident as serious is the factor most correlated to supporting you addressing or calling it out. Severity is somewhat subjective. Older, more conservative men need the most evidence and the clearest sense of wrongdoing to view an incident as sexist and severe. Voters are more likely to think an incident is severe if you are a younger candidate or a woman of color. And voters who are people of color are more likely to rate incidents as severe. If the incident isn't publicly known and widely viewed as serious, consider what evidence exists and who can effectively validate the severity. It's important for you to speak up for yourself, though utilizing third-party validators to amplify and validate the severity of the incident can be an extremely effective strategy to build an ecosystem of support.
- **Consider the risk of staying silent.** Women candidates face risk of blowback if they are perceived to be ignoring or turning a blind eye to a sexist incident their constituents view as serious. Your constituents will support you speaking out if you do so in a way that proves your leadership, backbone, and electability.
- **Be calm, confident, and stay focused on the job at hand.** Being electable relies on your constituents perceiving you as a strong leader who can stay calm and keep focus on the job at hand. When you respond, do so calmly and confidently, striking a tone of professionalism that demonstrates the severity of the incident but also shows that you can handle any tough scenario.
- **Avoid angry outbursts or acts of retaliation that undermine your leadership.** Even if constituents view a sexist incident as a problem, they do not support a response that is retaliatory or emotional.
- **Frame your response as being about equality and fairness.** Respondents want a woman leader who focuses on what's best for all women and girls, not just on what's best for her campaign. Make it about experiences all women have faced. Frame your response in shared experiences of inequality & unfairness that have universal appeal, rather than about you being mistreated.
- **Use validators strategically.** A majority of respondents want you to respond to sexism directly, rather than relying on others to speak on your behalf. However, many also say validators can step in if they amplify your message (vs. speaking in place of you). Validators can also help to build support about the severity of the incident that you experienced.

# RUNNING AGAINST ANOTHER WOMAN

## The Challenge

Our unique research on races between two women candidates found that in an election with only women, gender biases are still prevalent and voters hold both women candidates to a higher standard than they hold men.

Even in races without male candidates, women running for office still face a qualifications barrier. Both women must show they are qualified and contend with the likeability-qualifications double bind. Voters assumed that a race between two women would be less negative overall, and they pushed back on negative attacks delivered by one of the candidates. As a result, the first woman to express a negative rebuttal against her opponent may have a disadvantage.

## The Solution

Women running against other women can take preemptive steps to counteract voters' biases — by highlighting qualifications, establishing a strong positive message, and demonstrating deep knowledge of important issues. Most crucially, center on voters in platforms and policymaking. Voters want to know how they will benefit from a woman candidate's experiences.

