

Basics of Running for Public Office

La Grange League of Women Voters

Ronette Leal McCarthy

Tyler J. Smith

Ancel Glink, PC

Today's Roadmap

1

Understand the nominating process

- Identify the election system and nomination path.



2

Secure ballot access

- Prepare candidacy forms, petitions, and disclosures.



3

Prepare for objections

- Track deadlines and understand the objection process.



4

Meet campaign-finance duties

- Know reporting thresholds, filings, and deadlines.



5

Campaign and govern responsibly

- Manage communications and Open Meetings Act risks.



Start With Official Resources



Official guides come first

Before anything else, ground your work in the State Board of Elections' own publications.



2027 Local Election Officials Guide

The official reference manual written for local election officials.



2027 Candidate's Guide

The official starting point for anyone running for office in 2027.



2027 Election & Campaign Finance Calendar

Official key dates for elections and campaign finance filings.

All three are published at elections.il.gov/Main/Publications.aspx

Illinois State Board of Elections



The screenshot shows the top portion of the Illinois State Board of Elections website. The header features the organization's name in a large, blue, serif font. To the right of the name are links for 'Home', 'Publications', and 'Feedback'. Below the header is a dark blue navigation bar with white text links. A light blue banner with a red warning icon and the text 'State of Illinois Coronavirus Response Site' is positioned below the navigation bar. The background of the page is a light blue sky with a tall, white, classical column visible in the center.

ILLINOIS STATE BOARD OF ELECTIONS

Home | Publications | Feedback

Information For Voters | Campaign Disclosure | Voting Systems | Running for Office | Candidate Filing and Results | Business Registration | Press Room | Forms | About The Board

! State of Illinois Coronavirus Response Site X

Election Guides

The screenshot displays the Illinois State Board of Elections website. At the top, the header includes the text "ILLINOIS STATE BOARD OF ELECTIONS" on the left and navigation links "Home | Publications | Feedback" on the right. Below the header is a dark blue navigation bar with white text links: "Information For Voters", "Campaign Disclosure", "Voting Systems", "Running for Office", "Candidate Filing and Results", "Business Registration", "Press Room", "Forms", and "About The Board". A light blue banner below the navigation bar contains a red warning icon and the text "State of Illinois Coronavirus Response Site" on the left, and a close button "X" on the right. The main content area features a background image of a classical building column against a blue sky with clouds. Overlaid on this image are four dark blue rectangular buttons with white text, arranged vertically: "Publications", "Fact Sheets", "Election Guides", and "Campaign Disclosure". Below the "Fact Sheets" and "Election Guides" buttons are light blue boxes containing a white dropdown menu with the text "Choose a Publication" and a downward arrow.

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Information For Voters Campaign Disclosure Voting Systems Running for Office Candidate Filing and Results Business Registration Press Room Forms About The Board

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Publications

Fact Sheets

Choose a Publication

Election Guides

Choose a Publication

Campaign Disclosure

Nominating Processes

01

**Non-Partisan v.
Partisan**

System of Elections

02

**Non-Partisan v.
Independent**

Candidates

03

**Caucus Nominating
Format**



Non-Partisan v. Partisan

System of elections tells you whether candidates can run as members of political parties or not.



Non-Partisan

Cannot run as members of political parties or as independent candidates.



Partisan

Can run as members of political parties or as independent candidates.



Non-Partisan v. Partisan



If a municipality was incorporated after 5/13/93, it is a non-partisan municipality unless it adopted a referendum to become partisan.



If a municipality was partisan prior to 1992, it continues to run partisan elections unless it adopted a referendum to be non-partisan.



All Townships are partisan.



All School Boards, Park Districts, and Library Boards are non-partisan (absent an unusual court order).

Non-Partisan v. Independent Candidates



Independent

Individuals who are not candidates of any political party, but who are candidates in an election at which party candidates may appear on the ballot.



Non-Partisan

Individuals who are running in certain units of government in which the statutes require that the candidate run on a non-partisan basis. For municipalities, this applies to candidates for commission and council-manager (councilmen-at-large) forms of government, or villages that have adopted a system of non-partisan primary and general elections under 3.1-25-20 through 3.1-25-60 of the Illinois Municipal Code.

IF NON-PARTISAN

Nobody can run as an independent candidate — all candidates are non-partisan.

IF PARTISAN

People can run as “independent” candidates to show they are not running as a member of any political party.

