THE PROJECT

Ballotpedia is looking to contract with local groups who can hold listening sessions to generate questions that local voters would like their candidates to answer. These questions will be included in our Candidate Connection survey. Ballotpedia will also do additional outreach to both voters and candidates in these communities preparing voters for upcoming municipal elections.

ABOUT BALLOTPEDIA

Ballotpedia is the digital encyclopedia of American politics and elections. Our goal is to inform people about politics by providing accurate and objective information about politics at all levels of government. We are firmly committed to neutrality in our content. Ballotpedia is a trusted source of political information for Twitter, Amazon, Facebook, The New York Times, Politico, and more.

DOWN-BALLOT ELECTIONS

Ballotpedia's long-term goal is to cover every one of the 550,000+ elections in the United States. Given that we already cover every election in the top 100 cities by population, every statewide race, and every congressional seat, we are continually working to expand our down-ballot coverage. The team at Ballotpedia is acutely aware of the difficulties of getting information on elections, especially local races. To reach our goal, we need to work with a larger audience to improve the amount of information available on local races, as well as the quality and relevance of that information.

CANDIDATE CONNECTION SURVEY

Since 2018, Ballotpedia has offered its own survey with the goal of finding out what motivates candidates on political and personal levels. Our survey goes beyond issue questions. It is designed to elicit insightful and thoughtful responses from candidates on what they care about, what they stand for, and what they hope to achieve.

In 2018, 15,054 unique candidates were contacted and 1,957 candidates completed our survey. This represented a 13.0% response rate. In 2020—the survey's third year and second even-year election cycle—12,233 candidates were contacted and 4,745 responded. This equals a 38.8% response rate—a 25.8 percentage point increase over 2018's rate.

PROJECT BACKGROUND

One of our core values is constant improvement and we recognize that one area where we can improve is ensuring that our candidate surveys include questions that better connect to the issues facing voters at the local level. This project is an expansion of the work we did in advance of the 2019 municipal elections in Chicago.

In our 2019 Chicago project, Ballotpedia partnered with City Bureau and the Interactivity Foundation to identify and recruit community members and potential voters in wards with historically lower voter turnout (Wards 15, 16, 24, and 28). These community members participated in several conversations to answer the question: "On what topics do you want to be hearing from the candidates for city office in this spring's city elections?" From these conversations, we were able to adjust our candidate survey—asking local candidates about the issues that matter most to their potential constituents. About 26% of candidates answered the survey questions that resulted from this work. This project is an extension of that work.

GOALS

Ballotpedia has the following goals for this program:

- By the end of June, we will have specialized survey questions for candidates
- By election day, 70% of candidates will have responded to our survey
- By the end of the year, Ballotpedia has newly engaged readers and voters that we didn't have before
- Three weeks after the election, our post-election survey results show that question-development participants found our survey helpful and used us as a source when they voted
- Following election day, we have established partnerships and networks that we could return to after the project ends

SURVEY QUESTION GUIDELINES

We created the following criteria. Questions should:

- Be open-ended
- Be unbiased
- Be fewer than 75 words
- Require little to no explanatory text and contain limited/no jargon
- Focus on local issues
- Ask for specifics from the candidate
- Center around a single subject

We recommend a 1,500 character limit for answers.

USE OF RESPONSE

Ballotpedia will use either the questions or themes generated from your listening session to add 3-7 questions to our Candidate Connection survey for candidates running in the municipal elections we cover in your city. In line with our commitment to neutrality, these questions may be edited to avoid bias.

FUNDING

Recruiting community members, organizing (likely remote) listening sessions, continued engagement with Ballotpedia, etc. will require staff time and resources. As such, we have some funding for this pilot project. Exact amounts will depend on proposals and requested budgets put forward. We would like to see a possible budget and use that as a starting point.

TIMELINE

- March 31, 2021: Ballotpedia has signed contracts with the groups that will be carrying out the question-generating process
- May 31, 2021: Ballotpedia has the final list of questions from the local communities
- June 30, 2021: Ballotpedia's survey has been updated with these questions and our additional outreach to candidates has begun
- August 24, 2021: The earliest elections we could to cover in this project occur in Birmingham, Alabama
- Three weeks post election, we have a survey out to the voters and residents who participated in the question-generating process

PROPOSAL REQUIREMENTS

- Please outline a similar project you have completed in the past. If you have not completed a project along these lines, please describe a successful community engagement project completed in the last two years.
  - Minimum 300 words
- Please share a list of local, state, or national community groups you have worked with.
- Please share how you have adjusted to working under your local COVID restrictions.
- Ballotpedia holds its commitment to neutrality in the highest regard. Are you willing to work with us to maintain this in all Ballotpedia-partnered communications?
- Do you have working relationships with any local media outlets?
- How would you carry out this project? Please include an expected timeline.
  - Minimum 300 words
  - Will your group meet virtually? Over the phone? Using text?
  - How will you compensate community members for their time?
- What would be your estimated budget for this project? Please include your anticipated costs.

PLEASE CONSIDER THE FOLLOWING

- Are there areas of overlap with your current work where we could work together?
  - If so, are there opportunities to share costs on this program as both groups expand their work?
- Is your organization willing to share participant contact information (email addresses only and only if the participants agree) with Ballotpedia so Ballotpedia can send follow-up information about their elections?
- Is your organization in contact with local candidates or willing to help with candidate outreach?

BALLOTPEDIA'S
CANDIDATE
CONNECTION

EXPANSION
PROJECT

QUESTIONS?

Contact Kayla Harris

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