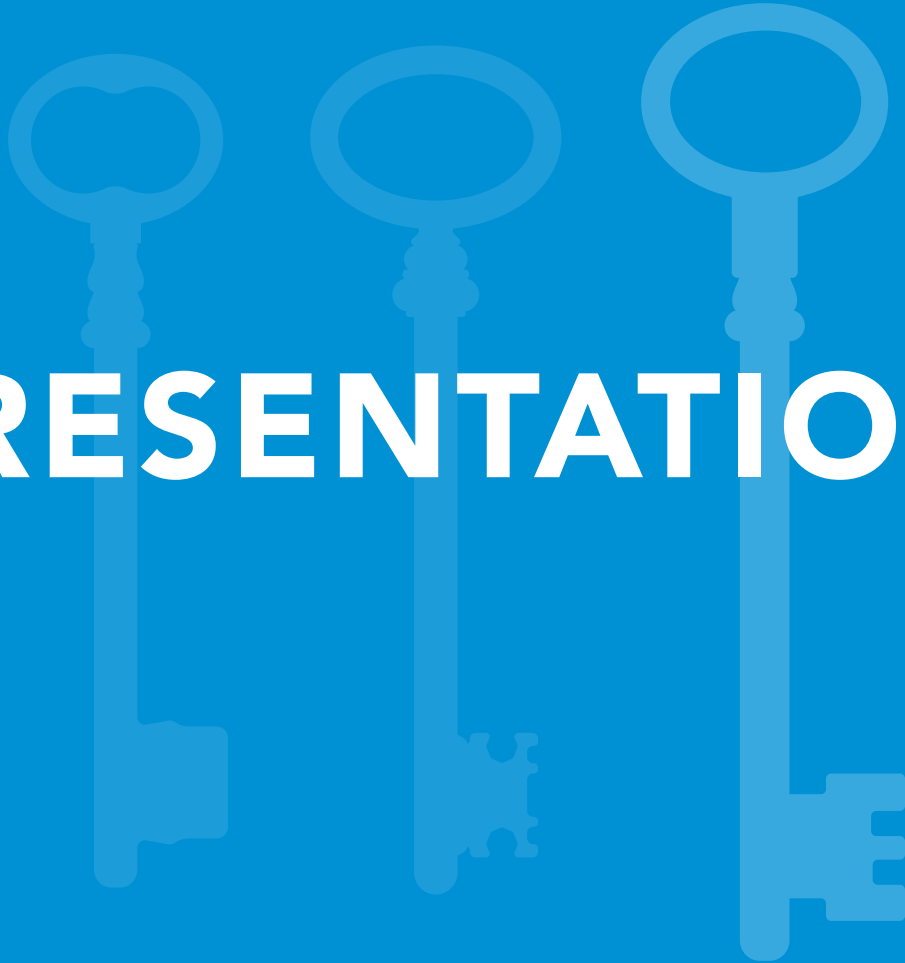


## KEY TIPS FOR CANDIDATES:

### WOMAN VS. WOMAN RACES

- **Lead with qualifications.** When introducing yourself to voters, first share your record and resume—what did you do before you ran for office? What is your record as a leader, and what have you achieved on behalf of voters? Issue expertise, accomplishments, and plans can all signal qualifications to voters. Showing you are qualified is one of the most important factors to voters who are deciding between two women candidates.
- **Demonstrate issue knowledge.** Voters say that your knowledge of issues is the most important consideration in an election. A total of 89% of respondents said that issue knowledge was either very or extremely important for a candidate.
- **Center your messages on voters.** Voters respond most when you connect what you say and what you have done to how you would help voters and the community. Even more so than we have seen in the past, voters want you to relate your record and your achievements to the impact they have had on voters' lives.
- **Appearance matters.** In formal campaign materials and at events, be sure to look put together with tailored, ironed clothing. Make sure you appear polished and neat. Use inviting body language and avoid crossed arms or closed off poses.
- **Be mindful of your electorate.** Our research found that political party—a candidate's party and the voters' party—plays a substantial role in voters' perceptions. Voters will give you advantages based on whether you are running as a Democrat or Republican. Voters continue to view women elected officials differently depending on the voter's political ideology.

# PRESENTATION







**"When you have a woman candidate, you always have to make sure she's dressed right, that she looks powerful, yet approachable."**

**CAMPAIGN MANAGER**

# ELEMENTS OF STYLE

## The Challenge

A woman's appearance is under a microscope—or perhaps more appropriately, in the headlines—far more often than her male counterparts'. No surprise there. Voters draw complex conclusions about women candidates from their appearances, according to interviews with campaign staff. One finance director reported, "I think she's so well dressed and so well put together that to some people, that didn't appeal to them. She was almost 'perfect.'"

We've heard it all: Voters and media alike comment on women candidates' clothes, lipstick, hairstyles. As one campaign manager put it, "The news would say 'the candidate appeared before the media in her trademark shapeless skirts'...they would never say 'our male opponent appeared in his scruffy wingtips and rumpled shirt.'"

What may be surprising, however, are some straightforward ways candidates have minimized the scrutiny.

## The Solution

- Winning candidates develop a look and style that is authentic and appropriate.
- Women's power-dressing has evolved past feminized men's suits to more colorful jackets over sheath dresses and pants. This change reflects the evolution of work wear in general but is particularly applicable to politics.
- Voters want to see women candidates look neat and put together. Make sure your clothes aren't wrinkled, and touch up your hair and makeup before a public event or official photo.
- As the saying goes, "Dress poorly and they remember the dress. Dress well and they remember the woman." Keep it simple and cultivate a collection of go-to outfits that convey power and are also practical.

