

Before you take the plunge and decide to run for elections, it is understandable if you have some doubts. Women throughout the Pacific have highlighted a range of worries they have about running for elections:

- ✿ Discriminatory attitudes towards women. Some people think women are not capable of acting in leadership positions. Others argue they are too young or too old, if they are single, that they are unstable, or if they are divorced, that they are unfit to hold public office.
- ✿ No support from immediate and extended family.
- ✿ The need to put the welfare of the family first.
- ✿ Bickering, jealousies and infighting with other women.
- ✿ No support from churches and other religious bodies. Women's involvement in politics is seen as 'ungodly'.

- ✿ Corruption makes politics a "dirty game" that it should only be played by men.
- ✿ Lack of money to contest the election (and the problem of "gifts" to voters in many countries).
- ✿ The attitude that Parliament and decision making is a 'man's domain'.
- ✿ The belief that women are not eligible because they do not hold a chiefly title or because their culture says they should stay in the home.
- ✿ Low esteem among women, who feel inferior to men.

It is to be expected that you will face obstacles when you run for a seat in the legislature. In many Pacific countries, the election of women to positions of leadership in the legislature represents a major change in the way things have been done in the past. Change often brings resistance.



**Imelda Nakamura,  
1991 Palau  
National Elections  
Candidate**

“As an attorney, every two weeks there were domestic violence cases and I realized that since 1994, even though our government had ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child, there was still no implementation. It is not about why I ran for elections but why women [in general] need to run. It is not about personal gain. Women need to be there to represent the needs of women and children.”

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However, women throughout the Pacific have proven for decades their ability to tackle complex challenges. Women have considerable expertise to contribute in the service of the public, not only drawing on their experiences as wives and mothers and daughters, but through their experiences as government officials, business-people, teachers, doctors, lawyers, accountants, and the like.

Preparation and a readiness to face problems energetically and innovatively can help to make sure you are in a good position to overcome any obstacles you might come across. Prepare yourself mentally. It also helps to prepare your family, as the stress of a campaign can have an effect on them too.

With commitment, courage and a willingness to try and try again, Pacific women can break through any and all barriers to leadership and reach the centres of power.

“ I find it particularly interesting that people focus heavily on reasons why women should not stand for elections rather than why they should. ”

Hon Mathew  
Batsiua, Minister for  
Justice, Nauru



# Sign Up!

**W**hen you make the decision to run for election you will need to sign up and nominate yourself.

**Think long and hard about why you want to stand for elections.** In discussions with women, one of the biggest problems identified is that women often sign up to run for election very late and have not fully considered WHY they want to run. Before you nominate yourself, you may want to talk to your family and friends about your ideas and see what they think. As a member of a community, you also may want to discuss your plans with those close to you, before you actually take the step to nominate.

Before signing up to run, consider whether you are really prepared. Have you been active in your community? Do you think people know you – or will you have to start from scratch? People often ask nominees, what have you done for the community to demonstrate your commitment to the community rather than just being hungry for power?

**Read the Electoral Act.** Every country has legislation and regulations that govern all aspects of elections, from nomination, to campaign financing and disclosures, to polling day to vote counting and so on. To ensure that you

are not tripped up by small procedural mistakes, it is smart to get a copy of all the relevant electoral laws from your Electoral Commission as soon as you decide you want to run in the elections. Read the documents carefully to make sure you follow the right processes. If you do not understand anything, feel free to contact the Electoral Commission and ask them for guidance.

**Decide which constituency you wish to represent.** Electoral laws usually determine where you are allowed to run for election. However, if you have a choice of constituency, to be most effective, you should consider running in an electorate that you either have grown up in or where you are well known.

You may want to take into account the following issues:

- ✿ How well do the people know you?
- ✿ What have you done for the community for which they will support you?
- ✿ Do you attend church, temple, mosque or another faith based organisation in the area?
- ✿ What are your traditional, family and/or business ties to the area?
- ✿ How well do you know and identify with community needs of the area?
- ✿ What previous leadership roles have you played in your community?

**Consider whether to stand as an independent candidate or to join a political party.** There are advantages and disadvantages of joining a political party or running as an independent candidate.

## Running as an independent

### Advantages:

- \* Freedom to develop strategies and policies and not be restricted by party policies or practices
- \* No need for negotiations with party officials
- \* You could end up holding the balance of power in government if the numbers are tied
- \* If you are popular and have a reputation that helps, then you are not stuck with a party that might be unpopular

### Disadvantages:

- \* You have to build your support from scratch as there is no support base
- \* Could be very expensive running a campaign on your own
- \* The probability of losing is higher except in a non-party system
- \* You can find yourself ineffective if elected, in countries where parties are dominant in the legislature

## Running with a political party

### Advantages:

- \* Support from the party for campaigning
- \* Party support for fundraising
- \* Ready made supporters who will work and vote for the party regardless of who is the candidate (in most cases)
- \* Professional media support and advertising

### Disadvantages:

- \* Selection process can take too long or may not happen
- \* Disagreements about party policies can lead to conflict and resignation
- \* Male dominated party politics
- \* You may have to compromise your own views/policies to fit into the party platform

Excerpt: UNIFEM Women and Political Empowerment Manual for the Pacific, p.67

If you are considering joining a party, then you need to learn all that you can about what the party stands for and decide if you agree with their views. Find out whether the party

supports special measures to increase the numbers of women in the legislature because this could help you to get nominated. If you decide you want to join up, then you need



**Taufa Vakatale, Former Deputy Prime Minister and Cabinet Minister, Fiji.**

“You could say the timing was right for me to run for parliament...I had reached the highest level within the civil service and therefore running for parliament was a natural progression. So when I was approached by a chief to actually run – I decided to go for it!”

