

Informed Citizens

Candidate Review Guidelines

The purpose of these Candidate Review Guidelines is to help voters evaluate representatives for public office in order to elect leaders most likely to support the Informed Citizens Plan for America and Informed Citizens Commission, regardless of party affiliation. Voters' evaluations should also support Candidates who will ensure their beliefs are fairly represented in balanced solutions, but who recognize the need for fair representation of all others' beliefs in those balanced solutions as well. Once an Informed Citizens Commission law is enacted and requires Candidates to report accurate and meaningful information, these Guidelines will be amended to include references to that information.

All qualified individuals who support the Informed Citizens Plan for America and Informed Citizens Commission are encouraged to run for office.

1. **Timing Overview**

- a. Begin candidate research eight weeks prior to each election
 - i. Primary elections: dates vary significantly by state (from March to November)
 1. See the following website for each state's 2026 primary election date - www.ncsl.org/elections-and-campaigns/2026-state-primary-election-dates
 - ii. General elections: begin early September for early November elections

2. **Identify Offices and Candidates**

- a. Identify the Offices and Candidates that will be on your Voting District ballot by using the following sources:
 - i. Your county election office website
 - ii. Political party websites (local, county, state or national political party websites)
 - iii. Public service websites (see Exhibit A for information on each):
 1. Vote USA: www.vote-usa.org
 2. BallotReady: www.ballotready.org
 3. Vote411 Voters Guide: www.vote411.org
 4. BallotPedia: [www.ballotpedia.org/Sample Ballot Lookup](http://www.ballotpedia.org/Sample_Ballot_Lookup)
 5. VoteSmart: <https://justfacts.votesmart.org/>

3. **Set up Candidate Review Forms**

- a. Attached is a pdf of a Sample Candidate Review Form for use in reviewing candidates.
- b. You may also download an Excel version of the attached Sample Candidate Review Form for use at - <https://www.informedcitizens.com/candidate-reviews>
- c. Feel free to use any form or format that you are comfortable with or that you believe will be best for your Friends & Family. It is more important to provide information and perspectives on Candidates than that it be in a particular format.
- d. Research the roles and responsibilities of each office up for election if not previously done and post to the Candidate Review forms

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4. Research Candidates

- a. Use the following websites and sources to research Candidates:
 - i. Political party websites (local, county, state or national political party websites)
 - ii. Public service websites (see Exhibit A for information on each):
 1. Vote USA: www.vote-usa.org
 2. BallotReady: www.ballotready.org
 3. Vote411 Voters Guide: www.vote411.org
 4. BallotPedia: [www.ballotpedia.org/Sample Ballot Lookup](http://www.ballotpedia.org/Sample_Ballot_Lookup)
 5. VoteSmart: <https://justfacts.votesmart.org/>
- b. In addition to the above websites and sources for researching Candidates, use the following:
 - i. Candidate Campaign Websites: See each candidate's campaign website
 - ii. Candidate Facebook page: Link generally available on candidate's campaign website, if not, search Facebook by name
 - iii. Candidate LinkedIn page: Link generally available on candidate's campaign website, if not, search LinkedIn by name
 - iv. Other sources of information (news, friends, candidate contacts, etc.)
- c. Research issues to develop perspectives on balanced solutions to those issues
 - i. The following is intended to provide information on general research sources. You can supplement these with additional general research sources and research sources specific to each issue.
 1. Internet search via Google/Bing/etc.
 2. Wikipedia
 3. Pew Research
 4. Think Tanks
 - ii. Information on issues is quite often presented to some extent in a biased way by both sides of the issue. It is difficult, but very important, to do this research with as much of an open mind as possible, realizing that we all have some biases.
 - iii. Once you've gathered information on the Candidates' positions on issues and developed a perspective on a balanced solution to those issues you will be prepared to evaluate and rate each Candidate on whether they have or will support balanced solutions to issues they will need to address in office
- d. Candidate Review Forms should be prepared with sufficient detail to be meaningful but summarized enough to be useful
- e. **State and National Elections (even numbered years):** There will generally be more information available for state and national election candidates, but it will be more professionally developed (negative ads, etc.) requiring further research to determine the accuracy of the information