# WORDS MATTER

## The Challenge

Traditionally, women are praised for being more cooperative and bipartisan. While voters still give women credit for these traits, they are cynical about the state of politics, unclear whether more women in office will have a measurable impact, and question any individual's ability to change politics.

## The Solution

Women candidates can maximize their advantages by using the right words and displaying the right actions. Both Democratic and Republican women have an advantage over a male candidate on representing voters' interests, having the right priorities, being honest and ethical, solving problems, working across party lines to get results, and being warm and likeable.

It remains important for a woman to take on insiders and to stand up for her constituents. Current women elected officials are seen as successfully challenging their legislatures. Figuring out how to deliver a simple, effective message is complicated and requires practice, and women candidates must consistently communicate better than their male opponents on many fronts.

## Women need to prove:

- Strength
- Qualification
- Ability to make change

## Ways women can demonstrate qualifications:

- Having the right priorities
- Showing strong negotiating skills
- Working with men and women
- Displaying the ability to handle a crisis

## Advantages women have:

- In touch, compassionate
- Right priorities
- Honest
- Problem-solving

# THE ETHICAL PEDESTAL: HONESTY & CHARACTER

## The Challenge

Voters historically have accorded women candidates a “virtue advantage,” seeing them as more honest and ethical than men. That perception remains, especially among Independent voters, though by a smaller margin and with significant partisan differences.

This is particularly important because voters who see women as offering unique traits like honesty are more likely to support a woman candidate.

The advantage that voters accord women on honesty can be dramatically reversed if they perceive that a woman candidate has been dishonest or acted unethically. A woman candidate who is accused of dishonesty or acting unethically pays a high price in the loss of voter esteem, especially among women voters who expect a woman to be different.

And because the cost of an ethical infraction is higher for a woman, campaigns against women candidates often use the well-worn strategy of launching negative attacks on character or values early in the campaign.

## The Solution

Women candidates’ place on the ethical pedestal is a worthwhile asset. Women can maintain that advantage by showcasing integrity, transparency, and consistency.



## KEY TIPS FOR CANDIDATES:

### STAYING ON THE ETHICAL PEDESTAL

- **Be transparent.** Set a standard of openness and stick to it. Your website is a great place to list your public schedule, post videos of speeches and debates, release position papers, and feature press interviews.
- **Be careful.** Conduct opposition research on yourself before the campaign ramps up. Develop a strategy to deal with anything that could be harmful with the most seasoned, trusted, and experienced person on your team. Prepare opposition research on your family members and business partners, as well.
- **Be thoughtful.** Anticipate what character attacks might be made against you or your family instead of giving that advantage to your opponent. Pre-emptively prepare a thoughtful, clear response to any potential attacks, and be sure to have clarity with your team about a rapid response.
- **Be sure.** Unless you are certain that your opponent seriously or habitually violates ethical, financial, or legal rules, do not be the first to raise the issue. Before you or your campaign make an accusation against an opponent, review your research to ensure that neither you nor anyone associated with you or the campaign have done the same thing.
- **Be quick.** Everyone makes mistakes. By quickly taking responsibility and moving on, you have a better chance of limiting the story to one news cycle. Also, call in a third-party validator when responding.
- **Be consistent.** If attacks linger, be consistent about your response. Share facts and talking points with supporters that mirror your messages. Be sure these third-party validators use your messages and know how to pivot to vouch for your qualifications, and don't focus on the character attack from your opponent.

# HANDLING A CRISIS

## The Challenge

The ability to handle a crisis has consistently been a key component of a woman candidate demonstrating her qualifications for office. In previous Barbara Lee Family Foundation research, voters rated “can handle a crisis” as a top trait that contributes to a woman’s electability.

## The Solution

Although there are many types of crises, from mass shootings, to hurricanes, floods, wildfires, and pandemics, voters have concrete ideas about what makes a woman leader successful at handling a crisis. Voters want a problem solver who is creative, realistic, strong, and decisive—someone who listens and projects calmness and confidence. Voters also want a candidate who takes a 360-degree view about what needs to happen before, during, and after the crisis. It is important to voters that women leaders have a plan—not just for the current moment, but for what is coming next.

