



Welcome! Thank you for your interest in being a member of the Westchester County Democratic Committee (the “WCDC”). This document was created to give you an overview of what being a Westchester County Democratic Committee member entails. For more information, please contact the Democratic Committee Chair from your municipality (contact information can be found [here](#)).

What is a Democratic District Leader?

Democratic County Committee members, sometimes called “District Leaders” (DLs), are the voting members of the WCDC and are entrusted with the power to elect the WCDC Chair and other WCDC officers, adopt the WCDC’s rules, speak at WCDC meetings, and participate in the WCDC’s endorsement and nomination of candidates.

In addition to serving on the County Democratic Committee, DLs from each municipality (village, town, or city) in Westchester comprise the voting members of each municipality’s Democratic Committee and are similarly entrusted with the power to elect the municipal Democratic Committee’s Chair and leadership positions, adopt such Committee’s rules, speak at Committee meetings, and participate in the County Committee’s endorsement and nomination of candidates for certain municipal elected offices. When DLs live in a city or a town, they serve on the city or town Democratic committee. When DLs live in a village, they serve on the village’s Democratic committee as well as the town Democratic committee for the town that includes the village (or part of the village) that the DL represents.

DLs are the Democratic party’s eyes and ears and point of contact with the community. We perform tasks that enable Democratic candidates to get on the ballot and run successful races. Our job is to recruit fellow Democrats, register voters, help select good candidates, get them on the ballot, and then get Democrats to the polls to vote for our candidates.

District Leader Qualifications

To serve as a DL in Westchester, you must be an enrolled Democrat who is elected or appointed to represent an election district (ED) in Westchester County . If you are registered in another party or in no party at all, you cannot become a Democratic DL without changing your party registration by filing a new voter registration form with the County Board of Elections. A change in party enrollment is effective immediately, unless it occurs after February 14th and the June primary election, in which case it becomes effective seven days after the primary.

For the purposes of election administration, each Town and City within the State of New York is divided into election districts (EDs). Each Westchester ED has two DLs. Under New York State (NYS) law, EDs are drawn by the local Board of Elections (BOE). Each ED is generally a small geographical area. All registered voters in each ED vote at the same polling place on Election Day (for in-person voting) and have the same elected representatives at all levels of government. DLs can represent any ED within the State Assembly District they live in, but DLs need not represent the ED in which they reside.

(Local municipal DL handbook: add details on your # of EDs)

“District Leader” is an elected party position with a two-year term. While the formal, legal term for DL is “county committee member,” WCDC members are almost always called “District Leaders.” Pursuant to NYS election law and the WCDC bylaws, elected DLs may fill vacant DL positions within their town/city/area/village between elections by voting at a duly called meeting to appoint qualified Democrats to serve as DLs until the next election.

Anyone interested in becoming a DL should attend city, town, or village Democratic Committee meetings to listen and learn, and to meet other DLs. Once a positive decision is reached, and there are vacancies to be filled, the aspirant should speak to the local party Chair to start the process of becoming a DL.

(Local municipal DL handbook: add chair contact info)

The ABCs of Being a District Leader

Functions of a District Leader

There are two core responsibilities every DL should take seriously and commit to: *carrying designating petitions* and *working on Early Voting and Election Days*.

In addition, DLs are encouraged to attend and participate in meetings, register voters (in one's ED and elsewhere), work for our candidates in the months, weeks, and days leading up to an election (by phone-banking, distributing campaign materials at supermarkets and railroad stations, knocking on doors, and so on), and contribute, as possible, to the financial well-being of the party. (The WCDC and municipal Democratic Committee may host one or more fundraisers throughout the year.)

Petitioning: Your Role in the Democratic Process

The *single most important duty* of a DL is to carry designating petitions for Democratic candidates seeking to run for office. Under NYS election law, those who want to run for a political office must gather a specified minimum number of signatures for their name to appear on the ballot. (The only exceptions are for candidates in special elections, candidates in villages using a caucus system, statewide candidates nominated by the Democratic State Committee, and candidates for State Supreme Court.)

DLs receive a packet from the Chair of their municipal Democratic Committee with designating petition sheets for Democratic candidates who wish to run in the district represented by the DL and who have been endorsed by the County or Municipal Committee, or in the absence of any endorsement for any office, for candidates who wish to participate. Along with the petitions, enrollment "walking" lists are given out. These lists contain the names and addresses of registered Democrats in the district (publicly available information), arranged by street and number for use in visiting the voters more easily. Generally, this is done by walking door-to-door, doing door-knocks and ringing doorbells. Petitions for non-presidential federal, state, and most local candidates are now distributed in late February or early March and must be returned on a specified date in late March/early April.

