

Using the State Board of Elections Website to Research Campaign Data:

A Basic Guide

Where to find the Illinois campaign finance data and other election information

Illinois State Board of Elections Website <https://www.elections.il.gov/Default.aspx>

Information available on the St Bd Website in addition to campaign finance reports

- Election and disclosure guides and calendars
- Searchable list of active and inactive political committees. Committee entries have links to all reports filed by a committee
- Searchable filings for office by candidates with status information (1998-2018)
- Searchable election results for each primary and general election for statewide, legislative and judicial offices (1998 – 2018) (Download by candidate or candidate by county)

Who must report campaign receipts and expenditures?

- Candidate committees – statewide, legislative, judicial, local government & school district offices
- Party committee – state, county, township and ward
- Political Action Committees PAC
- Independent Expenditure Committees IE
- Ballot Committee

What kinds of reports are available?

- D-2 comprehensive reports of receipts and expenditures for each three-month filing period: summary sheet and itemized records of receipts and expenditures
- A-1 reports of contributions of \$1,000 or more received by every type of committee
- B-1 reports of independent expenditures IE of \$1,000 or more made by an IE committee
- Searchable database of records for receipts (1993) and expenditures (2000).

When is the data available?

- Data is posted online instantaneously when a report is filed electronically
- D-2 reports are due within approximately 15 days of the end of a three-month reporting period
- A-1 reports are due within 2-5 days of the receipt by a committee. These allow you to track contributions in close to real time.
- B-1 report within 2-5 days of an IE expenditure of \$1,000 or more by the IE committee. These allow you to track independent expenditures in close to real time.

Where to Start

- For background – Go to State Board home page and click on the “reporter” button on the top. In the “Welcome reporter” box in the next screen, click on the “Understanding Campaign Disclosure” button for links to four very helpful publications
- For data/committee searches - Go to home page – The “Search Options” box and “choose search option” dropdown are located on the center of the home page

- Data search caution: The St Board treats all reports filed with them as electronic public documents. They do not correct spelling or standardize names. For example, contributions from the PAC of the IL Education Association will be reported by different candidate committees as contributions from the IEA, IPACE, I.P.A.C.E., IL Political Action for Education or the Illinois Education Association. Misspelling and inconsistent abbreviations are also problems. Multiple searches may be required to capture all the data for an individual or entity.
- Data Search caution: the boxes for entering search criteria for the various searches have default setting and dropdown options. When in doubt, it is usually best to choose the “contains” default rather than “starts with” or “matches” default.
- You can download the results of any search in either a tab-delimited text file or an XML file which can then be converted to Excel or a database program like Access. You can also print the results of any search.

Basic Committee Search

- Start with the Committee search option from the Search Options box in the middle of the home page. In the Committee search dialogue box on the new screen, check the “active committee only” to box limit the search and change the default for the “Committee name” entry field to “contains”. Now type in the name of the candidate, PAC, Party Committee, IE committee you are looking for and hit the search button. A search for “Madigan” yields the candidate committees for the Speaker and the Attorney General.
- The committee search dialogue box has street, city, and committee type entry fields that can be used to narrow a search.
- In addition to the official name for the committee there is also a **Committee ID number** on the record(s) produced by a committee search. This is a unique number for each committee. If you open the committee search dialogue box and type in 665 in the committee ID field and hit the search button, the Speaker’s candidate committee will be displayed.
- The committee name on a committee record is a live link to all the reports filed by that committee. Clicking on the committee name gets you to new screen with a chronological list of all reports filed by a committee. As of 9/3/2018, the candidate committee report list for Speaker Madigan begins with 7 separate A-1 reports filed after 7/1/2018, a filing notice, and a quarterly report (D-2) for the period of 4/1/2018 - 6/30/2018.
- Checking the A-1 reports filed by a committee alerts you to large contributions recently received by a committee.
- Clicking on a quarterly report record gets you to the summary sheet for the D-2 report which list various categories of receipts and expenditures and totals for each. The D-2 summary page gives you a starting and ending balance for the reporting period and the summary of the receipts and expenditures for the reporting period.
- The highlighted itemized total for each category on the D-2 summary page is a link to a listing of the individual records. Clicking on the itemized item under “individual contributions” get you to a new screen with a list of the individual records that make up the total for the reporting period. These records have name, address and amount information.
- In-kind contributions (goods and services donated to a committee from a third party such as a mailing or a computer) are both contributions and expenditures. The expenditure benefiting the committee has already been made by the third party and value to the committee is being reported by the committee. When reporting how much a committee raised and spent for reporting

period(s), you must add in-kind contributions to both the total receipts and the total expenditures to get an accurate accounting of the campaign activity for a reporting period.

