

Learning About Ballots & Candidates IG Live Q&A

Amy and Laurel from the Civic Lab team discussed some of the frequently asked questions about voting, ballots, and candidates at the Civic Lab on Instagram Live, Tuesday, September 22, 2020. See the questions and answers here, with links to more resources and information. You can also watch the video of the live conversation through the [library's Instagram page](#).

How do I know if I'm registered to vote?

- You can check your voter registration status through the State Board of Elections. The League of Women Voters website illinoisvoterguide.org has a quick link. You'll need to enter your first and last name, your birthdate, your zip code, and then the building number and street name of your residential address.

How can I register to vote?

- If you are a United States citizen, will be 18 or older on November 3, and will have lived in your election precinct at least 30 days prior to November 3, you can register to vote in the November 3 general election. You can register through the [State Board of Elections website](#).

Is there a deadline to register to vote?

- Yes, if you're registering online or by mail! In order to vote in the November 3 general election, you need to register to vote online no later than October 18, and by mail with your registration postmarked no later than October 6.
- After the online and mail registration deadlines, eligible voters can register at your local election office or early voting site; you'll need two forms of identification to complete the registration. Some general polling places also offer registration on Election Day, but it's a good idea to check with your local election office to verify.

I applied for a mail-in ballot. What do I do if my mail-in ballot doesn't arrive?

- If your mail-in ballot does not arrive at your address by Election Day, or even if it has and you prefer to vote in person, you can vote in-person on Election Day or early. Because there is a record of you requesting a mail-in ballot, the election judge will issue you a provisional ballot. Provisional ballots are counted after Election Day when it can be verified that a person did not vote more than once. You can check the status of your provisional ballot after the election on the Cook County Clerk's Office website.
- If you do receive your mail-in ballot and want to vote in person anyway, you can surrender your mail-in ballot to the election judge and then vote without requiring a provisional ballot.
- You can check the status of your mail-in ballot on the Your Voter Information page of the Cook County Clerk's Office website <https://cookcountyclerk.com/service/your-voter-information/>

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How can I find out about candidate platforms?

- Many candidates have websites and/or social media profiles that they use to share information about their platforms with voters and constituents, and oftentimes a quick Google search can help you find a candidate's website. When you're looking for candidate profiles on social media, dig into the posts a bit to make sure the account is run by the candidate or their office. Not every candidate will get a verified account—one with the little check mark that signals “this person is who they say they are”—but with a few clicks and a bit of reading you can see whether a social media account is real.
- You can also use candidate scorecards and endorsements from organizations you trust as a way to learn what candidates think about issues you care about. Voter research sites like [BallotReady](#) include information from scorecards and endorsements in their overviews of candidates on your ballot. Note that information on candidate platforms may be added as the election approaches.
- It's really important to be aware of potential misinformation about candidates and the election when you're researching candidates. Just because information is on an official-looking website doesn't mean it's real, and just because information on candidates is included in a news story doesn't mean that it isn't biased. It's so important to approach researching candidate platforms as a critical information consumer.
- One past Civic Lab participant put it this way: “You have to have good information to make up your own mind. If you have bad information, someone else is making up your mind for you.”

What do lesser-known offices on my ballot do?

- [Clerk of the Circuit Court](#) keeps records for the four divisions of courts of Cook County: Civil, Criminal, Family, and Traffic Court. Some of the duties for the clerk include preparing and maintaining court documents, collecting fines, and processing documents such as subpoenas and citations.
- [The State's Attorney](#) heads the seven divisions within the State's prosecutor's office. The responsibility for the State's Attorney's Office is to prosecute misdemeanor and felony crimes that take place in Cook County.
- [The Board of Review](#) contains three Commissioner positions representing three districts in Cook County. The Commissioners' job is to review all property assessments to ensure they are fair and impartial. The Board of Review also handles appeals to assessments filed by property owners.
- [The Metropolitan Water Reclamation District](#), often abbreviated as MWRD, includes a nine member Board of Commissioners whose job is to create policy and decide finances relating to wastewater and floodwater treatment in order to safeguard the health of Cook County residents.
- Other elected officials include judges for the different levels of courts in Illinois and Congress representatives.