Generally, candidates for public office are nominated by receiving the highest number of votes for that office in the primary election for their party that is held in June, prior to the general election in November. In order to be on the ballot for the primary election, a candidate must collect signatures from five percent of the registered voters enrolled in the party whose nomination they seek for that office or a smaller number established by

statute, whichever is less. Being cognizant of the fact that a number of signatures may ultimately be disallowed for various reasons, candidates often aim for at least twice the minimum number required.

In Westchester County, in even-numbered years each DL is required to carry their own petition (which may also name a co-District Leader) and obtain the required number of signatures to remain (or become) a DL. If extenuating circumstances will prevent a DL from carrying petitions (e.g., illness, an out-of-town trip), the DL should notify their Chair so that coverage can be provided.

Petitioning: Helpful Tips

Once you have your petitions, develop a plan of action and, if you have a co-DL, try to coordinate your efforts. Review your district's boundaries. Figure out your strategy: will you walk up one side of a street and down the other, going door-to-door? Does it make sense to start with an apartment building? For example, if your district includes apartment buildings, it is always helpful to coordinate with someone in the building who will let you in when it's necessary. If a particular building's rules frown on door-to-door solicitation, be creative. You could send a note to all the Dems, telling them that you'll be ringing their doorbells in coming weeks "unless that's inconvenient."

If you're petitioning in your home district, you may know many of your neighbors. Some DLs call in advance to make appointments to get their neighbors' signatures. (It makes sense to add phone numbers and email addresses to your walking lists when possible, and to keep those annotated lists going forward, so you can contact your "constituents" by phone or email when necessary.) You can host coffees and invite your Democratic neighbors—make petition-signing a social event—and you may even invite a candidate to join you. If you plan to go door-to-door and ask with a bit of lead time, a local candidate might very much appreciate the opportunity to walk with you.

Getting to know the people in your district is highly encouraged. Stop by and introduce yourself to eligible voters, leaving a card, if possible, with your name and phone number (whether they're home or not). Let the people in your district know how you can be reached if someone has a concern. As a DL, you will have regular contact with elected public officials, and you can serve as a go-between for a neighbor with a problem. And of course, someone on your walking list may turn out to be a prospective DL or even a candidate for public office.

While you may strike up some new friendships during your doorknocking, don't be discouraged if you encounter someone who's rude. The person may have had a bad day. Remember that as the grass roots of the party, participating in the democratic process, we are part of a lofty and important endeavor.

DLs are encouraged to enroll people in the Democratic Party who are new in the area, or perhaps even party-unaffiliated. (Sometimes it bears reminding people that in New York, they can only vote in a primary if they are registered in a party, and that – more influence over who candidates will be – may change some people's minds about affiliation.) Also, if you find voters who will be unable to vote in person on Election Day because they will be out of the County or for some other reason, you can make them aware of Early Voting opportunities at multiple locations throughout the County, and/or help them learn how to obtain an absentee ballot via a simple two-step process.

You can carry absentee ballot applications with you, or voters can pick them up at the BOE, or download them from the [BOE website](#). The voter's completed application must be returned to the BOE (in person or by mail). If a voter prefers to have the BOE send an absentee ballot application in the mail, the voter can request that application through the BOE's [online request form](#). Then, the BOE will mail out the ballot application to the absentee voter. Political Calendar deadlines are available at www.elections.ny.gov/politicalcalendar.html.

Petitioning: Details and Rules

Grab a clipboard, some pens, and your walking lists. You can also carry candidate literature, voter registration forms, and absentee ballot applications – in English, and in Spanish, too! You might even want to carry some voter registration forms, in case you end up meeting people who are new to town, or not registered for some other reason.

The petitions you carry will ultimately be bound in volumes and filed with the County BOE. These are legal documents, so there are rules:

1. Any person signing must be a registered Democrat and eligible to vote for the named candidate (i.e. live in that district).
2. The voter must sign the petition in front of you and may not take it out of your sight for another voter to sign. You will be swearing under penalty of perjury that each signer signed in your presence.
3. Nobody can sign for another voter. (If a voter offers to sign for their spouse/child, etc., you may not permit that action.)

