

On the Ballot This Year

A guide to the 2026 elections
and local issues on the ballot

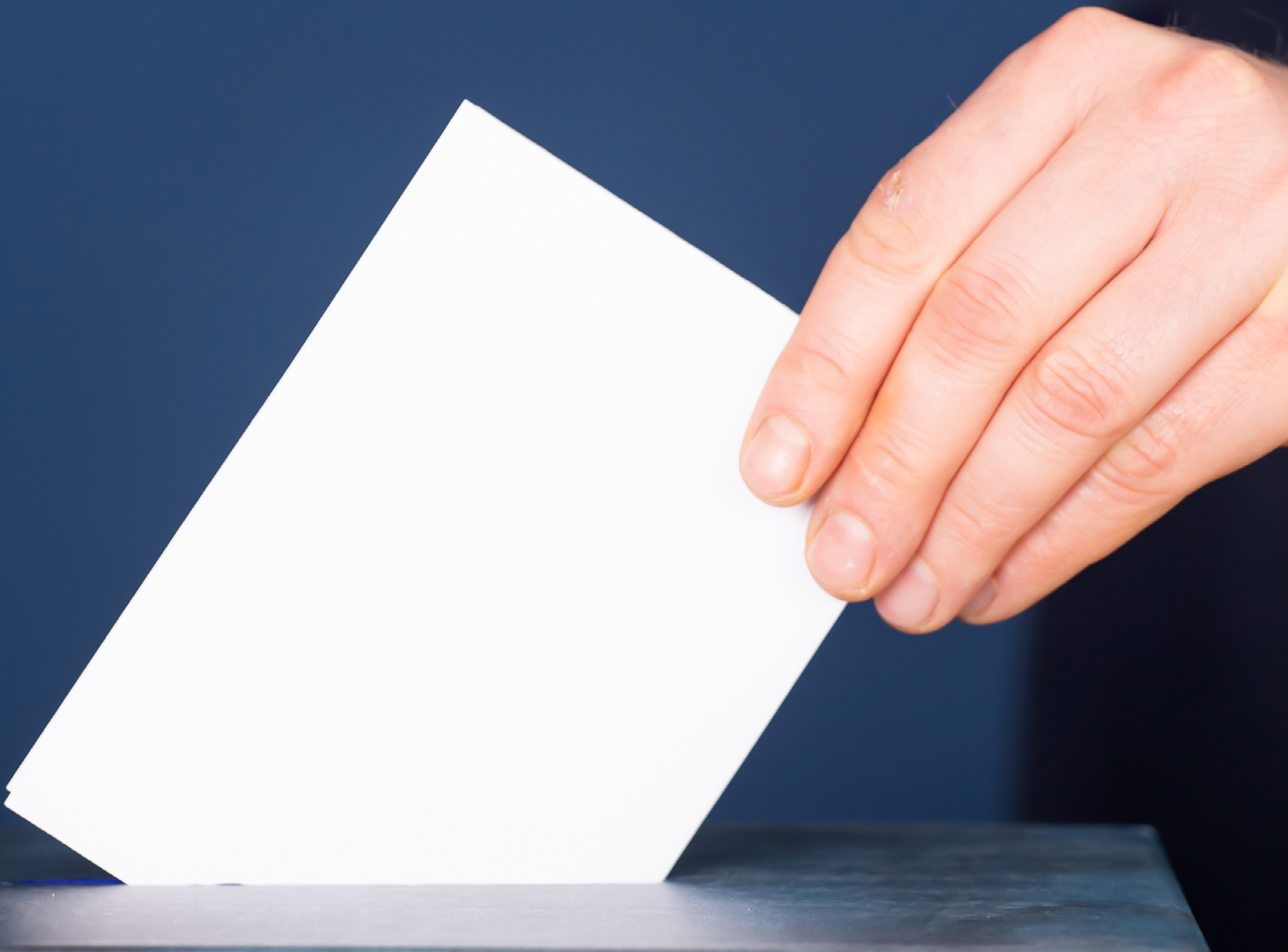


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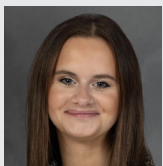


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Our Mission

To improve county Farm Bureau® influence in local government issues and advance county Farm Bureau leaders' awareness, capability, and involvement in local government through information and assistance in understanding and planning on local government issues.

Call to Action

We encourage you to share LINK with county Farm Bureau leadership and membership.

We invite you to share this publication with your local officials. This information may be a LINK to their success.

For information on past editions of the LINK publication and to access copies, please click [here](#).

Upcoming Dates & Events

February 5:

Early Voting Begins

February 17:

[Governmental Affairs Leadership Conference \(GALC\)](#)

February 25-26:

[Rural Community and Economic Development Conference](#)

March 17:

Primary Election Day

April 14:

Annual Town Meeting



Elections Provide Opportunity to Engage with Government

Illinois Farm Bureau (IFB) policy supports “the participation in the political process, both as individual citizens and members of the Illinois Agricultural Association (IAA).”

In many ways, the most fundamental way to participate in the political process is to have a say in which individuals serve in governmental office, and which questions of public policy (referenda) are adopted by governmental units by casting your vote in an election.

2026 is a mid-term election and provides two opportunities to do exactly this: By participating in the March 17 primary election and the Nov. 3 general election.

Voter participation in primary elections has historically been very low. Although 70.42% of registered voters participated in the November 2024 general election, only 19.07% of voters took part in the primary election that same year, according to the Illinois State Board of Elections.

While the primary election may be seen as having “lower stakes” than the general election, one should keep in mind that the candidates nominated at the primary ultimately go on to participate in the general.