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Where do I find candidate forums?

- The schedule for presidential debates is live and can be found at [Debates.org](https://debates.org). There are four scheduled debates that will kick off on September 29 and the final one will be held on October 22.
- For the many other candidates that you find on your ballot, we recommend checking the event calendars of various League of Women Voters chapters in the Cook County area for virtual forums. One that we can highlight now is a [debate on September 26 featuring Jan Schakowsky \(D\) and Sargis Sangari \(R\)](#) hosted by the Wilmette Chapter of League of Women Voters.
- Additionally, the Chicago Council of Lawyers has released its [Judicial Evaluation Results for November 2020](#). The importance of researching your vote for judges is apparent in this statement found on the Chicago Council of Lawyers website: “Almost 60 judges are running for retention in November 2020 and four people are running in contested elections to fill judicial vacancies. The 2018 election marked the first time in almost thirty years that a sitting Cook County Judge lost a retention election.”

How do I find out about a candidate’s political career?

- [Congress.gov](https://www.congress.gov) is a great website to research how congress members voted on bills and view videos and live streams of congressional meetings.
- You can also use [Ballotpedia](https://www.ballotpedia.org) as a starting place to find legislator scorecards—which are records of how legislators have voted on issues important to the organizations doing the scoring. Ballotpedia has these scorecards for state level legislators that may not be on Congress.gov.

How do I see what’s on my ballot?

- On the Cook County Clerk’s website [cookcountyclerk.com](https://www.cookcountyclerk.com), you can view a [list of all candidates](#) who are up for election on Nov. 3rd in Cook County. This includes candidates for all districts in Cook County.
- Another useful place to look is [Ballotpedia](https://www.ballotpedia.org). This site lists the [municipal elections happening in Cook County](#) in November 2020, including the State's Attorney and the Clerk of the Circuit Court. Ballotpedia is more concise and a little easier to navigate than the official Clerk’s office website.
- You can also use a site like [BallotReady](https://www.ballotready.com) to pull up your full sample ballot, complete with links to information on candidates.

When does early voting start?

- Early voting in Illinois begins on September 24 this year. Locations and hours may vary, so check with your local election office. And remember to wear a mask over your nose and mouth when you go to vote!

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What information *can* I bring to the polls?

- You can bring with you any information you need to cast your informed ballot. For some folks, that means bringing a printout of a sample ballot using a tool like [BallotReady](#). Some folks bring voter guides that they have marked up to reflect their choice candidates. I bring my voter postcard from the state election authority that lets me know my polling place information. Electioneering is not allowed in polling places, so make sure you are not bringing campaign materials and leaving them in the voting booth for other voters to find.

What information *do I need* to bring to the polls?

- In Illinois, voters are not required to bring any identification to the polls in order to vote. Registered voters receive a postcard in the mail with their polling place location information, and if you bring this card with you to your polling place, it can expedite the process of preparing your ballot, but you do not need to bring it with you.
- The exception is if your signature does not appear to match the signature on file from your voter registration. If your signature does not match, you can provide a driver's license, state ID, credit card, or other piece of identification that matches the name from your voter registration.

<https://www.ncsl.org/research/elections-and-campaigns/voter-id.aspx#Laws%20in%20Effect>

How might I participate in civic engagement during the pandemic?

- The League of Women Voters has a [comprehensive and resource-rich list of 100 activities](#), small and large you can do to participate in civic engagement before voting on Nov. 3. Some of the recommended actions include checking in with family and friends about their voting plan to make sure they're prepared and posting on social media about why you are voting.

Where can I get more information about the election if my questions weren't answered here?

- You can check out the Voter Information page on the library's website—go to skokiellibrary.info, then find Voter Information under the Resources menu section. We update this page as we get more information. You can also submit a reference question to us using the chat or email options at the bottom of the library's homepage.
- The League of Women Voters of Evanston is also running a voter hotline, where you can call and ask questions about registration, voting by mail, what's on the ballot, polling places, and more. The hotline is staffed by trained Deputy Registrars from 10 am-7 pm, and you can leave a message if you don't reach the registrar and they will call you back. The hotline number is 224-297-5052.