Ms Vakatale goes on to say however, that one does not necessarily have to reach the top of the civil service. It really is about how prepared you are and making that decision to run. “I knew I possessed the relevant skills to run for parliament. My time with the Young Women’s Christian Association (YWCA) prepared me for my role in politics. It taught me to open my eyes to the injustice happening around me and more importantly to be proactive,” she says.

When I decided to run for parliament I had already made in-roads into the party system. I was involved with political parties whilst I was in the civil service and even when still a teacher, I took part in helping out in elections. As a result I learnt about electoral processes and party politics.”

“It really is about how prepared you are and making that decision to run.”

to become a member of the party. You should also find out what they look for when choosing candidates to run for election.

Many women who have run for election observe that if you want to run as a member of a political party, it’s important to be involved in a party well before elections. You cannot expect the election to be called and to then simply ask a party to endorse you. If you hope to be selected by a party then the party needs to know who you are. At the time of the elections, you will need to convince the party that you are the right person to be selected. It is more likely that a party will nominate a loyal party supporter, who has been working for the party for a number of years, than a newcomer that they do not know.

Even if you can’t get a party to nominate you, you can always run as an independent candidate. In any case, this is what many women choose to do. It may be harder – because you won’t have the party machinery and funds to help you – but in many Pacific countries, parties are weak. You may prefer the freedom of running on your own and being able to say what you want and talk about ideas and issues that are important to you personally.

If you get selected to join a party, play a role in the development of its manifesto. Ensure your party commitments are gender sensitive and address issues concerning women and children. Lobby your party members on the benefits of being inclusive and addressing the needs of 50% your voters.



## Case study: Fiji - Harnessing the political party system



### Priscilla Singh, Suva Councillor & 2006 Fiji Elections Candidate

Priscilla Singh is not new to campaigning and standing for elections. She has stood for the local government elections since 1996 and is now serving her third term. More recently she stood for national elections in 2006. Prior to this she was involved with the National Federation Party for 15 years.

Priscilla says “The biggest hurdle can be party politics, the male dominance and a total disregard for a woman’s perspective. This obstacle is not something you just get over but something you have to work through. Dialoguing and listening to how men work, what they do and really just listening to the male perspective and using this opportunity to talk to them and for them to hear a woman’s perspective. Take time to have a bowl of grog (kava – traditional Fijian drink) with them.”

“I had to make inroads into the party structure itself. I organised the women’s movement of the party, became secretary, vice president and an executive board member, member of the selection committee that chose candidates for local and national elections. I went to all the party meetings and sometimes was the only woman there but I made myself heard and was assertive during meetings, demanding seats and positions for women. One must get very involved within the party itself. Get involved in the party right from the start. You cannot stand on the outside. You have got to get inside and get involved in the party structures by attending meetings conventions, rallies, campaigns and even working in the sheds and crossing off names from the voters rolls.”

Although Priscilla was unsuccessful in 2006, she continues to be actively involved in her party. “For me, the biggest joy came on a day when I was not actually campaigning. I was attending the ‘reguregu’ (funeral gathering) of a Fijian colleague. When I got to the house I heard the Fijian women who were there busy preparing the food for people, whispering, “Priscilla Singh, Priscilla Singh the NFP lady that stood for elections.” I was welcomed and women discussed their issues with me again.”

The fact that Priscilla did not win was not the issue. What was important was that she made herself known by speaking up and advocating for her party’s issues and people remembered this. There will be another election and with that another opportunity.



# alk about it!

**Y**ou need to talk about your ideas with the people around you and really get started planning and preparing to run a campaign.

**Know your voters.** Women who have run for elections before have observed that it is essential to really understand the needs of the constituency. You can start by collecting some basic information:

- ✧ What is their social and economic situation?
- ✧ How do their households made up – size, age, sex, occupation?
- ✧ How many registered voters are there?

- ✧ Who won the last election and what was their platform? How have they performed during their term?

If you really want to be a good representative of the people when you get to parliament, you need to know who they are and what they are most concerned about. Take the time to talk to voters and find out more about them:

- ✧ What are their concerns?
- ✧ What are their key priorities?
- ✧ How do your policies fit in with their aspirations and their hopes for the future?



**Hilda Lini, Former Parliamentarian, Vanuatu.**

“For me, it was many years of build up before I won the elections. For eight years we strategised. I won because by this time women were committed to having a woman in parliament and there was a lot of support from the Women’s Wing of the Liberation Movement.

