

Name of Signer (signature required)  
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Residence

WHEREOF, I HAVE REFUSED TO SET MY HAND, THE DAY AND YEAR PLACED OPPOSITE MY SIGNATURE.

Except in NYC

# STEP RIGHT UP

How to Become a  
City Council Member



# HOW DOES SOMEONE GET TO POWER IN NYC POLITICS?

In the spring of 2012, students from Ms. Pardo's 11th grade English Language Arts class from the Academy of Urban Planning collaborated with CUP and teaching artist John Dalessi to explore the steps to coming to power in New York City - specifically, how to become a City Council Member.

We started off by examining different elected offices within NYC, and then narrowed our focus to City Council, one of the offices most directly involved at the neighborhood level. We interviewed Antonio Reynoso, Chief of Staff for Councilmember Diana Reyna (of Council District 34 - Bushwick), and 2013 City Council candidate for the 34<sup>th</sup> District.

After becoming experts in the art of creative metaphors, we took all we had learned from our interview and research and created visual metaphors for the steps that are essential to running for City Council. This booklet is an introduction to what it takes get elected to city government.

The Center for Urban Pedagogy (CUP) is a nonprofit organization that uses the power of design and art to improve civic engagement.



City Studies are CUP's project-based in-class and afterschool programs that use design and art as tools to research the city.

To learn more about CUP, visit [welcometocup.org](http://welcometocup.org).



# WHAT ARE THE MAIN ELECTED POSITIONS IN NYC GOVERNMENT?

There are lots of people who represent us in city government. Here are some of the most important ones in New York City:



- The **Mayor** has the broadest power of all the elected officials. The Mayor appoints deputies, has veto power on all bills proposed by City Council, and comes up with the city's budget and other long-term city plans.

- The **City Council** is made up of 51 members (one from each district in NYC). They make and vote on all local laws. They approve the city budget and review land-use matters.



- There are five **Borough Presidents**. They propose how city funds get used within their boroughs to the City Council. They monitor borough-specific complaints and appoint members to their Community Boards.

- The **Comptroller** is in charge of the city's finances. They give budgetary advice to the Mayor, audit public agencies, and check on public agencies to make sure that they are using public funds appropriately.



- The **Public Advocate** monitors and collects information that comes from the public. They review complaints and hold public hearings.



# SO WHAT ARE THE OFFICIAL STEPS TO RUN FOR CITY COUNCIL?

## 1 Get on the Ballot

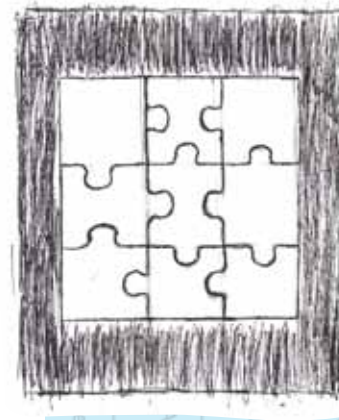
The only two requirements to run for City Council are:

- you must be at least 18 years old, and
- you must reside in the district you are running for by the time you are elected. That's it!

But first, you have to make sure your name is on the ballot. To do that, circulate a petition and gather signatures from people in your district. The minimum number of signatures you need is either 450, or 5% of voters that are registered with your party (whichever is lower). It's best to get a bit more than the minimum in case some of the signatures aren't valid.



At a concert, selling a lot of tickets proves you're popular. Getting enough signatures does the same thing.



To have a successful campaign, your committee must have all the right pieces.

## 2 Form a Committee

The next important step to officially start a campaign is to form a committee. The simplest committee can just have the candidate (you), a treasurer, and a campaign manager. Write out this information on the official forms, send them to both the City and State, and you're set.

In the game of electoral politics, picking who is going to be on your team is a crucial decision.





**"Ask every contact you make for money."  
— Antonio Reynoso**

# 3

## Fundraise for Your Campaign

Now that you've decided to run for City Council, certain expenses will come up—for example, paying your staff and paying for campaign material, like flyers and posters. Any individual or Political Action Committee (PAC) can contribute money (up to \$2,750) to your campaign. A business or corporation cannot.