- Individual In-kind contribution records have data on vendors involved and a description of the goods or services donated to the candidate committee. If the Republican party paid for a poll and gave the results to a candidate committee, the record filed by the candidate committee would show the Republican Party as the donor, the value, a description of good or service, and the name of the vendor involved.
- Summing the receipts and expenditures of a committee across multiple reporting periods. To get a total for the receipt and expenditure activity for the Speakers candidate committee from 1/1/2017 to 6/30/2018, go to the search option box and select the “Sum committee totals” option. In the dialogue box on the new screen, enter the committee number 665 in the committee ID field and then at the top of the box under “report period” select 1/1/2017 for the begin date and 6/31/2018 for the end date. Hit the search button and you will get a receipts total of \$2,630,630.08, and in-kind contribution total of \$14,937.73 and an expenditure total of \$3,176,618.12 for six reports. You will not get a starting balance or an ending balance. These can only be obtained from the quarterly D-2 beginning with 1/1/2017 for the beginning balance and the D-2 ending in 6/30/2018 for the most recent ending balance. To get a completely up to date receipt amount you would have to do a “contributions by committee” search for A-1’s filed since 7/1/2018, which is described below.

Basic contribution search

- Choose the “Contributions search” from the search options dropdown in the center of the home page. The dialogue box on the new screen has four tabs at the top. The most useful are the “ by all contributions” tab and the “by committee” tab. The default setting is the “by all contributions” tab.
- In either option you will have entry fields with default settings for type of contribution, name, address, amount, date received, and sort by (A-Z, most to least, etc.) which you can use to focus your search. The “by committee” tab give you additional fields for the name or committee ID number of a specific committee to further focus your search.
- To look at all the contributions from an individual, PAC or company for a particular time period, choose the “by all contributions” tab. To look for contribution from Kenneth Griffin between 1/1/2017 and 9/3/2018, enter Griffin in the last or only name field, change the first name field default to “contains” and enter Ken (this will catch both Ken and Kenneth) and type in the beginning and ending dates. As of 9/5/2018 this search would produce a screen with “Your search found 6 receipts totaling \$22,516,962.00” at the top of the page and an itemized listing of who received the 6 contribution and when.
- To do an all contributions search for a PAC or a company, enter the name in the last only name field and enter beginning and ending dates. Most searches for company names or association names are straightforward. A search for Ameren for the current election cycle yields slightly more than \$1million in contributions to candidate and party committees.
- Search for contributions from PACs/Associations can be complicated because of the lack of standardization across the reports filed by candidate and party committees. Contributions from the Beer Distributors PAC get reported as Associated Beer Distributors of Illinois, ABDI, and A.B.D.I. Faced with this situation, you will have to do multiple searches using different name/letter combinations. You can also download the data for a time period, put it in a spread sheet or database and then standardize the records and analyze the results.

- Using the “by committee” search tab allows you to search the records of a single committee for contributions from an individual, PAC, Party, or candidate committee. Choose the “by committee” tab and then enter the committee ID or the name of committee you want to search in the appropriate field. Set the time frame and enter the name in the appropriate field(s). To identify Beer Distributor Association contributions to Speaker Madigan’s candidate committee for the current election cycle, choose the “by committee” tab, enter 655 in the committee ID field, set the time frame to 1/1/2017 to 9/3/2018 (capturing any contributions of \$1,000 or more since 6/30/2018) and set the default for last only name field to “contains” and enter “beer” in the field. Starting with “beer” give you a broad search. This search yields one contribution for \$10,000 from Associated Beer Distributors of Illinois PAC. A search for ABDI yielded no results. The \$10,000 is very likely the correct total.
- You can use the “by committee” tab to get a total raised by a committee since the last quarterly report. Using the “by committee” tab and searching the Speaker’s candidate committee for 7/1/2018 through 9/5/2018 while leaving the name fields blank produces the following results: “Your search found 30 receipts totaling \$655,981.00 for 1 committee.”, which is the total the committee has taken in since July 1. This search is useful for tasks such as tracking receipts for the candidates in a legislative race before the next quarterly report filed after the end of September or between October 1 and election day. It enables you to track activity in real time.

Basic expenditure search

- The expenditure search option has the same mechanics as the contribution search option. When you choose the expenditure search option you get a screen with four tabs at the top with “by all expenditures” tab (default) and “by committee” tabs being the most useful. In addition to the name, address, amount, date, etc. fields, expenditure records also have a purpose field that may be useful in general or committee searches.
- You can use the expenditure search to look for a specific vendor for a time period across all committees or limit the search to a specific candidate committee by using the “by committee” tab.
- You can use the purpose field in an expenditure search to examine spending by categories for all committees or a specific committee. Committees are required to list a purpose for an expenditure, but there is no common set of terms or criteria. Examples of purpose categories used by committees are travel, fundraising, contributions to non-for profit/charitable organization, food, rent, equipment, etc. Using the “by all expenditures” tab and setting the default for purpose field to “contain” and entering “flowers” in the purpose field, a search of the period between 1/1/2017 and 9/4/2018 yields “Your search found 554 Expenditures totaling \$125,570.70”, which is a lot of flowers. A search of the same time period for JB for Governor (Pritzker candidate committee) for Dunkin Donuts shows the following: “Your search found 55 Expenditures totaling \$12,576.18 for 1 committee.” The JB for Governor committee appears to list all food purchases under “catering” in the purpose field.

