

Operational and Communications Toolkit for Candidate Issues



Handling candidate or campaign issues, such as a candidate being removed from the ballot or being disqualified, can be a critical task for elections officials. Common reasons for this type of change include:

- **Candidate Removed from the Ballot:** This can occur due to failure to meet eligibility requirements, insufficient valid signatures, death, or withdrawal.
- **Candidate Disqualification:** Reasons could include failure to file required documents, residency issues, or criminal convictions affecting eligibility.

This generic, nonpartisan resource contains a set of possible candidate issues and a sample step-by-step operational response, as well as starter templates for [social media](#), [news releases](#), and [voter-facing information](#). These can be easily adapted for any election office and provide a starting place for nonpartisan communication with voters about candidate issues. Keep in mind, these are just samples and guides. We encourage you to adapt them to your jurisdiction's needs and make them your own, and to consult your state, county, or city attorney where necessary.

Operational Response Template

This Operational Response Template outlines the steps that election officials can take to help ensure quick and comprehensive responses to candidate issues as they arise. These guidelines are based on best practices, and are organized based on the situation and audience.

Planning Phase	Steps to Consider
Preparation	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Understand Laws and Regulations:<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ensure all staff members are well-versed in local election laws, regulations, and procedures concerning candidate eligibility, ballot access, and campaign conduct. Consult with your state, county, or city attorney if you have questions.2. Establish Clear Procedures:<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Develop and document standard operating procedures (SOPs) for handling candidate and campaign issues, including removal from the ballot, printing new ballots, getting new ballots to voters, etc.• The SOP should include contingencies for how your office will respond up to and including on election day.• Understand how procedures and communication to voters and other stakeholders may differ based on where your office is at in the election calendar.3. Maintain Communication Channels and Partners:<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Establish communication channels with legal advisors, relevant government agencies, and political parties for consultation and guidance. Have at least two people you could call in the case of an unexpected candidate issue.4. Communications Planning<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Prepare a communication plan outlining how the office will inform the public about any candidate or campaign issues, including potential scenarios like candidate removal. This could include a script for when concerned voters call your office.• The plan should include media response, including a holding statement and draft news release.

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ensure all media contact lists are up to date ahead of time, including new digital news outlets that may not have existed in prior general election cycles.
Replacing a Candidate on the Ballot	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Determine Legal Options & Requirements:<ul style="list-style-type: none">• In the event of a candidate's death, disqualification, or withdrawal, consult federal, state and local law to verify the grounds for candidate removal from the ballot based on established criteria and reach out to your jurisdiction's legal counsel for legal advice.• Correspond with the campaign, committee, or candidate as appropriate in writing of the decision and reasons for their disqualification from the ballot, or to acknowledge their withdrawal.• Determine if a replacement candidate is provided for in law, and follow the prescribed process.2. Update Ballots and Public Notices:<ul style="list-style-type: none">• If law provides for a new candidate to be named by a party/vacancy committee etc., follow timelines in law to update the ballot.• If ballots cannot be changed, consider including an insert or sending a separate mailer or a printed poster for physical polling locations that includes information on the change and resources for voters.• Inform voters through official channels about the change in the ballot. Depending on the election timeline, advise voters to contact your office for more information.3. Legal and Public Relations Management:<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Coordinate with legal counsel to address any potential legal challenges or appeals from the affected candidate/committee/party etc.• Prepare a public statement or news release explaining the situation in a transparent and neutral manner.4. Internal Documentation:<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Maintain detailed records of the decision-making process, communications with the candidate, and any legal proceedings.• If ballots cannot be changed, consider how to clearly communicate election results information regarding the affected contest.
Communicating with the Public	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Official Channels:<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Utilize official communication channels such as your office's website, social media platforms, media outlets, and direct mailings to inform voters about changes in the ballot and ensure transparency.2. Answering Public Inquiries:

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Designate a spokesperson or team to handle inquiries from concerned voters or stakeholders promptly and professionally.● Provide accurate information and reassure the public of the integrity and fairness of the electoral process.
Media Engagement	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Communicate Proactively:<ul style="list-style-type: none">● As soon as your office has a firm grasp on any candidate or campaign issue, contact the media via news release and calls to media contacts.● Explain your standard operating procedures and the steps your office is taking to ensure that all voters will be able to participate in the election.2. Transparency and Accountability:<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Emphasize the importance of transparency and accountability in your communications with the media. Ensure that any information shared is accurate and up-to-date.3. Responding to Inquiries:<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Be prepared to respond promptly to media inquiries with accurate information and updates on the status of the candidate issue.4. Interviews:<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Offer interviews with election officials to provide deeper insights into the issue, actions being taken, and reassurance to the public.● Depending on staff capacity and the situation, assign a staff member (with name tag, emergency vest, etc.) to the original location to answer questions and redirect voters.