**You can't start the race, much less reach the finish line, without campaign contributions.**



# 4

## Decide if You'll Use the Campaign Finance Program

Candidates who don't think they'll get a lot of contributions can participate in the Campaign Finance Program. The city government program is paid for by NYC taxpayers. For every \$1 a participating candidate raises, the government will contribute \$6 (up to the first \$175 of a contribution). The catch is that participants can't spend more than \$168,000 for their primary and general election campaigns. And they might be running against candidates with way more money than that.

**Thankfully, for those candidates on a budget, there's a limited time "Buy 1, Get 6 Free" sale.**





# WHAT ARE SOME UNOFFICIAL STEPS TO RUNNING FOR OFFICE?

# 1

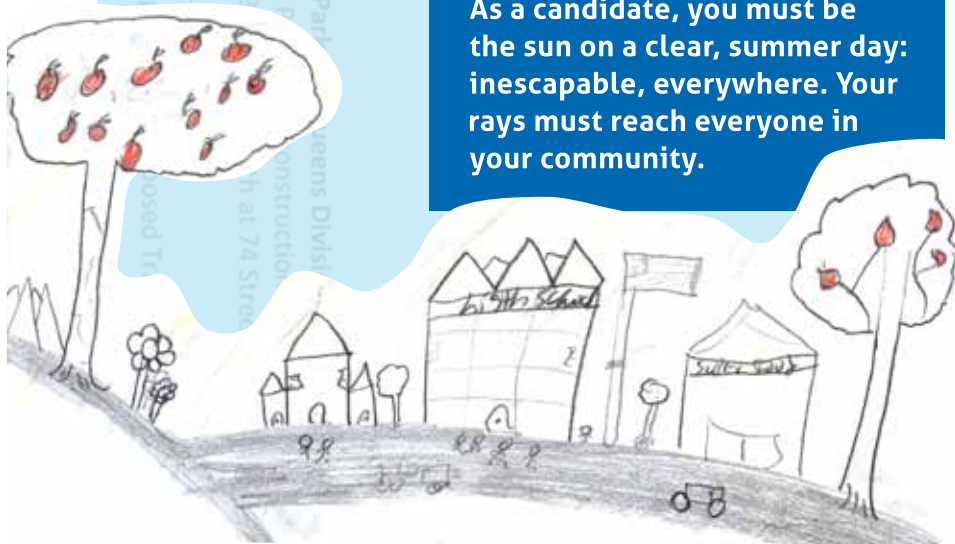
## Interact with the Community

There are many things you should do that you won't find in any official handbook. Interacting with many different people from your district is one of the most important parts of running for office. Even if you don't know or aren't friendly with an individual or group, talking to people outside of your circle of friends and supporters increases your chances of getting more votes, and ultimately, being a successful representative of your district if you win.

**"Meet every community leader, whether they like you or not. Go to every single community meeting."**

— Antonio Reynoso

**As a candidate, you must be the sun on a clear, summer day: inescapable, everywhere. Your rays must reach everyone in your community.**

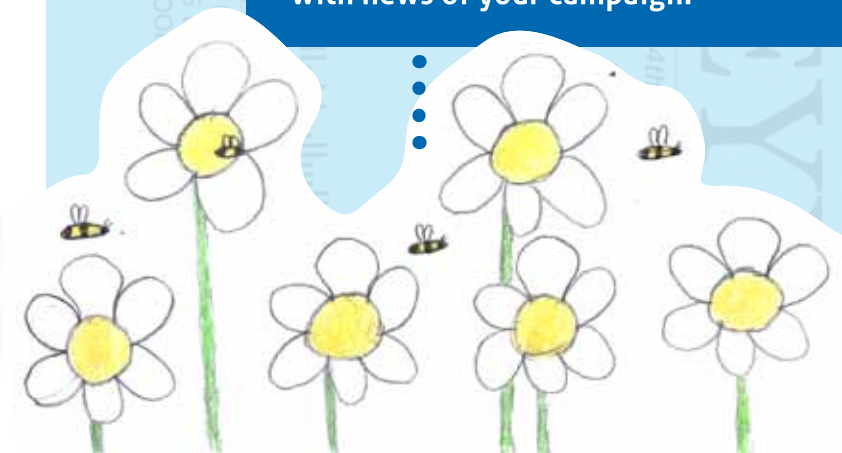


# 2

## Make Positive Contacts

A positive contact is a potential voter that your campaign reaches out to in many ways: at least once by phone, once by knocking on their door, and three times by mail. Because of limited funds, a campaign can't reach out to everybody this way. So traditionally, a campaign will reach out to people who have already voted in past elections. This is an unfortunate cycle, since campaign materials will rarely reach new voters. But an easy first step to getting in the know is to start voting.