Basic Independent Expenditure Search

- Independent Expenditures are expenditures made to support or oppose a specific candidate by an independent expenditure committee. Unlike a Political Action Committee or a candidate committee, IE Committees do not have limits on the amount of contributions they can accept from a single source. However, they cannot coordinate their activities with candidate committees. Their expenditures are usually in the form of TV and radio spots, direct mail, social media and phone calls.

- IE Committee must file the same reports as all other types of committees (D-2 & A-1). On their quarterly reports they show a total for independent expenditures and itemize them on a separate schedule.
- IE committees must also report IE expenditures of \$1,000 or more to the State Board through B-1 reports within 2-5 days of making the expenditure. But since these expenditures are not coordinated with any candidate committee, you can not find IE expenditures by examining the reports of candidate committees. You must locate them by using the search option and selecting the expenditure search.
- To look for IEs made in relation to a specific candidate or set of candidates, first select the “by all expenditures” or the “by committee” tab. In the dialogue box, change the type of expenditure from “all types” to “independent expenditures”. You must make this change every time you change tabs. This change gives you a dialogue box with a number of fields in addition to the name, address, date, amount, etc. fields from an “all type” expenditure search.
- In the center of field options is a “candidate name” field with a “starts with” default. Set it for “contains”. The field is really a candidate committee field. If you type in Quinn with the “starts with” default for the 2018 primary period, you get zero results. If you change the default to “contains” you find that a labor backed IE committee made \$685,000 in independent expenditure opposing Quinn’s candidacy for attorney general. All B-1 reports filed will show up in this type of search. B-1’s allow you to track IE expenditures in near real time rather than waiting for a D-2
- In the Republican primary for the 82nd House seat, Durkin was opposed by Straub. Entering Durkin in the candidate field (after setting it for “contains”) and selecting the “oppose” button gives you a total of \$47,000 of IE expenditure by Liberty Principles PAC opposing Durkin. Selecting the “support” button give you a total of \$80,000 in support of Durkin from five different groups. Doing the same thing for Straub shows \$1,378,000 of IE expenditures from Liberty Principles PAC supporting Straub. An examination of the reports filed by the two candidates with the State Board would not have identified any of the \$1.5 million of IE expenditures that were made trying to influence the primary election in the 82nd District.
- You can also use the committee name and committee ID fields to search for all the IE expenditures made by an IE committee. Start with the basic expenditure search. Choose the “by committee” tab. Change the type of expenditure from “all types” to “independent expenditures.” Leave the candidate name field blank and do not select either the support or the oppose buttons. Enter Liberty Principles in the committee name field for the period of 1/12017 to 9/3//2018. This search yields a total of \$5,595,163 in IE expenditures by Liberty Principles PAC.

Going beyond a search using the St Bd website and search engine – relational databases

- The State Board of Elections Website is a very valuable tool. Going beyond the searches available to you from the State Bd of Elections website requires both technical expertise and considerable time and effort. This may be justified for special projects.
- As noted earlier, you can download the results of any search in either a tab-delimited or XML file. Putting that data into a speed sheet or database will allow you to standardize and code the data in a single table or create new tables. But your analysis will be limited to the fields in the records.
- The most efficient way to add new dimensions to your analysis is to create a candidate/party committee table with identification fields for the candidate or party organization. This table can be linked to a contribution records table by the committee ID number because every contribution

record has the committee ID number of the committee reporting the contribution. This mechanism is referred to as a relational database.

- Once you link a contribution record table and a candidate/party table by the unique committee ID number shared by each contribution record and the committee reporting the contribution, you can write queries for tasks like identifying Illinois State Medical Society contributions to incumbent Republican Senators or determine the partisan split of contributions made by the Illinois State Medical Society to legislative candidates running for election to the House.

Campaign Finance Resources: Sources of information and data

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Illinois statewide and legislative elections

Private campaign contribution and expenditure databases – 2000 – 2018

State board of election data with value added through standardization and coding

Illinois Election Data – Scott Kennedy

<https://illinoiselectiondata.com/>

Best source of current and historical Illinois election data – open access and subscription data

Developing a strong campaign finance data presence – Tracks targeted legislative races

Illinois State Board of Elections

<http://www.elections.il.gov/>

Searchable and downloadable data base of campaign contributions (1994 to present) and campaign expenditures (2000 to present)

No value added – providing access to electronic public documents

Downloadable election data for primary and general election by candidate, office and county

Excellent campaign finance and candidate guide publications

Illinois Campaign for Political Reform – ICPR

<http://www.ilcampaign.org/> Home

<http://www.illinois sunshine.org/> Illinois Sunshine data base

Searchable database of campaign contributions and expenditures

Center for Responsive Politics – Open Secrets - Federal Data

<https://www.opensecrets.org/> Home

<https://www.opensecrets.org/influence/> Federal PACs, 527s, Non-profits, 501(C)(4)

<https://www.opensecrets.org/elections/> Federal Candidates and Elections

National Institute for Money in Politics (formerly the National Institute for State Money in Politics)

<https://www.followthemoney.org/>

Comparative data on state campaign finance

Data, analysis, research, and theory on federal elections and campaign finance reform – Campaign Finance Institute CFI is now a division of the National Institute for Money in Politics

Campaign Finance Institute

<http://www.cfinst.org/>

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