

QUICK GUIDE TO CAMPAIGN FINANCE

Candidate Committees

[Download the Campaign Finance Manual](#)

The State Board of Elections and county boards of elections regulate contributions and expenditures in primaries and elections for North Carolina offices. The [Federal Election Commission](#) regulates contributions and expenditures in primaries and elections for federal offices.

What is a contribution?

A contribution is anything of value whatsoever, made to, or in coordination with, a candidate to support or oppose the nomination or election of one or more clearly identified candidates, or to a political committee, to a political party, to an affiliated party committee, or to a referendum committee, whether or not made in an election year, and any contract, agreement, or other obligation to make a contribution. [N.C.G.S. § 163-278.6\(13\)](#).

A contribution includes in-kind transfers. An in-kind contribution is a non-monetary contribution, such as a good or service, made to a committee.

What is an expenditure?

An expenditure includes any purchase, transfer of funds, payment, gift, or anything of value whatsoever, whether or not made in an election year, and any contract, agreement, or other obligation to make an expenditure, to support or oppose the nomination, election, or passage of one or more clearly identified candidates, or ballot measure. [N.C.G.S. § 163-278.6\(51\)](#).

An expenditure includes any payment or other transfer made by a candidate committee.

North Carolina's Campaign Finance Laws require candidates to disclose all contributions and expenditures. North Carolina laws also set source and contribution limits. Violations may result in criminal or civil penalties. North Carolina's Campaign Finance Laws may be found in Chapter 163, Articles [22A](#) and [22M](#). Advisory opinions and regulations may be found in Title 8, Chapters [14](#) and [21](#) of the North Carolina Administrative Code.

This web page provides an overview for candidate committees; however, detailed information may be found in the North Carolina Campaign Finance Manual.

When to Organize a Candidate Committee

Each candidate who has received funds or made payments or given consent for anyone else to receive funds or transfer anything of value for the purpose of bringing about that candidate's nomination or election for office is required to organize a political committee. [N.C.G.S. § 163-278.7\(a\)](#).

Filing a notice of candidacy with a board of elections also triggers the candidate's obligation to organize a political committee

Treasurer

All candidates required to organize a political committee must appoint a treasurer who resides in North Carolina. [N.C.G.S. § 163-278.7\(a\)](#). A candidate may serve as their own treasurer, or may appoint someone else to serve. However, a candidate's spouse may not serve as treasurer. [N.C.G.S. § 163-278.7\(a\)](#).

Every treasurer must participate in treasurer training within three months of appointment and at least once every four years thereafter. [N.C.G.S. § 163-278.7\(f\)](#). More information on treasurer training can be found at the [Treasurer Training](#) page.

Bank Accounts and the Receipt and Use of Cash

The treasurer must maintain all moneys of the candidate committee in bank accounts used exclusively by the committee. [N.C.G.S. § 163-278.8\(f\)](#). Candidate committee funds may not be commingled with personal funds or other accounts. All bank accounts and other depositories used by the candidate committee must be maintained in North Carolina. [08 NCAC 21 .0201](#).

A candidate committee may not accept cash contributions in excess of \$50. [N.C.G.S. § 163-278.14\(b\)](#). Media expenditures may not be made in cash. [N.C.G.S. § 163-278.8\(c\)](#). Non-media expenditures of more than \$50 also may not be made in cash. [N.C.G.S. § 163-278.8\(d\)](#).

Organizational Report

All candidate committees must file an Organizational Report within 10 days of organizing or within 10 days of filing a notice of candidacy, whichever occurs first. [N.C.G.S. § 163-278.9\(a\)\(1\)](#).

Candidates for Council of State, General Assembly, and judicial offices (including district attorney) must file their Organizational Report with the State Board of Elections. Candidates for county and municipal offices file their Organizational Report with the county board of elections.

An organizational report must include the following required forms:

- [CRO-2100A Candidate Committee Statement of Organization](#). This form discloses basic information about the candidate committee, such as the name, address, office being pursued, and party registration of the candidate. This form also reports the name and contact information of the treasurer and must be signed by the candidate.
- [CRO-3500 Certification of Financial Accounts](#). This form discloses the bank accounts used by the candidate committee.
- [CRO-1000 Detailed Report Cover](#) AND [CRO-1100 Detailed Summary](#). As part of the organizational report, the candidate committee must disclose all contributions and expenditures not previously reported. At a minimum, the treasurer must submit the CRO-1000 and CRO-1100. As you complete the CRO-1100, you will be alerted as to any additional forms that are required. A free electronic filing option is also available. The treasurer must sign and file the CRO-1000 certifying the report as true and correct.