Our research found that “being a good communicator” was the most important trait for women leaders during a crisis. For voters, communicating is not only about conveying information but also about listening to and learning from experts, stakeholders, and those impacted.



## KEY TIPS FOR CANDIDATES:

### LEADING DURING A CRISIS

- **Confidence is key.** Confidence signals both qualifications and likeability, and is essential when it comes to showing you can handle a crisis. Voters have no patience for perceived on-the-job learning — the expectation is to show being prepared for leadership from day one.
- **Showcase your ability to build—and execute—a plan that prepares for the future, taking a 360-degree view.** Voters want to know you have the experience to not only develop a plan to ensure their communities have what they need during and after a time of crisis, but to prepare for different types of future crises. Voters appreciate visual cues — such as maps and data visualizations — that demonstrate preparedness, knowledge of the facts, and action as a crisis evolves.
- **Highlight your track record as a problem-solver.** For voters, problem solving is about mobilizing stakeholders, working on multiple fronts, listening to experts to find solutions, and showing that you can change the plan if need be. Voters want leaders who are nimble, flexible, and responsive during a crisis.
- **Be a team captain.** While voters expect you to be a leader, and take ultimate accountability, they also overwhelmingly want you to be part of a team. Show that you can delegate, take the advice of issue experts seriously, and work with other elected officials.
- **Focus on community.** Voters respond to leaders who take an authentic, proactive, and “in the trenches” approach when their community is experiencing a crisis; they are critical of any actions that seem staged or insincere.
- **Emphasize your communication and listening skills.** Voters want to be able to count on you for timely, accurate, transparent information, while at the same time know you’re listening to stakeholders, including experts, other leaders, businesses, and people who are impacted.
- **Know that empathy is needed, but is not enough on its own.** Traditionally, women have been penalized for showing emotion — that’s not the case here. It’s important to acknowledge the pain and sorrow that accompany crises, but what voters really want is for you to have a plan to address the fallout and move forward.

# RESILIENCE FOLLOWING MISTAKES

**"It was a big gaffe but [the media] definitely gave her a lot of credit for apologizing quickly and not making excuses. And so a story that could have plagued us... became a story that sort of petered out within three days."**

**CAMPAIGN MANAGER**

## **The Challenge**

No one can run a perfect campaign. However, women do not have much room to make mistakes. Voters remember and punish women more for mistakes, which undermine their qualifications.

Women are often perceived as letting mistakes linger for too long. This is devastating to both their likeability and their qualifications.

## **The Solution**

When women do slip up, they need to work immediately with their campaigns to engage in crisis communications.

One rebound strategy is clear: Respond quickly with a succinct, straight answer and then introduce third-party validators who can reinforce the candidate's qualifications. This strategy worked for women candidates and did not work for men candidates.



# NAVIGATING THE LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR ROLE

## The Challenge

Lieutenant governorships across the country are closer to gender parity than most other elected offices, and this position has historically been a stepping stone to governor for women leaders.

As integral and influential as lieutenant governors can be, voters in our recent research said that they do not have much awareness about what this position entails or what roles a lt. governor plays. Voters also said that they prefer to see a lt. governor establish her own niche separate from the governor, and that they want to see a woman lt. governor solve problems.

## The Solution

The fact that voters do not have strong opinions about lieutenant governors creates an opportunity for women in this role. LGs have an opportunity to define the role and tell the story of their accomplishments to the public.

Voters also said that they believe a woman lieutenant governor who is running for governor is qualified based on her tangible accomplishments and track record.



## KEY TIPS FOR CANDIDATES:

### SECOND IN COMMAND POSITIONS

- **Carve out your own niche.** Many voters don't have much understanding about what a Lt. governor does. Rather than only assisting or supporting the governor, voters want to see you take on your own projects.
- **Negotiate your portfolio of issues.** Voters are interested in your actions on their top issues. Instead of focusing solely on more abstract goals like attracting tourism or international trade to the state, take on challenges that directly impact voters' lives. Make sure you demonstrate listening and taking action. They especially want to know that you can respond to a crisis—pre-planning to prepare, working with other electeds, and listening to those most impacted by the crisis.
- **Be an expert on your state.** What are the issues that matter most to the communities in your state? Previous BLFF research found that voters want messaging framed around them, and how your work benefited the people in your community.
- **Demonstrate that you're a problem solver and communicate on results.** Voters want a Lt. governor to be a problem-solver. "Getting things done" is one of the most important traits voters prioritized for a qualified Lt. governor. Use action-oriented language and be specific about what you did to accomplish goals.
- **Highlight listening to the community.** Previous BLFF research shows that voters value women leaders who listen to the community. Focus group participants want leaders who listen to communities, oversee operations to make sure things work, and connect people to the governor.

