

How to Host a Ballot Research Party

Introduction

Many of us know where to look to find information and make informed decisions about presidential, congressional, and gubernatorial elections. But what about those choices further down the ballot, including ballot measures? **As Catholics and people of faith and goodwill, we are not only called to participate in shaping the common good by voting in elections, but we also have a responsibility to be educated and conscientious voters.**



At the same time, some of our ballots have a LOT of choices on them! For example, in California, there may be 14 statewide ballot measures for voters to consider. Voters in Ohio may be choosing from three candidates just for secretary of state. Researching all those options could be daunting.

But what if you brought family, friends, and neighbors together to help each other learn about who and what is on your ballot? What if you played fun music and all your guests brought their favorite snacks to share? **What if you hosted a Ballot Research Party?**

This **Ballot Research Party Guide** is a non-partisan educational resource for NETWORK Advocates' 501(c)(3) election year education and voter engagement campaign, **See. Love. Vote.** We hope that it equips you and your guests to become fully informed voters, and to have some fun!

In these challenging times, people of faith and those guided by the common good know that it is only in community that we will build a future where everyone thrives. And to build this multiracial, multi-faith, fully inclusive future, we must be informed, engaged, and committed voters this election year and beyond.



Planning Your Ballot Research Party

So, you've decided to host a Ballot Research Party for your family, friends, and neighbors. Congratulations! Here are some tips for having a successful party:

Set the Tone

- Yes, you are bringing people together to engage in research and political conversations, but it's important that you make room for some fun and joy—it is a party, after all! Do you want to have a potluck or a dessert bar? Themed beverages? Recycled patriotic decorations? Participation prizes? A playlist to keep people energized? Be creative!
- You also want to create a space where people feel comfortable sharing their ideas and asking questions. NETWORK has created some **shared agreements**—which we've included later on in this document—that you should review with your guests at the beginning of the party. It might even help to have them posted.
- Your guests may not all know each other, and even if they do, they probably haven't done a group research project together. NETWORK has created some **ice breaker questions** to get the conversation going. See below!
- As the host of the party, you must sign [NETWORK Advocates' nonpartisan pledge for ballot research parties](#) and read it to your guests at the beginning of the gathering. Ask your guests for a show of hands to demonstrate their commitment to the nonpartisan pledge:

Nonpartisan Pledge: *NETWORK Advocates' See. Love. Vote. campaign is a nonpartisan, 501(c)(3) education and voter engagement campaign. We recognize that researching who and what is on your ballot requires you to name candidates and parties. When you are presenting your findings to others, please share the information in a factual, neutral manner and refrain from showing your personal support for or opposition to any candidate, party, initiative, ordinance, or elected or appointed official.*



Set the Space and Gather the Tools

- During the party, you will most likely have your guests talking in pairs or working together in small groups and then sharing out with the large group. Think about the best setup to foster conversations and collaboration.
- Make sure you have **extra pens and paper** available for people to take notes. Also, since your guests will most likely be researching online, have **the Wi-Fi password** ready and accessible! You may want to have it posted around the room. You may also want to have flip charts or large paper and markers to facilitate group sharing.
- Be sure to have copies of **NETWORK Advocates' [See. Love. Vote. Checklist](#)** available as a tool to help evaluate candidates and guide discussion. If you think your guests are interested in helping get voters to the polls, you can also share some resources from our [See. Love. Vote. webpage](#).

Equip Your Guests for Success

- In your invitation, make sure that everyone knows to bring a sample ballot. Ahead of your event, encourage guests to visit:
 - vote.org/ballot-information
 - usvotefoundation.org/sample-ballot-lookup,
 - or ballotpedia.org/Sample_Ballot_Lookup.
- Additionally, your local county board of elections will often have sample ballots on their website or will mail you a sample ballot.
- Party attendees will be doing research, so make sure they come prepared! Encourage folks to bring their laptops, smart phones, or tablets, and also nonpartisan voter guides from a trusted organization like [League of Women Voters](#) or candidate profiles from the local newspaper. or candidate profiles from the local newspaper.



Sample Party Agenda

Be sure to add times for breaks!

- **Opening (5–10 minutes):** Welcome everyone. Together, review the [Nonpartisan Pledge](#) and the **Ballot Research Party Shared Agreements**. Ask your guests if they have any other agreements they want to add. If your guests don't already know each other, give them an opportunity to introduce themselves. Along with their name and where they live, you may want them to add why they came to the party today. Depending on the size and makeup of your group, it may be helpful to provide name tags for folks to write their name/city/district on.
- **Ice-Breakers (10–15 minutes):** We've listed some **Ice Breaker Questions below** to help get people talking to each other. There are many ways to get conversations going! For example, you can keep it simple and have people get into pairs or groups of 3, or you can set up a "speed dating" situation, where people switch conversation partners (we suggest setting a timer for at least 3 minutes for each conversation). You know your guests and what will work best for them.