An organizational report may also include the following optional form:

- [CRO-3900 Candidate Designation of Funds](#). This form designates how candidate committee funds should be disbursed in the case of the death of the candidate. Undesignated funds must be paid to the North Carolina Escheat Fund.

Reporting Schedule

After filing an Organizational Report, candidate committees for State and county offices file quarterly or semiannual disclosure reports according to the reporting schedule in [N.C.G.S. § 163-278.9](#). This schedule is available on the Reporting Schedules page.

Candidate committees for municipal offices file reports according to a different reporting schedule. Please contact your county board of elections to learn the reporting schedule that applies to your committee.

A candidate committee that receives a contribution or transfer of funds of \$1,000 or more before an election but after the period covered by the last report due before that election is required to file a 48 Hour Report. [N.C.G.S. § 163-278.9\(a\)\(2\)](#). Contributions disclosed in a 48 Hour Report must also be disclosed in the next quarterly report.

All reports must be signed and certified as true and correct. N.C.G.S. § 163-278.32. A committee that does not file a report by the due date will receive a late filing penalty. [N.C.G.S. § 163-278.34\(a\)](#).

Notices of reports due are sent by the appropriate board of elections to committee treasurers. Please note that if the mailing or email address of a committee's treasurer is not current on the Statement of Organization that committee may not receive the notifications, but must still file the reports.

Certain Candidates Under Threshold

Candidate committees for county office, municipal office, local school board and soil and water conservation district may be exempt from filing disclosure reports if the committee determines that it does not intend to receive in contributions or in loans or spend more than \$1,000 during the election cycle. [N.C.G.S. § 163-278.10A](#). This includes not just the value of monetary contributions, but also the value of in-kind contributions. In order to be exempt from filing disclosure reports, the treasurer of an under threshold committee must file a [CRO-3600 Certification of Threshold](#) at the same time the committee files an Organizational Report. A candidate committee that fails to file [the CRO-3600](#) at the appropriate time must file disclosure reports.

If the committee's intent changes, or the committee actually receives or spends more than \$1,000, the committee must immediately file [a new CRO-3600 Certification of Threshold](#) reporting the change. The treasurer must also submit the next disclosure report due according to the appropriate reporting schedule. In this report, the committee must disclose all contributions and expenditures not previously reported.

Electronic Filing

Some candidate committees are required to file campaign finance reports electronically. [N.C.G.S. § 163-278.9\(i\)](#). The State Board of Elections has developed and maintains free software that enables the storing of all campaign finance information and allows the committee to generate electronic disclosure reports. Candidate committees may also use third-party products that generate files that meet the file format requirements.

The following candidate committees are required to file campaign finance reports electronically:

- Candidate committees for statewide office that show a cumulative total of more than \$5,000 in contributions, loans or expenditures for the election cycle.
- Candidate committees that make contributions in excess of \$5,000 to candidates for statewide office or make independent expenditures in excess of \$5,000 that affect contests for statewide office.
- Candidate committees that show a cumulative total of more than \$10,000 in contributions, loans or expenditures for the election cycle.

Any candidate committee may choose to file reports electronically. We encourage committees to file electronically if they are able.

For more information about electronic filing, please see [08 NCAC 21 .0106](#) and the [Campaign Finance Reporting Software](#) page.

Reporting

Disclosure reports detail all contributions and expenditures occurring within the reporting period.

At a minimum, committees filing paper reports must submit the [CRO-1000 Detailed Report Cover](#) and [CRO-1100 Detailed Summary](#). As you complete the [CRO-1100](#), you will be alerted as to any additional forms that are required. Whether a committee files paper reports or electronic reports, the treasurer must sign and file a [CRO-1000](#) certifying each report as true and correct.

