

Coalition for Integrity

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FAQs about the
Virginia Integrity Challenge:

Why should candidates disclose beyond the bare minimum of what is required by law? The only action in the pledge not already required by law is disclosure of gifts. All other disclosures are already required to be made – we only ask that candidates link to them on their websites. We believe that candidates should be proactive about transparency and take affirmative steps to show voters that they will be open and accountable to those they serve. Making personal and campaign finance disclosures publicly available and easily accessible sends a strong message to voters who want to elect candidates they can trust.

Aren't candidate campaign committee contributions and expenditures already disclosed? Yes. But finding these disclosures requires citizens to search the Virginia Department of Elections Campaign Finance Reports database. By posting contributions and expenditures on their campaign websites, candidates provide voters with an easy way to see who is supporting their campaigns.

Are you asking candidates to disclose contributions to their campaign committees more often than required by law? No. For November elections, Virginia law requires candidates to meet several filing deadlines prior to (and after) election day. While we are asking candidates to pledge to disclose contributions on their campaign websites at the same time they file their contribution reports with the Virginia Department of Elections, we strongly encourage candidates to disclose contributions within 48 hours of receipt.

Aren't candidate financial disclosure forms already available to voters? Yes, but they are filed in different places. New candidates for office must file financial disclosure forms with the State Department of

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Elections. Incumbents must file their disclosure forms annually with the Virginia Conflicts of Interest and Ethics Advisory Council. By posting their disclosure forms on their campaign websites, incumbents and candidates save voters the steps of finding which agency to search and searching for the forms. Proactively posting their forms on their campaign websites signals a willingness to make this information publicly available and easily accessible.

How is a gift defined under Virginia law? A gift is any item having monetary value such as a gratuity, favor, discount, entertainment, hospitality, loan or forbearance. "Gift" does not include gifts that are returned or given to charity, gifts valued at \$20 or less, food and drink consumed while attending an event related to official duties, awards of appreciation such as plaques or trophies, campaign contributions and gifts from relatives. Gifts from personal friends are generally permitted, though the term "personal friend" is not defined. Admission, entertainment, food and beverages accepted or received while in attendance at a "widely attended event" are also permissible. A widely attended event is an event at which at least 25 persons have been invited or there is a reasonable expectation that at least 25 people will attend the event, the event is open to individuals who share a common interest, are members of a public, civic, charitable or professional organization, who are from a particular industry or profession, or who represent persons interested in a in a particular issue. See [here](#) for more information about gifts that are permitted/prohibited.

What gifts does the Integrity Challenge require disclosing? Coalition for Integrity is asking candidates to pledge to disclose *all* gifts that they or immediate family members receive, except for those from immediate family members. While Virginia law provides a variety of exceptions for gifts, we encourage candidates to go above and beyond what is legally required of them to demonstrate to their constituents a higher standard of accountability and honest government. Disclosing all gifts is a small gesture that speaks volumes about a candidate's commitment to openness and transparency.

Who oversees issues of ethics among elected officials in Virginia?

Virginia has two separate ethics agencies - the Virginia Conflict of Interest and Ethics Advisory Council has jurisdiction over executive branch officials

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and employees in matters regarding ethics and over legislators with respect to financial disclosure reporting. The Senate and House Ethics Advisory Panels have jurisdiction over legislators. As their name implies, the Advisory Council and the Advisory Panels merely serve an advisory role. They have no enforcement authority, unlike many other state ethics agencies. The Integrity Challenge asks candidates to support legislation giving these organizations enforcement authority, in order to create more robust ethics oversight of all elected officials and government employees.