

Be a VOTER

Vote411 Provides Nonpartisan Voting Guide For Washington Elections

Has someone ever asked you, “What’s the 411?” Or years back, suggested you dial 411 for phone number information?

For the uninitiated, 4-1-1 is shorthand for information, and the question “What’s the 411?” is slang for asking what’s going on.

For the past nine years, [Vote411.org](https://www.vote411.org/) (<https://www.vote411.org/>) has been the go-to site online for reliable and unbiased information about voting in Washington state. That’s because Vote411.org delivers all types of voting details—about ballots, candidates, forums, registration, and deadlines.

Want to find out who’s running for office in a race in the next election? Need to make sure you’re registered to vote? Need to register? Curious about debates in your area?

Want to compare candidates’ positions on an important topic in your community?

Log onto your phone, notebook, or laptop and type in [Vote411.org](https://www.vote411.org/). Then type in your home address.

“Everything about elections in Washington state is on there, all the way down to who’s running for the hospital, sewer, port, cemetery, and utility commissions, to the mayor, the city and county councils,” said Linnea Hirst, a member of the League of Women Voters who was instrumental in bringing [Vote411.org](https://www.vote411.org/) to Washington in 2012.

The League of Women Voters of the United States Education Fund created the initial [Vote411.org](https://www.vote411.org/) site in 2006. Over the years, the site’s popularity has grown and expanded to all 50 states and the District of Columbia. In 2020, it provided accurate and unbiased information about voting to more than 6 million people across the country. For the first time, it also featured a version in Spanish.

Funded with tax-deductible contributions from individuals, [Vote411.org](https://www.vote411.org/) has also garnered the support of more than 80 organizations, including nonprofits like the American Library Association and the National Association of Broadcasters as well as companies like Target, Sweetgreen, Lyft, Nando’s, Warby Parker, and Seventh Generation.

It’s also won impressive accolades, too, including three Telly awards, honoring excellence in video and television, and a People’s Voice Webby award for the best government and civil innovation website. Over the years, the popularity of the site in Washington has grown, said Beatrice Crane, the state League’s [Vote411.org](https://www.vote411.org/) project manager. She estimated some 80,000 users in Washington logged on for voting information in 2020.

Washington is one of a few states where [Vote411.org](https://www.vote411.org/) serves the entirety of the state, Crane noted. She said the Secretary of State makes available information about all of the candidates and races throughout Washington to the public.

“The office provides the information automatically and we can download the names of all of the candidates onto one spreadsheet. We don’t have to go to each county individually to get information about who’s running.”

One of the highlights of Vote411.org is the answers to questions the League poses to candidates. “We send out questions to all of the candidates in the state and we put their responses up there so voters can compare what they say, side by side,” Crane explained.

Members of local Leagues submit topics about local issues that the state Vote411.org committee then uses to produce questions for the candidates that are unbiased and straightforward. “The value is we try to ask unbiased questions that will elicit meaningful responses,” Crane said.

“We don’t just offer the voters the candidates’ own statements. We try to ask questions to give voters real information.” Nor do League officials edit the candidates’ responses.

Crane said one minus is that not all candidates answer the League’s questions. So a candidate’s name and general information appear but without any details about the person’s positions on key issues.

In 2020, of the 644 candidates listed on Vote411.org, 56% replied to the League’s questions. Of the contested races, meaning where more than one candidate ran, 65% of the winners had submitted answers.

League officials suggest that voters who are disappointed when a candidate doesn’t provide answers should feel free to contact the candidate’s campaign and urge them to do so. That a candidate is willing to provide their perspective is a real plus, said Hirst.

Hirst noted one of her neighbors who regularly turns to Vote411.org swears she never votes for a candidate who doesn’t answer the League questions.

Hirst also said Vote411.org is becoming more important as local newspapers across the country close or cut back on coverage. She mentioned a relative in New England who was looking to Vote411.org as a resource for candidate information because his local newspaper had reduced its coverage.