A platform is essential for any campaign, whether it be for a faculty, club, or USC position. Your platform is where you can outline what you want to accomplish if elected. Further, it is the main point of reference for voters on who you are and what you stand for as a candidate.

The length and depth of your platform depends on the role you are running for, the amount of responsibility or oversight it contains and often correlates with the number of students you aim to represent. For example, becoming a department representative on a faculty council might require you to outline issues specific to students in one particular subject area. Meanwhile, running for USC President means you need to do extra work to familiarize yourself with issues that impact the campus community more broadly.

Regardless of the position you are considering, this guide will outline some key steps towards building a platform as well as considerations when pulling together and presenting your ideas.

**Before You Write**

*Reflect on Your Motivation for Running*
One of the first places you should draw inspiration from is yourself. If you’re thinking about running for an elected position, it’s likely because you feel passionately about addressing certain issues, are interested in improving the way things currently are or have the potential to be a strong representative for other students. Before writing your platform, think about what led you to run in the first place and use it to identify who you are and what you stand for in the context of the role you are interested in. You can then take the things you’re passionate about and begin to identify areas of focus for your platform.

*Take Note of Current Events*
It is always good to be in the loop with what is happening on campus, especially if you are thinking of running for a position in the upcoming election cycle. If you don’t already, start paying special attention to things affecting the constituency you aim to eventually represent. Take note of what has happened and how students responded. This is important for two reasons:

1. **Student needs are ever changing.** What was a ‘hot topic’ issue one year might not be the next, over time concerns are addressed and new issues arise so keep tabs on what
students are talking about because they are likely things you will want to consider addressing in some way within your platform.

2. **Current events will be discussed during the election.** Students want to see candidates address issues that are relevant and affecting their university experience right now. You will likely be questioned on these topics in debates, media interviews and Q&A sessions throughout the election so knowing what’s happening and how it’s affecting students as well as having your stances outlined in your platform for students to reference will make you a stronger candidate.

Additionally, you will be able to more comprehensively flush out your thoughts and plans ahead of time by writing them in your platform. Being able to pull from your own ideas to answer questions or debate during the election will be easier and less stressful.

**Conduct Consultations**

While identifying your own ideas is a good first step, finding out the wants and needs of your constituents is the biggest challenge in writing your platform. It is important that your platform is informed by many perspectives, especially if you are running for a position that aims to represent students from different faculties or walks of life. One of the ways you can improve your understanding of key issues and identify areas of concern for students is by consulting with students at-large. This could include anyone from your friends, roommates and classmates to student leaders in various faculties, clubs and interest groups. Sitting down with students in an individual or group setting before developing your final platform will help to inform your positions and plans on how to tackle key issues.

Don’t know how to facilitate a consultation? Here are some prompts to get you started:

1. **Ask students what the current issues are that they care about.**
   This can be broader than the role you are running for, as it allows you to gain an understanding of the current landscape and some of the additional factors affecting students in your potential constituency. It is also a good way to identify things that might not have been talked about in the past. You can leave this open-ended or issue-specific if you have specific things you hope to gain additional perspective on.

2. **Ask students what they like and don’t like about the council, club or organization you are running for, and what they would want to see from the position you are running for.**
   Before you assume any leadership role, it is important to gain a solid foundation of understanding of the organization or group of people you hope to lead. Oftentimes this includes being critical of what has always been done and thinking about why it maybe is that way and if there is potential for it to improve.
3. **Ask students what makes their Western experience great.** While it is important to address current issues and be critical of potential improvements, there is also value in gaining perspective on the positive aspects of university life. Asking students about the things they love about Western and the specific councils, clubs or organizations they are a part of will be equally informative to your platform and overall campaign, as it might indicate initiatives that should continue or expand.

**Writing Your Platform**

*Introduce Yourself and Your Story*

Voters will value getting to know you as a candidate. As someone who aims to represent students, you should consider sharing pieces of your story that led you to run and make you passionate about improving campus life. Doing this can help you relate to voters and convey that you understand the frustrations of your peers. This can be done both in your written platform as well as at debates or other speaking events where you have an opportunity to share more about you as an individual.

*Investigate Feasibility*

Collecting feedback and input is key for a successful platform that reflects the needs of the student body, however, not every student will understand the scope of the organization or role you are hoping to be elected to and therefore not every suggestion will be feasible. As you put together your platform and begin to specify how you will reach your outlined goals, be sure to not just promise the flashy things, but actually investigate the feasibility of your ideas and ensure they are realistic. This might involve additional consultations or research but it will be worthwhile to know your plan is implementable. Your ideas can and should remain ambitious but doing your research beforehand will allow you to understand the necessary steps on the path to achieving your platform promises.

*Connect the Dots*

Your role as a candidate is to interpret the things students tell you, either informally or in consultations, and coupled with your knowledge of your desired role and organization, club or council, figure out what it is students want to see and how to make it happen. When students share their frustrations, oftentimes they are partially venting and don’t actually know what they’re hoping to see changed. How your platform can stand out is by identifying pain points within the student body and using your platform to explain how you would address them.
After You Write

Ensure it is Digestible
One of the most difficult components to writing and conveying your platform is doing so in a way that can be interpreted by everyone - from student government veterans to students who might not have a clue what the difference is between the USC and UCC. As you elaborate on your plans in your platform, ensure it is digestible to the average reader and that you are providing enough context to not only inform your audience but engage them and leave them wanting to learn more. You should also think about how to present the information in your platform, oftentimes candidates will section their platforms into ‘pillars’ and organize sub-points within a larger heading. This is only one of many options you could explore that would make it easier for students at-large to read and understand.

Consult with Your Team
If you haven’t read the brief about building your campaign team yet, this is your heads up that regardless of the position you are running for you should always have a few people in your corner to provide advice and perspective. With respect to writing your platform this can manifest in a number of different ways: you could task your team with talking to different groups of students, doing research on the implementation of your ideas or actually helping to write the document itself. Regardless, at the end of the day your team will be made up of students so they are a good test-group to read your platform and provide feedback.

Make it Available
Once you’ve written the bulk of your platform, consider how you’d like to share it with the student body (i.e. printed copy, digital copy, website, video etc.) and ensure you adjust the content accordingly. Your platform is one of your biggest assets in an election, as it is your well-researched and thought out action plan that speaks to who you are and what you stand for as a candidate. Put the time into developing a strong platform and ensuring the students voting can access it will help to broadcast your message and elevate your campaign.

Regardless of how the election turns out, writing a platform is an accomplishment. They take passion, diligence, research, consultation, and dedication to put together. Be proud of the work you and your team put into your platform and be thankful for the students and groups that provided valuable feedback and consultation.