Municipal Caucus



In municipalities with partisan elections and populations below 5,000 persons, candidates are nominated by established political parties at municipal caucuses unless the municipality passes an ordinance requiring established political parties to hold a primary.



Registered voters select candidates from their political party to nominate for offices up for election in the April consolidated election.



An established political party may only nominate one candidate for an office to be elected by the caucus method.



After being nominated at a caucus, the candidates must then individually file nomination paperwork with the local election official to appear on the consolidated election ballot.

Common Areas of Confusion

Political Parties v. Political Action Committees

Local Election Official v. Local Election Authority

- ✓ The local election official is the municipal clerk.
- ✓ The local election authority is the county clerk, or county or city board of election commissioners, if one exists.

Board of Election Commissioners v. Electoral Board

- ✓ A board of election commissioners is not the same as an electoral board.
- ✓ An electoral board is a quasi-adjudicative body, which comes into existence upon the filing of an objection.
- ✓ A board of election commissioners can sit as an electoral board.

Ballot Access - Requirements

Statement of Candidacy

- ✓ Candidate's address, exact office sought, and party (if applicable), full term or vacancy, political unit, election type and date
- ✓ Affirms candidate qualifications
- ✓ Signed by candidate and notarized

Petition Sheets

- ✓ Office and jurisdiction listed
- ✓ Circulator's statement completed and signed
- ✓ Pages numbered, notarized, and securely bound
- ✓ Required number of valid voter signatures
- ✓ Heading must clearly identify who (candidate), what office, where, and for which election

Statement of Economic Interests

- ✓ Filed with the appropriate office (County Clerk, Secretary of State, etc.)
- ✓ Receipt submitted with nominating papers
- ✓ Filed before statutory deadline

The statement should match the petition heading and economic interest receipt!!

Petition Signers: Basic Validity Questions

Is the signer a registered voter in the correct political subdivision?

- The signer should use residential address matching the voter registration
- The signer must sign for themselves – not a family member
- Printed signatures invite additional scrutiny in a potential objection
- Watch out for dual signers (multiple party and multiple candidate restrictions for the same election)
- BEST PRACTICE: collect more signatures than the min. requirement and conduct a preliminary review before filing



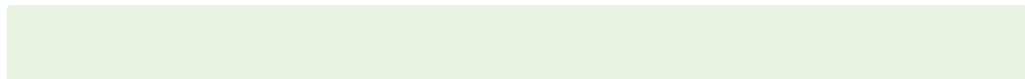
Before You File: Ballot Access Tips

Tips to Secure Ballot Access

- Get advice before forms circulate — not after a challenge is filed
- Use consistent office names, districts, terms, dates, and candidate information.
- Review everything before filing and leave time to fix problems.
- Train circulators and keep control of the paper flow.

Ballot Access Missteps

- Filing in the wrong office: make sure you verify which clerk or office (county or municipal – or Park District or School Board secretary) is the local election official



Ballot Access – Circulator Issues

Circulators Must Be

- ✓ 18 years of age and a United States citizen

Circulators Cannot

- ✓ Circulate petitions for more than one established or new political party
- ✓ Circulate petitions for both an established party and an independent/new party candidate in the same election cycle

Petitions Must

- ✓ Be circulated no earlier than 90 days before the filing deadline
- ✓ Be witnessed personally by the circulator
- ✓ Be circulated by only one circulator per petition sheet
- ✓ Include a completed circulator's affidavit

Ballot Access – Assembling the Packet

Think “book form”: organized, numbered, and securely fastened.

Top	Statement of Candidacy
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Optional	Loyalty Oath / other office materials
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Receipt	Economic Interests Receipt
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Base	Petition signature sheets numbered consecutively
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Avoid loose clips or casual assembly. Use a secure fastening method and keep a complete copy.



