

# ILLINOIS VOTER GUIDE RESEARCH PROCESS

## ILLINOIS VOTER GUIDE

LWVIL's Voter Guide helps voters find information about candidates and referenda on their ballots. For the Chicago municipal elections in February, the Voter Guide will focus on the offices of the mayor and City Council. It will present each candidate for public office, his or her educational background and experience, endorsements, and positions of issues. The Voter Guide links individual voters to the offices for which they will can ballots based on their location. See <https://illinoisvoterguide.org/>

The information below describes how LWVIL gathers information on candidates.

### Research Process

We are committed to providing comprehensive, nonpartisan information about every candidate on the ballot to help voters cast informed votes for every race and referendum.

In order to do so, we have spent extensive time developing rules and procedures for how we collect information and what is and is not included in our voter guides, in order to ensure we apply uniform standards and processes to all candidates.

Our systems, like democracy, are imperfect - we're continually reflecting on how we can ensure the information we provide is the most useful to voters and the most fair to candidates, and working to eliminate grey areas around what does and does not appear on our site. In order to create voter guides that voters and candidates trust, we're also committed to transparency around our process and decisions. For that reason, please find a comprehensive explanation below of how we collect our information. Please feel free to [reach out with further questions and feedback](#).

### Our Sources

When researching a given candidate, we use information that is publicly available online. In particular, we primarily consider three different sources of information in an attempt to accurately portray the candidate in the way they present themselves to the public: candidate websites, Facebook pages, and Twitter profiles.

We do this for two reasons. First, our mission is to aggregate information for a voter to make their own decisions. We do not and will never be in the business of directly or indirectly influencing voting decisions. Second, we link to our sources of information so that an interested voter can always examine the material for themselves. We do not use government websites in order to keep campaign information separate from government-funded elected official profiles.

### Candidate Photos

We use the candidate photos that candidates post as their social media profiles. If a candidate has no social media preference, we use their campaign websites. If a candidate has a series of photos available to the public, we try and choose the image that best meets our criteria. A good candidate photo resembles an ID photo. It has the candidate's face in the center, looking into the camera and does not contain intrusive text or other markings. It should not have any other people except for the candidate. However, if it is fairly apparent who the candidate is in the photo, or there are no other options, we may take a picture with multiple people.

### Candidate Bios

We collect the following two categories of biographical data: education (high school and above) and experience (experience in work, elected office, and the military). We aim to provide information that can present a more complete picture of a candidate's background, and illustrate their experience to the voter.

When we look for a candidate's education, we are looking for specific institutions and degrees from high school onward. As a rule of thumb, we list degrees without schools but not schools without degrees. We do not list minors or specializations.

For military experience, we look for service in one of the five main service departments of the armed forces as well as their respective Reserve and National Guard equivalents. The service department and the highest rank achieved or a brief role descriptor are included. We try and avoid overly generic terms (a simple "Veteran" in the Position field may be used if a candidate provides no other details) and we do not list any decorations, specific military units or deployments. Service in non-U.S. armed forces may be listed under this category but will be clearly indicated.

We do not show volunteer or board experience because it's often very extensive and harder to verify time periods.

## **Issue Stances**

When we collect data on candidates, much of our effort goes into finding a candidate's stances on the issues that are important to them. On our site, issues displayed in quotation marks as a direct quote from the candidate or from a source that reflects the views of the candidate like the candidate's campaign page. Unfortunately, because Facebook pages and posts are harder to source, we do not take sources from candidates' Facebook pages.

We consider an issue stance as a statement that a candidate makes that is succinct, specific, and actionable. In other words, we primarily look for statements that clearly indicate a candidate's stance on an issue, and allow a voter to infer how that candidate will govern in the future. As a result, we tend to avoid simply listing broad stances such as "I support veterans" since these do not show a candidate's stances on specific issues. We also only pull statements from candidate websites where a candidate takes a specific policy stance. For example, candidates may talk about their background growing up in the community before explaining why this makes them believe their district needs better transportation option. We will only display as a stance the candidate's statement on better transportation options.

As a rule, we do not take issue stances from third-party sources, including news stories. Even if the stance in question is a direct quote, we tend to avoid third-party sources to prevent arguments over source attribution and copyright permissions.

In order to present candidate views as accurately as possible, we take the information we find verbatim, rather than changing words and unintentionally distorting their intent.

## **Endorsements**

Endorsements are generally used by a candidate to illustrate organizations or elected officials that have given their support for their campaign. We collect and compile endorsements from campaign websites. We accept endorsements from current and former elected officials, but not private citizens, even if that individual is associated with a political party. Sometimes, candidate endorsements are illustrated in the form of pictures of a logo or acronym. We make every effort to correctly identify the organization, although often in this scenario we will be unable to ascertain a distinction between a larger, parent organization and a smaller, local chapter. In this case, the broad organization name will be used.

We recognize that endorsements are often announced on a rolling basis. We have committed ourselves to performing multiple sweeps for new endorsements before Election Day, but recognize that we may miss new endorsements in between these updates.

## **Candidate Submission**

We attempt to contact every candidate who we have obtained contact information for with an opportunity to view their profile, and augment or correct any information that we display. We also accept submissions from users who can link to a source.