

NON-PARTISAN STEPS FOR CHOOSING A CANDIDATE



Step 1 – Decide what you are looking for in a candidate

- Identify the issues that you care about.
- Leadership qualities and experience a candidate would bring to the office.

Step 2 – Learn about the candidates and their stands on issues

- Research the election you will be voting in at [Vote 411](#) to identify candidates running for office and ballot issues. (Vote 411 is a non-partisan voting information site maintained by the League of Women Voters.)
- Explore ballot questions and candidates' positions in your state and local media.
- Other information sites about your ballot include the [Secretary of the Commonwealth](#) or the website for your local town clerk/election official.

Step 3 – Gather materials about the candidates

- Check out candidates' websites, campaign headquarter information, mailings.
- Attend or watch candidate forums or debates.
- Consult trustworthy news sources respected for accuracy. Use your school and local library.
- Find out who else endorses the candidates.

Step 4 – Evaluate each candidate's positions on the issues

- What specific conclusions can you draw about each candidate's positions?
- Keep an electronic record (that you can update) to compare where the candidates stand on similar issues.

Step 5 – Learn about a candidate's leadership abilities

- Based on experience and background, does the candidate appear to be qualified for the job?
- Do they speak to different types of people and get involved in projects that reflect their issues and concerns?
- Do they talk about their action plans and what they hope to accomplish?
- Do they demonstrate the leadership qualities and skills that are important for elected representatives? *

Step 6 – Learn how other people view the candidates

- Seek the opinions of those who would be affected differently by political decisions.
- Check where the candidate's campaign contributions come from [Open Secrets](#).
- Learn how to evaluate opinion polls. (Check for bias and a track record of reliability.)

Step 7 – Use your written record to evaluate the candidates

- Which candidates' views on the issues do you agree with the most?
- Who ran the fairest campaign?
- Which candidate demonstrated the most knowledge on the issues?
- Which candidate has the leadership qualities you are looking for?

Step 8 – VOTE! Make a plan to vote and do it in person or by mail.

*See reverse side for information about important qualities to consider in candidates for office.

IMPORTANT QUALITIES TO CONSIDER IN SELECTING ELECTED REPRESENTATIVES

1. **Integrity and Ethics:** A track record of honesty, transparency, and ethical behavior, prioritizes the public interest over special interests and personal gain.
2. **Experience and Knowledge:** Relevant experience in public service, community leadership, or a related field, knowledge of local issues and government operations, is active in the community to be served.
3. **Vision and Leadership:** The ability to articulate a clear vision for the future and inspire others, with strong leadership skills necessary to navigate complex decisions and lead effectively.
4. **Collaboration and Communication:** Works well with others, including fellow elected officials, citizens and the community, able to communicate clearly and listen to diverse perspectives.
5. **Commitment to Public Service:** Demonstrates a genuine commitment to serving the community and improving residents' quality of life.
6. **Problem-Solving Skills:** Demonstrates analytical thinking, creativity, and a pragmatic approach to problem-solving.
7. **Accountability and Responsiveness:** Accountable to the public, responsive to constituents' concerns, and willing to explain their decisions, ensures taxpayer dollars are used efficiently.

From: [How to Evaluate Candidates: Your Vote Your Voice](#)

PREPARING TO VOTE FOR UPCOMING ELECTIONS

1. Identify the next election date from your Town Clerk's office and mark it on your calendar.
2. Remind yourself a month before the election to get a sample ballot to see the candidates and the ballot issues.

Fall 2025/2026 and Spring 2026:

- Most local elections for town positions are in the spring with the exception that Barnstable holds their town election in the fall including this November 4, 2025.

November 3, 2026:

- State-wide positions (Example: Governor)
- State Representatives to the Massachusetts State House
- US Congress positions

HOW TO VOTE IF YOU ARE AWAY FROM HOME

If you will be away from home on Election Day, plan ahead to request that a Mail-in Ballot be mailed to you. Please consult the [Voting in Massachusetts](#) brochure by the League of Women Voters for information about how to apply for a Mail-in Ballot and how to return it.

You will also find similar information on the Secretary of the Commonwealth website and the website for your Town Clerk or Election Official.

This information was developed by the League of Women Voters of the Cape Cod Area in 2025 adapted from a September 29, 2020, LWVUS Blog, "How to Judge a Candidate." Thanks also to LWV Alachula in Florida.