

Citizens for Informed Voters

Overview

The Citizens for Informed Voters initiative (CIV Initiative) provides support for people with the time and interest in researching Candidates so they and their friends and families can become more informed voters. People with the time would be mostly young adults (ages 20 to 30) and recently retired individuals (ages 65 to 75) but could include anyone.

The purpose of researching information and developing ratings on Candidates is to be able to elect leaders that will do what's best for all citizens, not just represent issues or ideology to get re-elected. Researching information on Candidates would include their education, work experience, and positions on issues. Developing ratings for Candidates would be based on their integrity, honesty, and transparency; skills, and experience for the role; and balanced solutions for issues.

If at any time and for any reason any of the sources, approaches and/or forms suggested below aren't right for you, please ignore and use your own sources, approaches and/or forms. It is much more important that you prepare information on Candidates for yourself and your friends and family that you are comfortable with than it is that you use any of the following.

1. **Timing Overview**

- a. You can begin candidate research up to 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 states' primary election date - www.ncsl.org/research/elections-and-campaigns/2022-state-primary-election-dates-and-filing-deadlines.aspx
 - ii. General elections: you can begin in early September for early November elections
- b. You should provide your Candidate Reviews to your Friends & Family two weeks prior to elections to allow time for early voting and for review, questions and/or suggestions

2. **Identify Offices and Candidates**

- a. The first step will be to identify the offices and Candidates that will be on your Voting District ballot. You can do so 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 Appendix I for information on the top five)

3. **Set up Candidate Review Forms**

- a. The next step would be to set up a Candidate Review form for each office that will be on your ballot, with each of the Candidates running for that office
- b. Following is a link for sample Candidate Review forms and examples of completed forms - <https://www.informedcitizens.com/candidate-review-forms-and-examples>

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- 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

4. Research Candidates

- a. Next, research each Candidate running for an office that will be on your ballot and summarize that information on the Candidate Review form for that office
- b. 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 Appendix I for information on the top five)
 - iii. Candidate Campaign Websites: See each candidate's campaign website
 - iv. Candidate Facebook page: Link generally available on candidate's campaign website, if not, search Facebook by name
 - v. Candidate LinkedIn page: Link generally available on candidate's campaign website, if not, search LinkedIn by name
 - vi. Other sources of information (news, friends, candidate contacts, etc.)
- c. Candidate Review Forms should be prepared with sufficiently detailed information about the Candidate to be meaningful but summarized enough that friends and family won't need a lot of time to review
- d. **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
- e. **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

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- 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 -
www.pabar.org/site/News-and-Publications/News/News-Releases/2021/Feb/PBA-JEC-Ratings-of-Appellate-Court-Candidates

5. **Research Issues**

- a. The purpose of researching issues and developing perspectives on them is to be able to understand them well enough to evaluate each Candidate's willingness to find balanced approaches to those issues
- b. See Appendix II for information on sources for researching issues
- c. Most important in researching information on issues is to search for information that is accurate and balanced with respect to all perspectives the issue
- d. Social media platforms should not be relied upon for accurate, balanced information on issues since their primary goal is profits, not accuracy or thoroughness of information

6. **Develop Candidate Ratings**

- a. Develop Ratings on Candidates and post those Ratings and reasons for them to the Candidate Review forms
- b. See Appendix III for Candidate Rating Criteria suggestions
- c. Feel free to use your own criteria but be sure to communicate what criteria you use to your friends and family group

7. **Distribute Candidate Review Forms**

- a. Distribute the Candidate Review Forms to your Friends & Family group two weeks before election day via email (or however is best for you)
- b. Consider scheduling a Zoom call or a get together a few days prior to election day with your Friends & Family group to discuss the Candidate Review Forms and to allow for questions
- c. Consider setting up a public Facebook Group page to post your Candidate Reviews
 - i. You could name the page – "(your name) Candidate Reviews"
 - ii. You could then post the link to this Group page with all Candidate Reviews to your personal Facebook page, your neighborhood Facebook Group page, etc.
 - iii. Your Friends & Family group members could forward the link to their friends and family, etc.

8. **Encourage Friends & Family to Vote**

- a. On election day encourage via email, Facebook, etc. Friends & Family members to vote

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9. **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.) to be better prepared for the following election for that Candidate and office.
- b. Identify others that may be interested in participating in the Citizens for Informed Voters Initiative and/or become members of your friends and family group to receive your Candidate Reviews for the next election
- c. Request that your elected representatives inform all constituents about the CIV Initiative availability as a resource for researching Candidates and developing ratings on them. Request that they work with other elected representatives to provide state and national education initiatives and also directly communicate with their own constituents.

10. **The Informed Citizens Commission and Issues and Guidelines Office**

- a. Once the Informed Citizens Commission and Issues and Guidelines Office are implemented, the quantity and quality of information available about Candidates and Issues would be significantly improved, making the above process much easier.
 - i. See <https://www.informedcitizens.com/informed-citizens-commission> for more information on the ICC, proposed minimum Candidate reporting requirements and an ICC Overview document
 - ii. See <https://www.informedcitizens.com/issues-and-guidelines-office> for information on the IGO, proposed minimum issues and guidelines for balanced solutions, and an IGO Overview document
- b. Once the Informed Citizen Commission and Issues and Guidelines Office are enacted, it will be even more important for people with the time and interest in researching Candidates and Issues to do so for themselves and their friends and families. There will be a need to evaluate the improved information, to summarize in a format that is most helpful for friends and family, and to provide perspectives on the Candidates based on the improved information in order to elect the most qualified representatives who will act for the best interests of all citizens.

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Appendix I 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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Appendix II Issues Information Research Websites

1. Google: <https://www.google.com/>
 - a. Generally provided balanced perspectives on issues
2. Wikipedia: <https://www.wikipedia.org/>
 - a. Generally provided balanced perspectives on issues
3. Pew Research: <https://www.pewresearch.org/>
 - a. Generally provided balanced perspectives on issues
4. Think Tanks
 - a. Think tanks are interest groups that pursue research and analysis to advance a set of values or ideas, often through political action and policy change, as well as through cultural and social influence. Some think tanks are truly non-partisan, regularly working with administrations of both main US political parties, while others self-identify as non-partisan despite evidence to the contrary, and still others are explicitly or tacitly conservative, neo-conservative, libertarian, centrist, liberal, progressive, or socialist.

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Appendix III Candidate Ratings Criteria

Overall Rating

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

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
 - Serves all interests fairly

Skills and Experience Rating

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

Balanced Solutions Rating

- Rating on whether the Candidate will evaluate all liberal and conservative perspectives and reach balanced solutions in the public interest, which take into consideration:
 - Short-term and long-term impact
 - Local and national interests
 - Individual and public interest