Ballot Access – Filing Day

Where

- ✓ Proper election authority or local election official for the office
-

Receipt

- ✓ Ask for date-stamped / time-stamped confirmation

When

- ✓ Customary office hours; watch out for the last-day deadline

Filing Dates for 2027 Elections

CONSOLIDATED PRIMARY

February 23, 2027

NOMINATION PAPERS FILED

October 19–26, 2026

FIRST DAY TO CIRCULATE PETITIONS

July 28, 2026

CONSOLIDATED ELECTION

April 6, 2027

NOMINATION PAPERS FILED

November 16–23, 2026

FIRST DAY TO CIRCULATE PETITIONS

August 25, 2026

Defending Against Objections

CONSOLIDATED PRIMARY • FEBRUARY 23, 2027

NOMINATION PAPERS FILED

October 19–26, 2026

OBJECTIONS DUE

Monday, November 2, 2026

5 business days after close of filing

CONSOLIDATED ELECTION • APRIL 6, 2027

NOMINATION PAPERS FILED

November 16–23, 2026

OBJECTIONS DUE — depends on local Thanksgiving closures:

Dec 1, 2026 — 1 Thanksgiving holiday

Dec 2, 2026 — 2 Thanksgiving holidays

Dec 3, 2026 — 3 Thanksgiving holidays

What Counts as a “Business Day”?

Any day the local election official’s office is open 7 hours or more.

Example: If an office closes early on Wednesday, November 25 (fewer than 7 hours) and reopens at regular full hours on Friday, November 27 (7 hours or more), Friday counts as a business day — Wednesday does not.

Objection Process

1

Convening of the Electoral Board

Electoral Board to issue call to candidate and objector

2

Initial Meeting

Set briefing schedule for motions, if required

3

Evidentiary Hearings

Electoral Board to hear testimony and review evidence

4

Records Examination

Only applies if signature challenges are raised — objector must plead individual challenges to signatures

5

Final Decision

Must be issued to all parties in open session



Campaign Finance

\$5,000

RAISED OR SPENT IN
ANY 12-MONTH PERIOD

Candidates, groups, or individuals who cross this threshold must file a Statement of Organization to create a political committee with the State Board of Elections.

Once Formed, Political Committees Must

- ✓ File disclosure reports with the Board, detailing money raised and spent
- ✓ Report contributions, expenditures, fundraising proceeds, loans, and all other fundraising activity

Campaign Finance – When Are Filings Due?

Filing	Deadline
Form D-1 Statement of Organization	10 business days after exceeding \$5,000 <i>Within 30 days of an election: shortens to 2 business days</i>
Form D-2 Report of Contributions & Expenditures	Due by the 15th of the month after each quarter
Schedule A-1 Contributions of \$1,000 or more	5 business days <i>Within 30 days of an election: shortens to 2 business days</i>
Schedule B-1 Independent Expenditures of \$1,000 or more	5 business days <i>Within 60 days of an election: shortens to 2 business days</i>
Final Report	May be filed at any time; must indicate a zero balance



Before You Post: Social Media Rules for Candidates

Campaign Tips — Dos

- ✓ Best practices include using accounts to boost ads, provide campaign updates to supporters, and remind supporters of voter registration deadlines.
- ✓ Candidates may voluntarily file the Illinois Code of Fair Campaign Practices, pledging to conduct their campaigns consistent with principles of honesty, fairness, and open discussion. Once filed, campaign communications should be review for consistency with that pledge.
- ✓ Maintain a separate campaign account rather than using an official governmental account.
- ✓ Identify who is authorized to post, approve content, and respond to comments.
- ✓ Verify facts, quotations, photographs, and endorsements before publishing.

Note: Special, more restrictive rules apply to judicial candidates.

Campaign Tips — Do Nots

- ! Be cautious of a communication's content — defamation suits can be costly to defend.
- ! Do not use governmental staff, email lists, logos, equipment, photographs, or other public resources for campaign activity.
- ! Do not blur the distinction between official governmental communications and campaign communications.
- ! Do not post accusations about an opponent without confirming the factual basis.
- ! Do not alter photographs, video, audio, or quotations in a misleading way.
- ! Do not assume that reposting, liking, or sharing someone else's content eliminates responsibility for what is being communicated.
- ! Do not conceal who paid for campaign content or coordinate supposedly independent communications without legal review.

Open Meetings Act

Electronic communications (emails, text messages, social media) among elected officials of a board can create a “meeting” that triggers OMA compliance.

If email exchanges are contemporaneous, they may constitute an improper meeting.

Elements of a Compliant Meeting



Notice



Agenda



Minutes



Open and
convenient



Public
comment



Quorum



Questions?



Ronette Leal McCarthy

EMAIL

rmccarthy@ancelglink.com

PHONE

312-604-9196



Tyler J. Smith

EMAIL

tsmith@ancelglink.com

PHONE

312-604-9194

