Avalanche

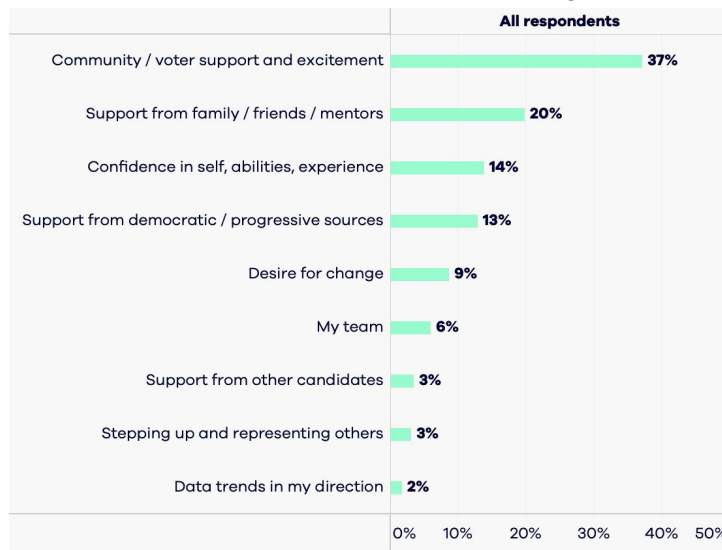# Run For Something gives candidates the confidence and support they need to run, win, and run again

From November 18-30, 2020, Avalanche Insights conducted a deep listening survey of 232 Run For Something candidates to advance understanding of the most pressing challenges candidates face when running for office, which resources and programmatic supports are the most valuable, and key differences in the candidate experience based on age, race, and gender. A majority of surveyed candidates were first-time candidates and had run for state legislative office.

These findings revealed that RFS candidates across gender, age, and urbanism faced numerous challenges campaigning during COVID, especially when it came to hiring qualified staff. These challenges were especially salient for women and rural candidates. Through structural support and programming, RFS was able to substantially alleviate these challenges by providing credibility, legitimacy, and critical one-on-one advice and mentorship.

KEY INSIGHTS

Candidates, especially women and rural candidates, rely on external support from family, friends, and community to build the confidence to run. RFS plays a key role in building & reinforcing that support.

Main source of confidence when deciding to run

	All respondents
Community / voter support and excitement	37%
Support from family / friends / mentors	20%
Confidence in self, abilities, experience	14%
Support from democratic / progressive sources	13%
Desire for change	9%
My team	6%
Support from other candidates	3%
Stepping up and representing others	3%
Data trends in my direction	2%

- When asked what provides the main source of confidence in the decision to run for office, a majority cite external support, led by community / voters (37%) and family / friends (20%).
- Women are >2x as likely to cite external organizations, whereas men are more likely to cite self-confidence.

- Younger candidates are >3x as likely to cite desire for change (22% to 6%).
- Rural candidates are more likely to cite local leaders or external orgs, and less likely to cite community encouragement.

Key Candidate Quotes

"Discussions with friends and reading "Run for Something" (the book)" - White, 32, Male

"I gained confidence with the outpouring of support I received from the community when I announced I was running."
_- Latinx, 28, Male_

"The outpouring of support I received from within and without the District, that and President Obama's endorsement."
- Native American, 41, Female

RFS endorsements lend candidates credibility, driving fundraising and sparking momentum, and RFS one-on-one connections with candidates provide crucial support, advice, and mentorship. This programming is especially valuable for younger candidates who face increased scrutiny regarding their experience.