# RELAUNCHING AFTER A LOSS

## The Challenge

In the winner-take-all voting system in the U.S., there can only be one winner. As one focus group participant put it: “There is always going to be a loser.” Clichés abound about the importance of learning and moving forward after failure, but often that’s easier said than done, particularly after an electoral loss.

Historically, women candidates have faced questions about their qualifications and likeability in the campaign post-mortem period. Because voters remember and penalize women’s mistakes on the campaign trail, women candidates may feel that running again after losing a campaign is not a viable path forward. However, voters are incredibly open to the idea of a woman relaunching herself as a public figure and running again after a loss.

## The Solution

A woman can start her next campaign as soon as her concession speech or statement. It’s important to be forward-thinking—don’t dwell on the past. Voters are sensitive to any perceived whining or blaming.

The messaging should focus on the voters, not the candidate. It’s important for a woman candidate to be values-oriented and grounded in the needs of her constituency. Voters respond when women who have lost elections focus on listening to the community, continuing to fight for their ideals, and getting things done for the community.

After losing an election, a woman candidate has a wide range of options for her next steps. However, voters demonstrate clear preferences for specific things a woman candidate can do after losing that they believe would make her qualified to run for office again. Voters want to see a losing candidate who is a community-focused, issues-oriented public servant. Find ways to stay engaged in the community, and take time to work on an issue that was big in the campaign, build political skills, and network with other leaders.

# RUNNING FOR REELECTION

## The Challenge

Even with an increased number of women serving as governor, when voters think of a governor, they automatically picture a man.

Another challenge is that when a woman serves as governor, voters do not assume she is doing a good job, nor do they take her word for it. However, voters do recognize that women, especially women of color, serving in executive office are held to a higher standard than their male counterparts.

## The Solution

To effectively communicate her record with voters, a woman incumbent must proactively lay out what she has accomplished while in office. Voters prefer for her to use specific examples and benchmarks to show how she has helped communities, and how she has gotten results as an executive leader.

When an opponent attacks a woman's record, voters look for her to defend her actions decisively. Beyond addressing the issues in question, voters want to see a woman who is running for reelection handle criticism with strength and composure.



## KEY TIPS FOR CANDIDATES:

### BUILDING STAYING POWER

- **Be proactive about communicating how you've made positive change.** Focus on the results you've achieved on behalf of communities, not on your personal accomplishments.
- **When your record is attacked, respond in a way that demonstrates confidence and calm.** Voters want an answer from you when your record is critiqued, and they will make different judgements based on how you respond. The best responses demonstrate how you are taking steps to solve a problem.
- **Use specifics when talking about what you have achieved.** Back up your claims with facts and figures, and use benchmarks to communicate progress with your ongoing efforts.
- **Listen to your constituents and to experts.** As demonstrated in previous BLFF research, listening is critical to show that you are tapped into what communities are facing.
- **Convey positivity and results.** Statements that communicate positive change and results work better than statements that negate or deny a mistake.

# CONCLUSION

**T**he findings laid out here show that women candidates still face challenges. Those challenges, however, are surmountable—and they are often countered by strategic advantages.