For each contribution, a treasurer must collect the following information for reporting purposes:

1. The name and complete mailing address of each contributor;
2. The principal occupation of each contributor;
3. The amount contributed; and
4. The date each contribution was made. [N.C.G.S. § 163-278.11\(a\)](#).

A treasurer should use the best efforts outlined in [08 NCAC 21 .0101](#) to obtain, maintain and report contributor information. [N.C.G.S. § 163-278.11\(d\)](#).

Anonymous contributions are prohibited and subject to forfeiture. [N.C.G.S. § 163-278.14\(a\)](#). Contributions may not be made in the name of another. [N.C.G.S. § 163-278.14\(a\)](#).

A treasurer is not required to report the name, address, or principal occupation of any individual who contributes \$50 or less to the committee during the election. [N.C.G.S. § 163-278.11\(b\)](#). These contributions are reported using [form CRO-1205 Aggregated Contributions from Individuals](#), which discloses only the date, amount and form of payment.

For each expenditure, a treasurer must collect the following information for reporting purposes:

1. The name and complete mailing address of each payee;
2. The amount paid;
3. The purpose; and
4. The date each payment was made. [N.C.G.S. § 163-278.11\(a\)](#).

Loan proceeds, outstanding loans, refunds and reimbursements, and debts and obligations must all be closely tracked and reported.

Contribution Limits

Effective Jan. 1, 2021, no individual or political committee shall contribute in excess of \$5,600 to a candidate committee in any election. [N.C.G.S. § 163-278.13](#).

If there is a primary and a general election, the candidate may receive \$5,600 from a contributor between the beginning of the election cycle and the day of the primary, and another \$5,600 from the same contributor beginning the day after the primary through the end of the election year.

The fair market value of in-kind contributions count towards contributions limits.

There are a few exceptions:

- A candidate or candidate's spouse may contribute unlimited amounts.
- Any national, state, district or county executive committee of any political party recognized under [N.C.G.S. § 163-96](#) is exempt from contribution limits.

Source Prohibitions

A candidate committee may not accept any contribution made by a corporation, business entity, labor union, professional association or insurance company. [N.C.G.S. § 163-278.15](#).

Expenditure Limits

A candidate or candidate committee may only use contributions for the purposes listed in [N.C.G.S. § 163-278.16B](#). These include:

1. Expenditures resulting from the campaign for public office;
2. Expenditures resulting from holding public office;
3. Donations to certain nonprofit organizations so long as the candidate and certain members of the candidate's family are not employed by the organization;
4. Contributions to a national, State, district or county political party committee or an affiliated party committee;
5. Contributions to another candidate or candidate's campaign committee;
6. To return all or a portion of a contribution;
7. The payment of penalties imposed by the State Board of Elections;
8. Payments to the North Carolina Escheat Fund; and
9. Legal expense donations not in excess of \$4,000 per calendar year.

Rules regarding the use of contributions can be found in Title 8, Chapter 21 of the North Carolina Administrative Code. Executive Directors of the State Board of Elections have also issued a number of advisory opinions regarding [N.C.G.S. § 163-278.16B](#). Additional guidance is provided in the Campaign Finance Manual.

Disclosure Legends

Print media, television and radio advertisements purchased by the candidate or candidate committee must have a disclosure legend that includes the statement “Paid for by [name of candidate, or candidate committee]”. For more information about the format and size requirements, please review [N.C.G.S. § 163-278.39](#) and the [Campaign Finance Manual](#).

After the Election

A candidate may choose to keep their committee active after the election. An active committee must continue to file disclosure reports.

A candidate committee continues until it winds up operations, disposes of assets, files a final report and files a [CRO-3400 Certification to Close Committee](#). [N.C.G.S. § 163-278.6\(74\)](#). The committee may not close if it still has outstanding penalties from the State Board of Elections.

A candidate that wishes to maintain their committee for future elections may go inactive. If no contribution is received or expenditure made during a reporting period, the treasurer may file a [CRO-3200 Certification of Inactive Status](#). [N.C.G.S. § 163-278.10](#). While inactive, the committee is not required to file disclosure reports. If a contribution is received or an expenditure made, the committee must return to active status by filing a [CRO-3300 Certification to Return to Active Status](#). The treasurer must also submit the next disclosure report due according to the appropriate reporting schedule. In this report, the committee must disclose all contributions and expenditures not previously reported.