

# BECOMING A COUNTY COMMISSIONER

The decision to ask your peers and neighbors to elect you to represent them is one of the most rewarding and even difficult decisions you will ever make. Because they touch and influence all three branches of government, boards of county commissioners constitute the most powerful administrative body in county government. They make laws through the adoption of ordinances, carry out those laws by directing staff and working with other elected officials, and apply laws by making quasi-judicial decisions during planning and development decisions and show-cause hearings. These diverse responsibilities affect many very important aspects in the lives of Nevada's citizens.

## Why Do I Want to Be a County Commissioner?

Running for any elected office is not a decision to be made lightly. There are many reasons people decide to run for public office. Some are based solely on the desire to make a difference while others may be driven by a special issue. Some candidates run because they are called to help work on local policies that have affected them directly such as the condition of local roads, development and land use decisions, or ensuring that the services provided to taxpayers by county governments are provided efficiently and justly. Before you make the decision to file for the office of county commissioner, the checklist below may assist you as you consider your decision:

- ✓ I believe I have the expertise to do the job, or am willing to learn
- ✓ I am engaged or concerned over a particular issue
- ✓ I believe I can help make local decisions that will best represent my constituents
- ✓ I disagree with a sitting county commissioner or other elected official
- ✓ Others are urging me to run
- ✓ I need to supplement my income
- ✓ I believe in public service
- ✓ This seems like a good opportunity to advance my career
- ✓ Prestige
- ✓ I have a desire to help build a better future for my community
- ✓ I enjoy building consensus and working as part of a team
- ✓ My business success could translate to political success
- ✓ I want to leverage my community work to serve others by holding elected office
- ✓ Other

## Background & Requirements

In Nevada, county commissioners come from a variety of backgrounds. No specific job experience or education is required to run for county commissioner, though familiarity with some aspects of county government including budgeting, personnel management, public infrastructure, communications, and Nevada state law could be very helpful. There are, however some essential requirements necessary to build a solid foundation for your success. They are *knowledge of your county* and *ethical behavior*.

***"A public office is a public trust and shall be held for the sole benefit of the people"***  
*(NV Revised Statutes, NRS 281A)*

### **Misconceptions**

One of the biggest misconceptions individuals may have when they decide to run for county commissioner is that they will independently be able to change the face of county government. As an individual, your decision-making power is limited. If elected to county commissioner you will be part of a team, and your successes will come through building the consensus and support of your teammates—the other county commissioners on your board. As part of that team, you can make a difference. Remember, any decisions made by the county commission must be approved by a majority of the members. This means that any initiative you sponsor will require forming alliances with others on the board who also support the goals you are working towards on behalf of your constituents.

### **Powers & Responsibilities**

Being an effective county commissioner is not an easy job. There are many general and implied powers and duties of county commissioners and every decision you make will find its basis in law. Review Chapter 244 of the Nevada Revised Statutes for a good overview of your powers and responsibilities.

### **How Much Time Does It Take?**

This is a question many people wish they had asked themselves before they ran. Even in rural counties, where the salary is commensurate with only a part-time job, the time spent on commission duties may actually be more than a full-time job. Additional assigned liaison duties may require that you're frequently away from home during the evening or overnight. This may vary by county, but not by much. One thing is certain: during your first six months in office you'll be getting acquainted with your colleagues and staff, learning about county issues as well as day-to-day processes, learning how to juggle all your county responsibilities with your demands at home, and coming to the realization that YOU are now the individual who citizens call in both good times and bad. Being a county commissioner is a lot of hard work, but, hopefully you will find that working on behalf of your community and constituents to tackle the many challenges that county governments face is a true public service and could be the most rewarding job you will ever accept.

### **Provided By:**

The Nevada Association of Counties (NACO) is the state association for county government officials and staff. You can access our website at [nvnaco.org](http://nvnaco.org), or call us at 775-883-7863.



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