Most useful RFS program, resource, or tool
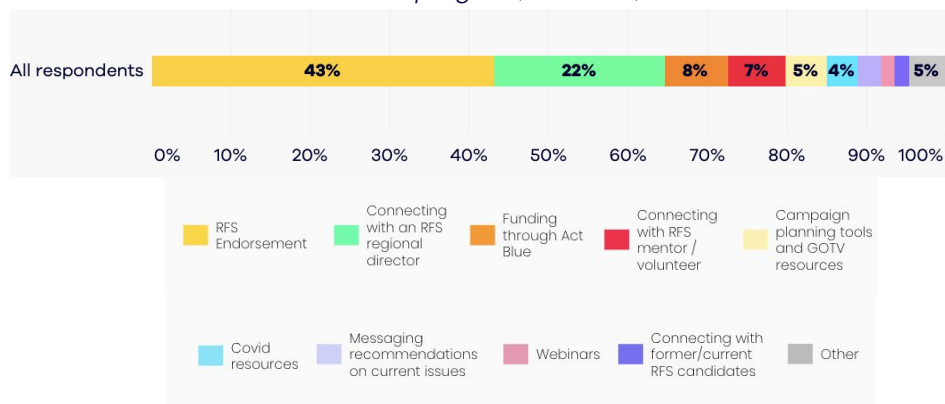
- Nearly a third of candidates cite their age as a challenge they faced based on an aspect of their identity (32%). This leads both racial identity and sex.
- When asked which RFS program was the most useful, a strong plurality of candidates say "RFS endorsements," citing the added legitimacy an RFS endorsement offers with organizations, other candidates, donors, and voters.
- When asked which RFS program was the most useful, nearly a quarter say "Connecting with an RFS regional director," citing the value of empathetic and strategic advice in navigating top challenges during their campaign.
- Women and rural candidates, who face increased structural barriers in running for office (including hiring qualified staff and navigating remote campaigning), are more likely than their male and urban counterparts to cite the value of connecting with an RFS regional director because of the nuanced advice and support they receive.

Key Candidate Quotes regarding age-based challenges:

"Proving myself to be a top contender because people saw me as young." - Male, 26, Black

"As a young female, my older male opponent liked to paint me as uninformed and inexperienced." - White, 34, Female

Key Candidate Quotes regarding RFS support:

"It showed I was vetted by a larger organization that shared my views and the views of other community members." - Male, 36, Black

"The endorsement provided a network of support, credibility and visibility to my campaign." -Male, 34, White

"My Regional Director was in-tune with the ebbs and flows of my race, knew my important deadlines/dates, was empathetic, and made a crucial connection for me with EMILY's List." - Female, 34, White

"Having RFS staff to talk to was incredible. I really just needed moral support and advice, she came in at exactly the right time for me." - Female, 34, Latinx

"Our regular meetings were key to keep me sane, and help me figure out how to use my time and resources." -Male, 41, Asian

A significant majority of RFS candidates say they will run for office again.

Whether candidates will run for office again
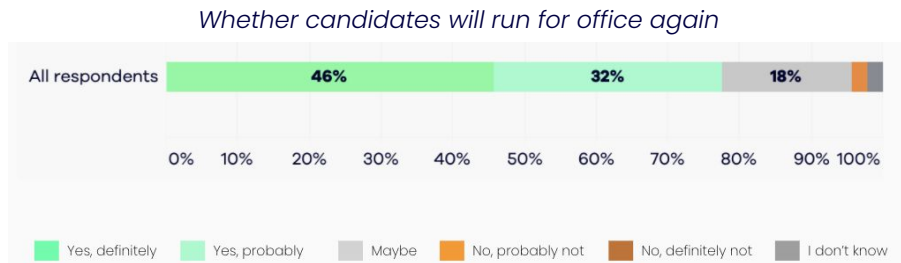
- When asked whether candidates think they will run for office again, more than 75% of RFS candidates say they will run for office again, and nearly half say they will definitely run.
- Men, younger, and urban/suburban candidates are more likely to say they will run for office again.

THE TAKEAWAY

RFS candidates, many of them first-time, face barriers to running for office, including lack of experienced staff and navigating the complexity of remote campaigning. During the 2020 campaign season, RFS alleviated these challenges by providing candidates with credibility and legitimacy. RFS also played an important role in providing candidates with the confidence and ongoing support they needed to be successful, with candidates directly citing the RFS team's strong presence and commitment to empathetic, strategic, and nuanced advice. In 2020, this overarching support has not only helped to

elect 300 diverse progressives across 45 states — it has also driven candidates to say they will seek office again.

METHODOLOGY

An Avalanche Listening Instrument combines open and closed-ended questions. Open-ended questions provide rich data sets that allow us to analyze beliefs, values, and emotions related to an issue. Closed-ended questions provide clarity and comparability with existing research. Our technology enables us to analyze qualitative research at scale, providing the depth of a focus group with the breadth of a poll.