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- f. **Local, County and Judicial Elections (odd numbered years):** There will generally be less information available for local, county and judicial election candidates, which will require further research, as follows:
 - i. Start with the secretary of state's office or the state's board of elections. Work your way down from there, starting with your county government website, then the city website, and finally the board, district, or court website depending on the type of office you're researching
 - ii. Consider web searching for "(your county) election board", "(your city) candidates" or "elections (current year)", "filed candidates", "current elections", etc.
 - iii. Use county and/or city website menus, website maps or government sections to search for information on elections. Local election authorities include city clerk, clerk of courts, recorders, and election boards
 - iv. Check your local and state news sources. A reporter may have posted candidate lists following a ballot access filing deadline
 - v. Information isn't always available online; sometimes you will need to send an email, make a phone call, or even visit a government office to find this information
 - vi. Use state and county Bar Associations for judges and justices:
 1. Search by state and county
 2. Following is an example for the PA Bar Association reviews - <https://www.pabar.org/site/For-Lawyers/Committees-Commissions/Judicial-Evaluation/Resources/JEC-Ratings>
5. **Develop Candidate Ratings**
 - a. Develop Ratings on Candidates, post those Ratings and reasons for them to the Candidate Review forms
 - b. See Exhibit B for Candidate Rating Criteria suggestions
 - c. Feel free to use your own criteria
 6. **Encourage Friends & Family to Vote**
 - a. On election day encourage via email, Facebook, etc. Friends & Family members to vote
 7. **Between elections**
 - a. Follow elected leaders (i.e. attend town hall meetings, subscribe to newsletters, emails and other communications, request information, reach out to people who know or follow them, etc.)
 - b. Identify others that may be interested in using the Candidate Review Guidelines and provide them with the link or document.

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Exhibit A

Candidate Information Research Websites

1. Vote USA: www.vote-usa.org
 - a. Website is easy to navigate
 - b. Not as much biographical information as some of the other research sites
 - c. Requests positions on issues, but only has for higher level offices
2. BallotReady: www.ballotready.org
 - a. Good ballot lookup tool; candidates are shown side by side on the first page, but information on individuals is on separate pages
 - b. No information on candidates' positions on issues
 - c. Individuals can provide additional information on candidates, including local, but only if the candidate is identified; a source URL and email address for the provider are required
3. Vote411 Voters Guide: www.vote411.org
 - a. League of Women Voters information website
 - b. Has a good ballot lookup tool
 - c. Provides comparative formats
 - d. Provides descriptions of the offices up for election
 - e. Provides links to official websites, campaign website, Facebook, and other social media
 - f. Has biographical info, including education and qualifications based on prior experience
 - g. No information on candidates' positions on issues
 - h. Provides questions for candidates and the candidates answers, without validation
4. BallotPedia: www.ballotpedia.org
 - a. Ballot lookup tool with address lookup is easy to use
 - b. Not in a comparative format
 - c. They have a candidate questionnaire on issues, but only a few candidates respond
 - d. Has biographical information, including education and qualifications based on experience
 - e. Provides links to official websites, campaign website, Facebook, and other social media
 - f. Provides history of prior elections for the candidate
5. VoteSmart: <https://justfacts.votesmart.org/>
 - a. The lookup tool is not as user friendly as other websites
 - b. There is good information on votes on bills, positions on issues, ratings by special interest groups, endorsements, speeches, and funding sources
 - c. State level row offices and Supreme Court only, no lower state courts

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Exhibit B

Candidate Ratings Criteria

Overall Rating

- The Overall Rating for a Candidate is an average of the three categories below.

Integrity, Honesty, and Transparency Rating

- Rating of the Candidate's integrity, honesty and transparency in general and based on:
 - Positive ads, based on record, not attacking opponent or opponent party
 - Actions consistent with messaging
 - Transparent with the information required for this rating

Skills and Experience Rating

- Rating of the Candidate skills and experience for the role and responsibilities, based on:
 - Government and business experience
 - Education
 - Goals for the office

Balanced Solutions Rating

- Rating on whether the Candidate will evaluate all liberal and conservative perspectives and reach balanced solutions for the benefit of all citizens, which take into consideration:
 - Short-term and long-term impacts
 - Middle class and upper class interests
 - The Informed Citizens Plan for America and Informed Citizens Commission