Candidate Issues Social Media Templates

Here are some generic sample social media posts addressing candidate issues. Keep in mind, these are designed to be a starting point. They can (and should) be adapted to meet your election office's particular need and based on the urgency of the situation. These sample posts may also be used on other platforms you use to reach community members, like Nextdoor. The platforms provided below are just examples. Depending on the laws in your jurisdiction, additional context should be added to the posts about what will come next. This may include:

- **Party Nomination:** If the withdrawing candidate is from a political party, the party typically has a process for selecting a replacement candidate. Reach out to your contacts at the party as soon as possible to coordinate logistics and information sharing.
- **No Replacement:** In some cases, if a candidate withdraws, there might be no mechanism to replace them on the ballot. In this case, the race proceeds without the candidate, or the ballot remains as is, with votes for the withdrawn candidate not being counted or published.
- **New Candidate Filing:** Some jurisdictions may allow a new candidate to file for the vacancy. This would typically require the new candidate to meet all standard filing requirements, such as collecting the necessary number of signatures and submitting paperwork by a specific deadline.
- **Special Election:** In rare cases, the jurisdiction might call for a special election to fill the vacancy, although this is more common in cases where an officeholder resigns or passes away.

Be sure to consult your jurisdiction's legal counsel if you have questions about what information should be included or next steps in the process.

Platform	Sample Text
Twitter	<ul style="list-style-type: none">●  Attention Voters: There's been a change to the ballot. This update won't affect your voting process! Please download your customized sample ballot online: [Insert Link]. For questions, visit our FAQ page or call our office at XXX-XXX-XXXX. #VoteInformed #Election2024●  Ballot Update: A recent change has been made, but don't worry—it won't impact how you vote! Download your sample ballot here: [Insert Link]. For more info, check our online FAQ or call XXX-XXX-XXXX. #ElectionDay #StayInformed●  Ballot Changes: A quick update—there's been a change to the ballot. It shouldn't affect your voting process. Download your personalized sample ballot: [Insert Link]. Questions? Visit our FAQ page at [website] or call XXX-XXX-XXXX. #YourVoteMatters
Facebook	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Attention Voters!  There has been a change to the November ballot. This adjustment won't impact your voting process, but we encourage you to download your customized sample ballot online: [Insert Link]. If you have any questions, please visit our online FAQ page or call XXX-XXX-XXXX. We're here to help! #VoteInformed #Election2024● Important Ballot Update: There's been a change to the ballot, but rest assured, it won't affect your ability to vote. To see the latest version, download your sample ballot here: [Insert Link]. For any questions, visit our FAQ page or call XXX-XXX-XXXX. Your vote is important! #ElectionDay #StayInformed

Candidate Issues Social Media Templates

Platform	Sample Text
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Notice to All Voters: 🗳️ A recent update has been made to the ballot. This change won't impact how you vote. Please download your customized sample ballot online: [Insert Link]. For more information or assistance, visit our online FAQ page or call XXX-XXX-XXXX. #YourVoteMatters
Instagram	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 🗳️ Attention Voters: [Candidate's Name] will no longer appear on the ballot due to [reason]. Visit our profile link for more information on what this means for the upcoming election. Your voice matters! For additional questions, visit our FAQ page or call XXX-XXX-XXXX. #ElectionUpdates #VotingRights • 🗳️ Ballot Update: A small change has been made, but don't worry—it doesn't affect how you vote! Download your sample ballot now. Link in bio! For more info, check out our FAQ page or call XXX-XXX-XXXX. #ElectionDay #StayInformed • 🗳️ Ballot Changes: There's been a recent update to the ballot. This shouldn't impact your voting experience. Download your personalized sample ballot today. Link in bio! Questions? Visit our FAQ or call XXX-XXX-XXXX. #YourVoteMatters
LinkedIn	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 🗳️ Important Voter Notice: We want to inform you that [Candidate's Name] has been removed from the upcoming ballot due to [reason]. While this update won't impact your voting process, we encourage you to download your customized sample ballot online: [Insert Link]. For further information, please visit our online FAQ page or call XXX-XXX-XXXX. We're committed to ensuring a smooth voting experience. #VoteInformed #Election2024 • 🗳️ Important Ballot Update: An update has been made to the ballot. This change will not affect how you cast your vote. To see the updated version, please download your sample ballot here: [Insert Link]. For any questions, visit our FAQ page or call XXX-XXX-XXXX. Your participation is crucial! #ElectionDay #StayInformed • 🗳️ Notice to All Voters: A recent update has been made to the ballot, but don't worry—it won't affect your voting process. Please download your customized sample ballot online: [Insert Link]. For more information or assistance, visit our online FAQ page or call XXX-XXX-XXXX. We're here to help you navigate this election smoothly. #YourVoteMatters

For more examples of social media posts and other sample content, reference the Elections Assistance Commission's ["Election Official Social Media Toolkit"](#).