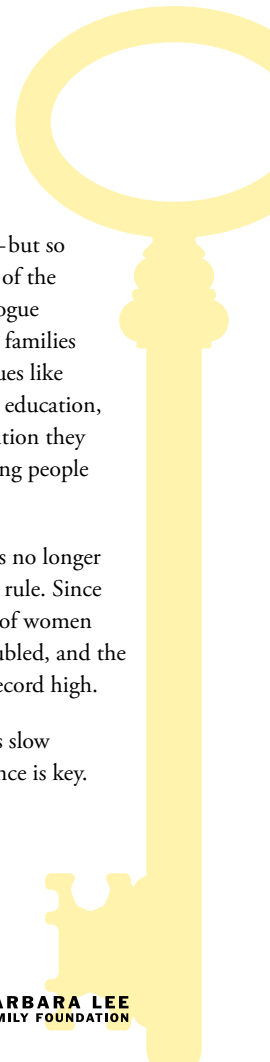
## **We know that women must:**

- Prove they can handle a crisis
- Handle sexism with confidence, calm, and professionalism
- Be prepared to hit the ground running
- Use the “qualified” label
- Lead with experience and expertise before sharing personal background
- Utilize the full life experience that comes with being a woman—work experience, family life, balancing the personal and professional—to connect with voters
- Know how to go negative without losing the ethical advantage
- Unravel the double bind to demonstrate qualification and likeability
- Rebound quickly from mistakes

*How* women reach political equality is important—but so is the *why*. With more women’s voices at the center of the conversation, we have a more robust, inclusive dialogue about issues that matter not only to women, but to families and all Americans. With more women in office, issues like economic opportunity, access to healthcare, quality education, reproductive health, and sexual assault get the attention they deserve. To voters, women are the ones likely to bring people together to get results and make government work.

Women in politics are no longer an anomaly. Voters no longer see qualified women as the exception instead of the rule. Since the inception of this research in 1998, the number of women governors in our nation’s history has more than doubled, and the number of women in the U.S. Congress has hit a record high.

Progress toward equality in elected representation is slow and incremental. But it is persistent—and persistence is key.



# METHODOLOGY

The Barbara Lee Family Foundation has been lucky to have many partners over the years in the work to study women candidates for governor and how voters respond to women's campaigns, including:

- Lake Research Partners  
(formerly Lake Snell Perry & Associates)
- Bellwether Research & Consulting
- Avalanche Insights
- AmericanViewpoint, Inc.
- Center for American Women and Politics and  
the Eagleton Institute of Politics Center on the  
American Governor at Rutgers University
- Chesapeake Beach Consulting
- Hughes & Company (formerly Staton Hughes)
- Iowa State University
- 76 Words

The resulting body of work is the Barbara Lee Family Foundation Governors Guidebook Series. That series is distilled in this book, along with the key findings from separate pieces of research focusing on women candidates more broadly. These works studied messages for women candidates; demonstrating qualification; contrasting with opponents; showcasing likeability; and next steps following an electoral loss, as well as other topics.

Each study and its full methodology are available at [www.blff.org](http://www.blff.org).

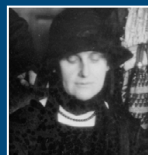
# OUR PARTNERS





# THE GALLERY

## A History of Women Governors



Governor  
Nellie Tayloe Ross  
1925-1927  
Wyoming



Governor  
Miriam A. Ferguson  
1925-27 and 1933-1935  
Texas



Governor  
Lurleen Wallace  
1967-1968  
Alabama



Governor  
Ella T. Grasso  
1975-1980  
Connecticut



Governor  
Dixy Lee Ray  
1977-1981  
Washington



Acting Governor  
Vesta M. Roy  
1982-1983  
New Hampshire



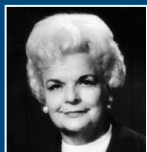
Governor  
Martha Layne Collins  
1983-1987  
Kentucky



