

# Women in Politics: Groups Aim to Increase the Numbers in 2012



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With the 2012 elections in mind, several groups are gearing up to recruit and train women candidates after a mixed showing in 2010.

The 2010 census means districts for the U.S. House of Representatives and for state legislatures are being redrawn, creating the potential for more open seats, more competitive races, and possibly **more women** in office.

"We have to take advantage of that once-a-decade opportunity," said Mary Hughes, a California political strategist who is founder and director of the **2012 Project**, a nonpartisan group trying to recruit women candidates. On the conservative side, Smart Girl Politics is also adding to the mix by training women to run for office.



Florida Lt. Gov. Jennifer Carroll / Walter Michot, Miami Herald / MCT

Members of the 2012 Project are attending a **range of** women's professional events in an effort to encourage women to run for office in 2012.

"Women need to be asked," Hughes said. "We don't self-nominate. The most important thing to do is to go

out and to find qualified, gifted, experienced women...We've specifically targeted baby boomer women who are already achievers."

**About 60** former and current women officeholders, both Democrats and Republicans, are helping in the effort. They include Florida's Republican Lt. Gov. Jennifer Carroll, former Republican National Committee co-chair Jo Ann Davis, former Democratic National Committee vice chair Polly Baca, and former Democratic Vermont Gov. Madeleine Kunin, among others.

"We send them to conventions, seminars, regional meetings of leadership groups, associations," Hughes said, to " demystify the process and get them on the road to filing."

The organization is affiliated with **Rutgers University's Center for American Women and Politics**. Partner groups include the National Women's Political Caucus, Planned Parenthood Federation of America, Republican Majority for Choice and other mostly progressive groups.

Right now, the group is **focusing on off-year legislative elections** in New Jersey, Mississippi, Virginia and Louisiana.

If women are interested in becoming candidates, 2012 refers them to training groups such as the **White House Project** or **Ready to Run**, also affiliated with Rutgers.

"Anyone who comes to a presentation we do has already identified as a woman first. We don't get into what people's views are," Hughes said. "We will ultimately connect them with their state's party structure whether they are R or D."

Meanwhile, **Smart Girls Politics** is **training conservative women** to get involved in politics.

"It is important for conservatives to step up efforts to recruit and train women because we are an under-represented group at all levels of government," Smart Girl co-founder Teri Christoph said in an e-mail. "In addition, we bring a unique skill set that would improve the dynamic of any legislative body. I am hopeful that women like Sarah Palin and Michele Bachmann will inspire a whole new generation of conservative female candidates."

Christoph said the group isn't recruiting candidates for specific races, but is offering online training for members and non-members. A session Thursday included information on what to consider before becoming a candidate, including building a base of support.

"Once they decide to run, we offer follow-up training for building a campaign apparatus, fundraising, social media, and a host of other issues," she said in an e-mail.

Despite the **publicity surrounding high-profile women** candidates in 2010, **the numbers in Congress declined slightly**. Six women currently **serve as governors**, down from a high of nine in 2004 and again in 2007.

Hughes hopes to see improvement in 2012.

"We don't need thousands, we need really good people situated in competitive districts. We're very optimistic."

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