Candidate Issues News Release Template



This generic news release template is a starting point to help you provide public guidance about candidate issues. This is customizable for your jurisdiction. The **Blue text** notes places where jurisdiction specific text is particularly important. It's a best practice to keep news releases to one page or two at most.

CONTACT

[Your Name]
[Your Title]
[County Elections Office]
[Phone Number]
[Email Address]
[Date]



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Elections Office Addresses Candidate Issue: [Candidate's Name] Removed from Ballot

[City/County], [Date] – The [City/County] Elections Office today announced that [Candidate's Name] has been officially removed from the upcoming [specify election type] ballot, effective immediately. This decision follows [briefly state reason, e.g., failure to meet eligibility requirements or other legal grounds].

[Candidate's Name] was initially slated to participate in the [specify election] scheduled for [date], seeking the position of [specify position]. However, after careful review and consultation with legal advisors, it was determined that [he/she/they] did not meet the necessary requirements outlined in [specify relevant laws or regulations].

"[Our foremost commitment is to uphold the integrity and fairness of our electoral process]," stated [Your Name], [Your Title] of the [City/County] Elections Office. "This decision was made in accordance with [specify relevant laws/regulations] to ensure that all candidates adhere to the established criteria for ballot access."

Voters who have already received their ballots or are preparing to vote are encouraged to visit our official website at [website URL] for updated information on the list of candidates. It is essential for voters to stay informed and exercise their right to participate in [City/County]'s democratic process.

For media inquiries or further clarification regarding this matter, please contact [Your Name], [Your Title], at [phone number] or [email address].

About [City/County] Elections Office: The [City/County] Elections Office is responsible for administering fair and impartial elections, ensuring voter registration and access to the electoral process, and maintaining compliance with local and state election laws.

Contact: [Your Name]
[Your Title]
[City/County] Elections Office
[Phone Number]
[Email Address]
[Website UR

Candidate Issues

Voter-Facing Information Template



It's important for voters to understand various candidate and campaign issues that may arise during an election. This generic one-pager aims to provide you with a starting point for providing essential information to your voters to help them navigate through these situations effectively. **Blue text** denotes places where jurisdiction specific information is particularly important, though the entire resource is customizable for your jurisdiction. Be sure to consult your jurisdiction's legal counsel where necessary.

Voter Guide on Navigating Candidate Issues



There are a variety of reasons why a candidate may no longer be on the ballot or participating in a campaign. More common reasons typically fall under two categories:

- **Candidate Removed from the Ballot:** This can occur due to failure to meet eligibility requirements, insufficient valid signatures, death, or withdrawal.
- **Candidate Disqualification:** Reasons could include failure to file required documents, residency issues, or criminal convictions affecting eligibility.

What Happens if a Candidate is Removed from the Ballot?

1. **Impact on Voting:** If a candidate withdraws by a certain deadline, their name will be removed from the ballot, voters will no longer see their name listed when they go to vote. After certain deadlines and in specific scenarios, legislation or court cases may decide whether or not the candidate's name should remain on the ballot.
2. **Notification:** The elections office will notify voters and update official election materials to reflect the change. If you vote by mail, and the ballot change happens after your ballot has been mailed out, your local elections office will contact you with next steps.
3. **Legal Process:** The removal is based on legal grounds determined by election officials and may involve legal proceedings or appeals.
 - [\[Instagram URL\]](#)
 - Local media and digital newsrooms will also be providing updates throughout the day.

How Voters Can Stay Informed

- **Research Candidates:** Before voting, research each candidate's background, qualifications, and stance on issues that matter to you.
- **Attend Debates and Forums:** Participate in debates or forums where candidates discuss their platforms and answer questions from the public.
- **Verify Information:** Cross-check information about candidates and campaigns from reliable sources to avoid misinformation.

Your Role in Ensuring Fair Elections

- **Report Concerns:** If you suspect any irregularities or misconduct related to candidates or campaigns, report them to your local elections office.
- **Exercise Your Right to Vote:** Your vote matters! Participate in elections to make your voice heard and contribute to the democratic process.

We're Here to Help

Visit [\[Website URL\]](#) for voter guides, candidate profiles, and election updates.

For questions or concerns about candidates or the electoral process, contact [\[Elections Office Contact Information\]](#).

Thank you for your commitment to informed voting and civic engagement.
Together, we ensure fair and transparent elections in our community.