Ice Breaker Questions (pick 1–3!):

- What is giving you hope this election season?
 - What issues keep you up at night?
 - What is something you dream of for your community? (*Examples: A free bus system! Accessible sidewalks on every street! Concerts and dancing in the park every Saturday!*)
 - What is your most memorable experience voting, or volunteering to get out the vote?
 - What are you hoping to learn more about today?
- **Ballot Overview and Breaking into Research Groups (10 minutes):** Give everyone a few minutes to review their sample ballots. Identify what offices, candidates, and/or ballot measures the party wants to focus on and then break into research groups by office. For example, one group will research school board candidates, while another group researches the judges for the Circuit Court.
 - *Note: Make sure you have one group take on the ballot measures! Researching ballot measures is different than researching candidates. This group should make sure they can communicate what each ballot measure is proposing and its possible consequences.*



- **Small Group Research (30–45 minutes):** Have each group research their assigned candidates and/or ballot measures. Before they begin, each group needs to decide who is taking notes and who will be reporting the findings to all the guests.
- **Report Out (30–45 minutes):** Have each group share the results of their research.
 - **IMPORTANT: Stay objective.** *Your job is to share the facts of a candidate's proposed policy agenda and its potential impacts, and/or the content and potential impact of ballot measures. Please make sure that the report-outs are presented as neutrally as possible, and don't come across as endorsements, or un-endorsements, of candidates or measures.*
- **Closing/Celebration (10 minutes):** Wow, you and your guests have just done a lot of work — be sure to celebrate! You may also invite everyone to go around the room and share one word about how they are feeling (they can also pass). Encourage guests to **check out NETWORK Advocates' See. Love. Vote. webpage and resources at networkadvocates.org/vote**, to help get their friends and family to the polls this November!
- **Following Up:** After your event, collect all the notes provided by the small groups and email them to the attendees. You might also consider posting photos from your event on social media to inspire other folks—near and far—to engage this election year! NETWORK would also love to see photos and hear all about your event.

Ballot Research Party Shared Agreements

As much as you want your Ballot Research Party to be educational and fun, you also want to ensure that your guests feel comfortable talking to each other about politics and asking questions. Below are a list of shared agreements for your party. Some are based on NETWORK's Racial Justice Shared Agreements, as well as popular education models. When you review these with your guests, you may want to invite them to add their own for your time together.

- **Speak up/make space.** If you are someone who tends not to speak in group settings, challenge yourself to do so today! Conversely, if you are someone who speaks a lot, make space for everyone in the room to contribute to the conversation, and be mindful of those who haven't had a chance to speak and invite them to share their thoughts.
- **We are each experts on our own experience.** We can only speak to our own lived experiences. Be sure that we are only speaking for ourselves and not speaking for someone else or their intentions. At the same time, be mindful not to challenge or invalidate someone's lived experience.
- **It's okay to not know!** Unlike most activities, the less you know only means you will get more out of this experience. For many of your party mates, this might be their first time researching their ballot as thoroughly as you will today. Don't be afraid to ask questions or not know an office or candidate. We are all here to learn together!
- **Whether or not it has been named, the personal manifestations of power are present.** White supremacy and racism are embedded within every institution within the U.S. This means that every person is living within that social context, which bestows an amount of privilege or disadvantage on each person in the room depending on their identities. It's important to recognize your identity and the identity of those you are interacting with. It's also important to remember that aspects of people's identities that may lead them to experience oppression may not be visible or immediately apparent.
- **Assume good intentions but own the impact.** During the conversations, another guest might say something that bothers or offends you. Don't be afraid to respond in that moment, but also don't assume malicious intent. Ask questions that help you understand where the statement came from and see if you can use the moment as a learning experience. If you say something offensive, consider why/how that statement might have hurt others rather than immediately trying to defend yourself.



- **Challenge the idea, not the person.** It is inevitable to run into challenges regarding political stance or ideology. We all come from different places that have influenced our political opinions. Don't forget to listen with empathy and curiosity, and try to narrow your disagreements to the idea in question rather than the candidate. Remember we all are sacred with valuable different lived experiences. This applies to candidates too! While it is certainly challenging, this is not the time to endorse or trash a candidate. This is a time to educate ourselves so that we can make our own informed decisions.
- **Practice self-care.** While this is a party, it's also a lot of work! Be sure to take breaks, drink water, eat snacks, look away from your screen, etc. It can also be upsetting to learn about a candidate who doesn't share your values. If you're feeling stressed, take care of yourself!
- **Keep it nonpartisan.** Remember, this ballot research party is an opportunity gather with friends, family, and neighbors to celebrate actively engaging in our democratic life and practicing our civic responsibility to be informed voters. It is not a space to advance our own agendas or opinions, or that of any particular party or candidate. Keep the tone respectful, neutral, and focused on the purpose of the party: equipping one another with the resources we need to be informed voters in the 2026 midterm elections.