4. Voters should sign *just as they are registered*, without titles or nicknames. Margaret Smith should sign as Margaret Smith, not Dr. Margaret Smith, not Peggy Smith, not Mrs. Robert Smith, etc. Suffixes (Jr., III, etc.) are fine; indeed, if a father and son with the same name live in the same household, those distinguishers are important.
5. As noted, the voter **MUST** supply their *own* signature. You *or* the voter can fill in the date and the voter's street address. (Zip codes are unnecessary.) But don't leave those spaces blank. The signature is invalid without them.
6. The voter must *sign* the petition with his or her regular signature--not by printing, unless printing is the person's regular signature.
7. Voters usually register using their full first names but when signing petitions often try to use just a first initial. Don't let them! They must sign the petition as their name appears in the BOE registration records, which is what will be reflected on your walking list. (If they don't remember how they registered, that's a good time to consult your walking list!)
8. When carrying your own petition for DL, signatures may come only from the ED in which you are running for district leader. When you are collecting signatures for others, signatures can come from anywhere within the elected official's district.
9. Signers should use black or blue ink, not pencil. There's no rule against felt-tip pens, but if the sheet gets wet, felt-tip signatures may run, resulting in disqualification of those signatures. Discourage felt-tip pens.
10. If a signer makes a mistake in the signing, draw a straight line through it, and then you (the witness) must initial the cross-out. Start again on the next line.
11. At the end of the process, the witness (you) will complete the witness statement on each sheet. You will print your name and address and indicate the number of signatures in the witness statement, then sign it. Please note that many petitions are disqualified because of incorrect witness statements. If in doubt, ask for help, but do not leave town without signing the witness statements on your petitions and turning them in to the party. Do not fill in the space at the bottom of the petition that says, Sheet No. ____.) That is used when the petitions obtained by DLs for that office are put together and submitted to the BOE.
12. Get out early (in the petition signing period, not the day)! If a voter signs two petitions for the same office, only the first signature counts.

To reiterate:

- It is important to obtain as many signatures as possible, as challenges are often made by an opposing candidate.
- All petitions must be turned in on time.
- You may not sign petition sheets that you are witnessing. You *should* sign a petition for the Democratic slate, but it must be a petition sheet witnessed by someone else, such as your co-District Leader, or someone else in your committee.
- Do not fill in the page number on the bottom right of the sheet, but do make sure the names of the county and city or town (*not* village, hamlet, or PO/zip code name) are there; often those are pre-filled, if required.

Voter's FAQs About Petitioning

Q: *Isn't George Latimer [or other incumbent] already on the ballot? Why do I have to sign a petition to get him on the ballot?*

A: Everyone, even long-time incumbents, must collect petition signatures to get on the ballot each time their office is up for election. As noted earlier, the only exceptions are candidates for statewide office who are nominated at a State Committee convention, candidates in special elections, candidates in certain villages, and candidates for State Supreme Court Justice (who are nominated at a convention made up of those party members who are elected at the primary election after petitions have been carried for them as part of the normal petition process.) . The petitioning process is required by election law. Petitions signers are an essential part of our democratic process.

Q: *Can signing a petition result in my getting called for jury duty?*

A: No. The county uses all sorts of lists for that purpose, including licensed drivers lists, but it doesn't use petition signers.

Q: *Will I get lots of phone calls if I sign a petition?*

A: A person's party registration and voting history (whether or not they voted in specific elections – not *for whom* they voted) is a matter of public record. Candidates buy lists of voters and use them to target calls, so whether or not you sign a petition, you will probably receive some calls.

Q: *I don't know anything about this nominee.*

A: I'm happy to tell you about the candidate, and I have some material to leave with you. But please understand that your signature does not commit you to vote for this candidate. By signing, you are simply participating in the democratic process that permits a candidate to get on the ballot. When the election comes, you can vote for anyone you like.

Q: *Am I committing to vote for these candidates if I sign these papers?*

A: No. This petition process simply gets the candidates on the ballot. (See above.)

Q: *What is a "Committee to Fill Vacancies"?*

A: These are the people who would choose another candidate to fill in for our candidate if the candidate passes away, moves out of state, or otherwise has to withdraw after these petitions are filed.

Q: *What are "Judicial Delegates"? Am I signing to make all these people judges?*

A: Instead of holding a primary for State Supreme Court Justices, there are party conventions in each judicial district; we live in the 9th Judicial District, which includes Westchester, Putnam, Dutchess, Rockland, and Orange Counties. Democratic judicial delegates meet in August to select the Democratic State Supreme Court candidates who will appear on the November ballot.

Q: *Can I sign for my spouse/child/friend, who's also a Democrat?*

A: No. Every signer must enter their own signature, in front of the witness who signs at the bottom of this page.

Q: *Can I think about it? Can you come back next month?*

A: Petitioning is done in a very short time period. I need to finish these soon, and I may not have time to return, because I have to visit a lot of neighbors. Your signature does not commit you to vote for any of these candidates; it simply gets Democratic candidates on the ballot. Are there any questions I can answer for you?