**Starting from the formation of your committee up until Election Day, the worker bees of your campaign must buzz far and wide, pollinating the community with news of your campaign.**



To reach the top, a candidate must be a structurally sound airplane, with the support of friends and family as its aerodynamic design and jet fuel. Those made of paper will only get so far before crashing.



3

## Have a Strong Base of Support

Even though just about anyone (18 years or older) can run for City Council, it seems that the system is set up so that you can't just come out of nowhere and win an election. You need a strong base of support outside of your immediate community.

**"Never expect to lose."  
— Antonio Reynoso**

A candidate's support base must be a house made of stone, not a vulnerable house of straw.



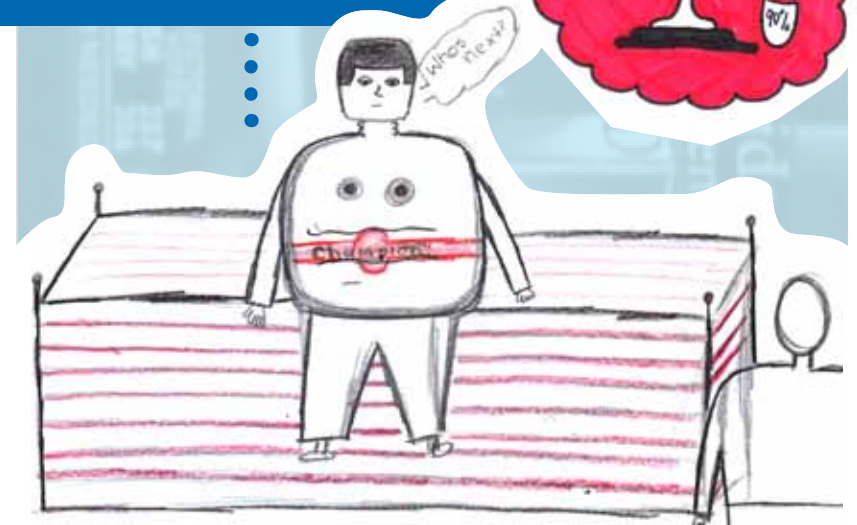
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## Be Elected...Already

Most elected officials are limited to two terms in office (one term=four years). So City Council Members can be in office for a total of eight years. After their first term, they're called "incumbents." Incumbents are very likely to be re-elected for a second term.

In 2010, the incumbent re-election rate for statewide officials was 96%! But don't let the odds stop you. After reading this, you are a little bit closer to getting elected to City Council.

Winning a match, or even getting into the ring, can be tough when a reigning champion is still in the fight.





## CUP

Teaching Artist: John P. Dalessi

Project Lead: Valeria Mogilevich

Project Support: Sam Holleran, Christine Gaspar

Graphic Design: Robin Mooty

### The Academy of Urban Planning Students:

Dimitri Agosto

Gendyliss Almanzar

Medelin Almanzar

Fausto Avinicio

Amaris Brignoni

Ramon Luciano Capellan Peguer

Christopher Estrella

Angel Flores

Rosa Gomez

Gabriel Marte

Fabian Morales

Juan Morales

Luis Morales

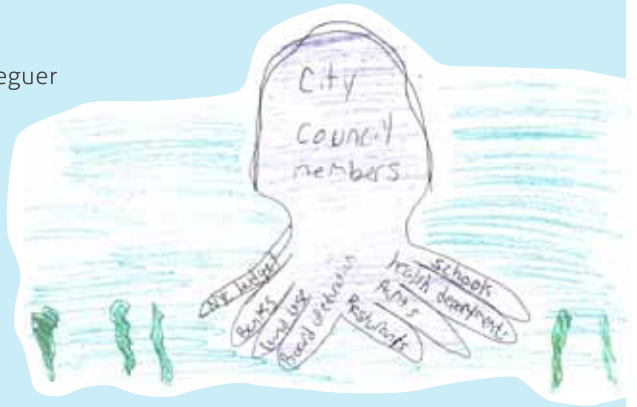
Jaquan Robinson

Alexis Suarez

Josue Torres

Classroom Teacher: Ms. Pardo

Program Coordinator: Josh Lapidus



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