For me, my key was having a very influential person behind me. She was the late Grace Molisa. She was the private secretary to the then Prime Minister. This helped me strategise my campaign. In addition to this, I had a very strong NGO background and was able to articulate my issues clearly.”

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**Talk through your campaign strategy and plan.** Preparation and planning are essential when you are campaigning, to maximise your resources. Talk to your family members – they can help you. Talk to your friends, associates, church members, work colleagues and professional associates who can be counted on for support and find out what they can offer to your campaign.

- ✿ Is there someone who can be trusted to take on the role of campaign manager?
- ✿ What possible difficulties may arise and how can you deal with them?
- ✿ Is there someone (like an experienced politician) whose advice will be valuable?

✿ What are the key issues you will highlight in your campaign?

**Get tips from those you trust.** Ask questions when you don't know something. Talking about your ideas and listening and learning from others is important especially if you are running for the first time. See if you can make contact with other women who have stood for elections, because they may be able to give you useful tips – what worked for them but also lessons learned. Some political parties may also have a “women's caucus” that brings women in the party together to talk about their special challenges or concerns.



“...find yourself a ‘go to’ person... someone who knows everything about where you will be standing”

**Minister Fiaame Mata'afa, Minister for Women, Community and Social Development, Samoa:** “Ask yourself, why are you doing this? Is this for the right reason? When you decide, find yourself a ‘go to’ person. Someone who knows everything about where you will be standing and can assist you in terms of developing tactics and finding information. This person will also help you profile your constituency and your competitors.

Getting to know my constituency was important. I decided to live in the village where I was going to stand as I had been in NZ. So I lived in the village for seven years before running. This enabled me to get broad support from the extended family.”



# **A**ct now!

**Y**ou need to act quickly and effectively to get your campaign moving. Elections are usually held within 4-6 weeks of being called. You don't want to waste time that you could be using to get out into the community talking to voters.

**Share your ideas with voters and ask them for their feedback.** Think about attending seminars, meetings and workshops at which you can talk with voters. People won't vote for someone they don't know. People need to know who you are and what you stand for.

Remember that in the Pacific, there are lots of opportunities to talk to people about your ideas and why they should vote for you. You can meet people at local sporting events, at village meetings, at music concerts, at church or even at meetings you organise yourself. Make the most of these opportunities.

**Get comfortable speaking in public.** Be active in introducing yourself to people at meetings so everyone gets to know you. Develop confidence but do not be boastful or over-confident – that can be off putting. Learn to be gracious, listen to others and

take note of what people are saying. Prepare yourself for public speaking and making speeches. If you get nervous speaking in public, prepare notes from which you can speak so that you are clear, coherent and what you say is meaningful. When preparing your speaking notes, ensure you have some good solid facts and prepare yourself mentally for questions from voters.

**Develop communication materials to distribute when you are talking to people.** Any materials you produce need to be in simple language so that ordinary people can understand what you stand for. If you are proposing policies, describe your ideas clearly but simply. Keep written documents short because voters often do not have a lot of time to spend reading campaign materials. Short flyers and posters can be very effective.

**Work with the media.** It is important to increase your public profile. Try to tap the media so that your policies are communicated to as many voters as possible. Get to know reporters and some key people in the media - they can help with your media profile. Your community needs to see that you are active.



**You may wish to issue press releases the media can use in their stories.**

These should usually be no more than one page long and could include quotes from you which the press can use. This assists the press with their own work load and means they are more likely to print your story. Try to arrange to speak on radio, as radio in the Pacific has a very extensive reach. Talkback shows are popular.

**Profile the candidates running against you.**

Who else is contesting the same seat as you? What are their strengths and weaknesses? What are their policies? What is the difference between you and them? Will this difference make people vote for you or for them? It is useful to help voters understand what is different about you and your policies because this will help them decide on why they should choose you and not someone else. Make sure to highlight what you think the strengths of your campaign are.

**Stay active.** It is important to keep your campaign constantly moving forward. Campaigning will be stressful and tiring but you need to stay active so that people remember

who you are and why they should vote for you.

Throughout your campaign, it is important to take time to reflect on your actions, strategies, progress and problems encountered. Your campaign strategy should be constantly reviewed and revised to take account of any new developments. Do not be discouraged or be distracted by unexpected or negative situations, this is all part and parcel of politics and campaigning.

Have regular debriefing meetings with your support team. It is almost survival of the fittest – so make sure you are fit and healthy enough to handle the stress, pressures and physical exhaustion.



**Imelda Nakamura, 1991 Palau National Elections Candidate**

“Prepare, plan and perform. Prepare a strategic plan, profile your constituents and your opponents. Creating a platform that you can pull candidates together who fight for the same issues. Know where your constituents are and make sure you have the finance to get to them. In my case I had to fly to Guam, Saipan and Hawaii. In the past elections the outside voters made the difference... Whether you win or lose – you need to have a plan.”

“Know where your constituents are and make sure you have the finance to get to them.”