Q: *I already signed another petition for a candidate for this office—does that matter?*

A: Yes, it does! For any given office, only the first signature counts. So if you've already signed another petition for this office, you shouldn't sign this one.

Registering People to Vote

Voting is one of our most important rights and privileges. As a DL, it's your job to make sure the people you talk to are aware of how important voting is. In New York, any citizen who resides in the State and is over the age of 18, who is not currently serving a prison sentence, is eligible to register to vote. Sixteen- and seventeen-year-olds can pre-register to vote but may not vote before they turn 18. Try to persuade your constituents—and anyone else—to participate in this democratic process.

Campaigning for the Endorsed Candidate

There are many ways to participate. You can help coordinate the "ground" effort, or oversee a letters-to-the-editor campaign, coordinate with campaign teams to go door-to-door, make phone calls, distribute and put out yard signs, and/or hand out literature at train stations, the Little League parade, or outside a supermarket. You can identify local issues and help create the message. Host a meet-and-greet, start an email

chain. Post on social media. On Election Days you'll be asked to open and/or close polls, and perhaps observe during the day

In the weeks leading up to Election Day, we try to contact every Democrat at the door or by phone to remind them of the upcoming election and urge them to vote. Obviously, this is very labor-intensive, so we will be calling YOU to volunteer.

Election Day

Primary Elections

Primary elections for state and local office are now held in June, generally on the fourth Tuesday. (Early Voting takes place at designated locations throughout the County over nine days leading up to Election Day, with no voting on the Monday just before Election Day.) Polling hours on Election Day in Westchester County are from 6am to 9pm. Early Voting hours vary from day to day. Primaries occur when more candidates from the same party file valid petitions than there are vacancies for the same office. The process makes it possible for all party members to participate in selecting the party's candidates and officials. Primary winners become the nominees for office whose names appear on the general election ballot. When only one candidate files enough valid signatures for a given office, no primary is held for that office and the person for whom the valid petition was filed is the party's nominee for the general election.. We never know for sure whether there will be a primary until all petitions are filed and any objection period passes.

November Election Day

Election Day is always the first Tuesday after the first Monday in November. Early Voting takes place at designated locations throughout the County for nine days leading up to Election Day, with no voting on the Monday just before Election Day. Polling hours on Election Day are from 6am to 9pm. Early Voting hours vary from day to day. Westchester voters can vote at any Early Voting location within the County, but on Election Day must vote at their assigned polling location.

ELECTION DAY: What Should the District Leader Do?

When possible, we appreciate the help of DLs on Election Day. Some of the jobs DLs do on Election Day include:

Open the Polls

1. Arrive at 5:45am carrying a poll watcher's certificate signed by the local party Chair or by any candidate. (Some DLs bring cookies, clementines or donuts for the inspectors, who will have a very long day.) If anyone contests your right to be there, call your local party Chair immediately.
2. For each ED, there should be four inspectors present: two Democrats and two Republicans (and additional inspectors for the Plan B machine in each location). Introduce yourself to the inspectors and let them know that you or someone else from the Democratic Party will be back later in the day. (If anyone asks if Republican DLs will show up, the answer is probably that you don't know! Sending DLs to the polls is not a legal *requirement*. Some poll workers are unaware of that.)

3. Make sure the correct sample ballots are in each ED, with English and Spanish versions separated. Make sure sample ballots are placed where voters can review them. Note: you are not permitted to physically do that yourself. Ask the election inspectors, who are ultimately in charge of their own materials, to do that.
4. Ask inspectors to remind voters that propositions are on the backs of ballots, if applicable.
5. Make sure no one is campaigning or wearing partisan buttons, t-shirts, or hats. Electioneering is not permitted within 100 feet of the polls. If there is a problem, call the Democrat who has been designated to run the election-day operation.
6. If there are not enough inspectors present, or if a machine can't be opened, a candidate is missing on the face of the ballot, or similar situation, immediately call the party Chair or other designee to report this.
7. Secure a sample ballot, which you can use when closing the polls later.

Final Round of GOTV (Get-Out-The-Vote) Calls

Starting around 5pm, volunteers gather at a final phone bank to remind Democrats who haven't voted that day that it's Election Day and polls are open to everyone who is on line by 9 pm. We need every possible person for this task.

Closing the Polls

By 8:40 pm, DLs who are closing polls should be on their way to (or already at) their assigned locations with their poll watcher's certificate and a sample ballot. Introduce yourself to the election inspectors and tell them that you will be collecting numbers for the Democratic candidates.