Governor  
Madeleine M. Kunin  
1985-1991  
Vermont



Governor  
Kay A. Orr  
1987-1991  
Nebraska



Governor  
Rose Mofford  
1988-1991  
Arizona



Governor  
Joan Finney  
1991-1995  
Kansas



Governor  
Ann Richards  
1991-1995  
Texas



Governor  
Barbara Roberts  
1991-1995  
Oregon



Governor  
Christine Todd Whitman  
1994-2001  
New Jersey



Governor  
Jane Dee Hull  
1997-2003  
Arizona



Governor  
Jeanne Shaheen  
1997-2003  
New Hampshire



Governor  
Nancy P. Hollister  
1998-1999  
Ohio



Governor  
Judy Martz  
2001-2005  
Montana



Governor  
Ruth Ann Minner  
2001-2009  
Delaware



Acting Governor  
Jane Swift  
2001-2003  
Massachusetts



Governor  
Linda Lingle  
2002-2010  
Hawaii



Governor  
Jennifer M. Granholm  
2003-2011  
Michigan



Governor  
Janet Napolitano  
2003-2009  
Arizona



Governor  
Kathleen Sebelius  
2003-2009  
Kansas



Governor  
Olene Walker  
2003-2005  
Utah



Governor  
Kathleen Blanco  
2004-2008  
Louisiana



Governor  
M. Jodi Rell  
2004-2011  
Connecticut



Governor  
Christine Gregoire  
2005-2013  
Washington



Governor  
Sarah Palin  
2006-2009  
Alaska



Governor  
Jan Brewer  
2009-2014  
Arizona



Governor  
Beverly Perdue  
2009-2013  
North Carolina



Governor  
Mary Fallin  
2011-2019  
Oklahoma



Governor  
Nikki Haley  
2011-2017  
South Carolina



Governor  
Susana Martinez  
2011-2019  
New Mexico



Governor  
Maggie Hassan  
2013-2017  
New Hampshire



Governor  
Kate Brown  
2015-2022  
Oregon



Governor  
Gina Raimondo  
2015-2021  
Rhode Island



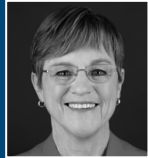
Governor  
Kay Ivey  
2017-Present  
Alabama



Governor  
Kim Reynolds  
2017-Present  
Iowa



Governor  
Michelle Lujan Grisham  
2019 – Present  
New Mexico



Governor  
Laura Kelly  
2019- Present  
Kansas



Governor  
Janet Mills  
2019-Present  
Maine



Governor  
Kristi Noem  
2019- Present  
South Dakota



Governor  
Gretchen Whitmer  
2019-Present  
Michigan



Governor  
Kathy Hochul  
2021-Present  
New York



Governor  
Maura Healy  
2023-Present  
Massachusetts



Governor  
Katie Hobbs  
2023-Present  
Arizona



Governor  
Tina Kotek  
2023-Present  
Oregon



Governor  
Sarah Huckabee Sanders  
2023-Present  
Arkansas

Source: Center for American  
Women and Politics's *History of  
Women Governors*

# LEARN MORE

**Below is 25+ years of in-depth research available from the Barbara Lee Family Foundation:**

- Second in Command: The Challenges and Opportunities Facing Women Lieutenant Governors (2023)
- Shared Hurdles: How Political Races Change When Two Women Compete (2022)
- Staying Power: Strategies for Women Incumbents (2021)
- Putting Sexism in its Place on the Campaign Trail (2021)
- Rising to the Occasion: How Women Leaders Prove They Can Handle a Crisis (2020)
- Ready, Willing, & Electable: Women Running for Executive Office (2019)
- Relaunch: Resilience and Rebuilding for Women Candidates After an Electoral Loss (2018)
- #MeToo: An Issue that Transcends Party (2018)
- Voters, Candidates, and #MeToo (2018)
- Opportunity Knocks: Now is the Time for Women Candidates (2017)
- Modern Family: How Women Candidates Can Talk About Politics, Parenting, and Their Personal Lives (2017)
- Politics is Personal: Keys to Likeability and Electability for Women (2017)
- Unlocking the Door to Executive Office: Essential Tips for Women Candidates (2015)
- Change the Channel: Ads that Work for Women Candidates (2013)
- Pitch Perfect: Winning Strategies for Women Candidates (2012)
- Breakthrough Messages for Women Voters (2012)
- Turning Point: The Changing Landscape for Women Candidates (2010)
- Leading with Authority (2008)
- Positioning Women to Win (2006)
- Cracking the Code (2002)
- Speaking with Authority (2001)
- Keys to the Governor's Office (1998)



## **Barbara Lee Family Foundation**

advances women's equality and representation in American politics through nonpartisan political research, strategic partnerships, and grantmaking. Our work is guided by our core belief that women's voices strengthen our democracy and enrich our culture.



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