Be friendly. These folks (like you) have been working and busy for 15+ hours, and tempers may flare. Your goal is to obtain the results, not to win arguments. That said, there is one time when you must be assertive: voters who are inside the polling place by 9pm, or on line by 9pm, are entitled to vote, even if the line is long. Help waiting voters insist on their right to vote if the inspectors show any indication of locking the doors or shutting down the machines before nine o'clock, or before voters who have been waiting on line have had a chance to cast their ballots.

Ask the inspectors to let you photograph the tape with the results – this is a perfectly common, and legal, practice. Alternatively, once the polls are closed, as the inspectors read off the numbers, record them on the sample ballot. If you don't have a sample ballot, write them neatly elsewhere. Make note of the ED number and all the results for all the candidates (or as directed), and do it carefully. If you miss a number, wait until the end and ask the inspector then, rather than interrupting the process. Bring the photo

or numbers back to the designated location or text or call in the results, as directed by your party chair.

Other Situations to Look Out For on Election Day

Challenges

Anyone who wants to vote and whose name is in the e-poll book used at the polls should be entitled to vote. Ballots are generally cast by filling in the circles on the ballot form and placing it in the scanner. Voters who have moved within the County but have not filed a change of address with the BOE may not appear on the voter roll, but are still allowed to vote.

If you (or anyone else) think that a person's name should not be on the list (because you have knowledge that the person moved away or died, for example), you can challenge the vote that is cast in that person's name. The voter will be allowed to vote and will be required to sign an affidavit (election inspectors will have the proper forms) attesting to their right to vote, and then will be allowed to vote on that paper affidavit ballot (not on the machine) which will be sealed in an envelope. If after the BOE reviews its records the person is entitled to vote, the ballot will be counted. If, however, the voter is subsequently found to have sworn falsely, the voter can be prosecuted for perjury.

Voters Not Listed on the Rolls

If a person finds their name is not in the poll book and claims they are eligible to vote, that person is absolutely entitled to vote by paper ballot after signing an affidavit stating that they are registered to vote in that district. There are also "inactive" voters (those registered but who have not voted recently and whose mail was returned). There is a special procedure the inspectors are to follow in those cases. To be allowed to vote on a machine, a voter who is not listed must get an order from a local Supreme Court judge; a court is open on Election Day to handle such cases. For a Democratic voter, offer to call the New York Democratic Lawyers Council or the County party's designated lawyer.

Voters Being Required to Present Identification (ID)

A person who comes to vote may be asked for ID only if (1) the person did not register to vote in person, and (2) the person is voting for the first time since registering at the current address. In Westchester, the BOE will indicate on the iPad Electronic Voter List (as "ID Required Marking") which voters may legally be asked to produce identification.

If election inspectors are routinely asking *everyone* for identification, this is a problem and should be reported right away to the person who has been designated by the party to run the election-day operation. Only for voting in a primary may voters be asked their party enrollment status.

How Do You Fit in the Bigger Picture?

The Democratic Party is headed by the Democratic National Committee (DNC), which includes representatives from every state. The DNC's elected Chairperson is the leader of the Party. Each state has its own state Democratic committee; the NYS Committee is composed of its officers and two people from each of our 150 assembly districts. The Chairperson of the State Committee is the leader of the party in the State.

The Westchester County Democratic Committee is composed of two members from each of the 800+ EDs in the County. If you become a DL, you will be, by definition, a County Committee member.

Currently, Suzanne Berger is Chair of the Westchester County Democratic Committee. Because the full committee is so large, an Executive Committee (consisting of state committee members, town and city chairpersons, representatives of certain affinity groups such as the Westchester Young Democrats and officers elected by the full committee) conducts much of its business.

(Local municipal DL handbook: add details regarding who your representatives on the WCDC Executive Committee are.)

Each DL/County Committee member is also a member of their village/town/city committee and participates in electing the village/town/city chair. None of this can happen without our DLs, who are the backbone of our party, the blades of grass that make up the "grass roots."

DLs have opportunities to meet with local elected officials at committee meetings, to vote on which candidates for local office we should endorse, and, if certain elected officials leave office mid-term, it is the DLs who will meet to select a Democratic candidate for a special election. DLs help to steer the course of our party and determine what projects we will undertake and what issues we'll get involved in.

Thank you very much for your service.

Note: this Handbook is not a Legal Guide and some rules are presented in summary form. It should not be relied on for Election law advice. Please consult an attorney for that purpose.

This Handbook has been updated by the WCDC Voter Outreach Committee. Suggestions are welcome for the next edition. Contact the committee [here](#).