If you’ve ever been disappointed with your candidates on the ballot in November, now is the time to do your homework and work to ensure your candidate of choice advances past the primary.

Additionally, questions of public policy, also known as referenda, are sometimes on the ballot during primary elections, and these can have a significant impact on residents’ day-to-day lives. Questions like:

- “Shall the office of County Recorder be eliminated and all duties be transferred to the office of the County Clerk?”
- “Shall a special tax for highway purposes be levied within the County?”
- “To pay for public safety costs, shall the County be authorized to impose an increase on its share of local sales tax by one half of a percent?”

This issue of LINK aims to help readers understand the primary election, its role in the election process, the local offices up for election, the importance of referenda and how readers can engage with local candidates. In doing so, we hope to achieve another of IFB’s policies, to support “equal access to government for all citizens regardless of political engagement.”

IMPORTANT POSTMARK CHANGES

What Vote by Mail Voters Need to Know

Mail Postmark Rules Have Changed

Previously:

Mail was postmarked the day you mailed it

Now:

Mail is postmarked the day it is processed which can result in at least a 1-2 day delay

Vote By Mail Ballots MUST be postmarked by Election Day to be counted
A late postmark will **NOT** be counted



If you are returning your ballot within a week of OR on Election Day:

- Go to the post office counter & request a manual postmark
- Use a secure drop box (if available)
- Deliver your ballot directly to your election authority’s office

DON'T RISK A LATE POSTMARK

Take one extra step to make sure YOUR VOTE COUNTS!

Check with your election authority for drop box locations and office hours

HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

Get Involved In The 2026 Election

BE A STUDENT ELECTION JUDGE!

Even if you can't vote yet, you can help run the election if you:

- ✓ Are a U.S. citizen
- ✓ Are a junior or senior in good standing (or in college/community college)
- ✓ Have at least a 3.0 GPA
- ✓ Get written approval from a parent/guardian & your principal
- ✓ Complete election judge training
- ✓ Meet standard election judge qualifications

✳ Only one student per political party per precinct allowed.



PRE-REGISTER TO VOTE AT 16!

Get your driver's license at the DMV?

You can pre-register to vote!

Your application will be saved and activated when you're eligible.

TURN 18 BY NOV 3, 2026?

You can register & vote in the primary election!



COUNTDOWN TO ELECTIONS

It's an election year!

With the start of the new year, we are already well into the calendar of dates tied to this year's midterm election – so called because it occurs two years into the U.S. President's term of office - when we'll be voting for many local officials along with a number of state and federal officers and legislators.

Among the first of those important dates is the primary election, which is held on the third Tuesday of March in even-numbered years. This year, that date is March 17.

In Illinois, the primary election is a critical step where voters cast their ballot to determine which candidates will advance to the general election on Nov. 3, 2026. Through this process, Democratic and Republican voters decide which of their party's candidates will move forward to the general election where they can be elected.

Please note that just because a specific office or individual is up for election in the primary does not mean that they will always have an opponent. In these instances, an unopposed candidate will advance to the general election regardless of the number of votes they receive.

Primary elections can take several different forms across the nation. Illinois' primary elections are partisan for many local offices, including county board seats, most countywide offices as well as federal and state legislative offices. In a partisan election, voters choose between candidates within a political party (e.g., Democratic or Republican) to vote on who will be the party's nominee in the general election. Voters will only vote on one ballot that lists the candidates for that party only. Candidates in the primary election are considered nominated rather than elected.

Illinois uses a partially open primary system. This means that voters do not register with a political party in advance but instead, choose a party's ballot when they vote in the primary. Not having a party label on your voter registration allows voters to choose a different party at the next primary election. The selection at this primary election does not determine a voter's choice in future elections.

As with every election, questions of public policy, known as referenda, can also be on the primary election ballot. If a voter does not declare a party and instead requests a nonpartisan ballot, they will receive a ballot that contains only nonpartisan items, such as the referenda.

Dates Governing Federal, State, And County General Primary

DATE	FILING/PUBLICATION
Monday Nov. 17, 2025	Last day notice of intention to file a petition to create a political subdivision, whose officers are to be elected rather than appointed, may be published in a newspaper within the proposed political subdivision, or if none, in a newspaper of general circulation within the proposed territory.
Monday Nov. 17, 2025	Last day to file petitions (must contain original sheets signed by voters and circulators) to create a political subdivision.
Monday Nov. 24, 2025	Last day candidates of established political parties may file original nomination papers (must contain original sheets signed by voters and circulators).
Monday Dec. 15, 2025	Last day for filing petitions (must include original petition sheets signed by voters and circulators) for the submission of questions of public policy.
Monday Dec. 22, 2025	Last day to file objections to petitions for the submission of questions of public policy (local). Objections to petitions for local referenda are filed with the same office that has the original petitions.
Monday Dec. 29, 2025	Last day for local governing boards to adopt a resolution or ordinance to allow binding public questions to appear on the ballot and the last day for County, Municipal, School, Township and Park Boards to place advisory referenda on the ballot by resolution.
Wednesday Jan. 14, 2026	Last day a candidate may file a Withdrawal of Candidacy in the office of the election authority.
Monday Mar. 9, 2026	Last day for the election authority to publish a notice of any question of public policy to be voted upon within the jurisdiction.

COUNTDOWN TO ELECTIONS

Registering to Vote

Illinois residents may register to vote online through the Illinois State Board of Elections through March 1, 2026, or by contacting their local election authority (typically their county clerk). After this date, residents can register to vote through March 16, but they are then registering under a "grace period," meaning any vote cast afterwards is not officially counted until election officials can verify that they are an eligible voter.

To vote in Illinois, state law stipulates:

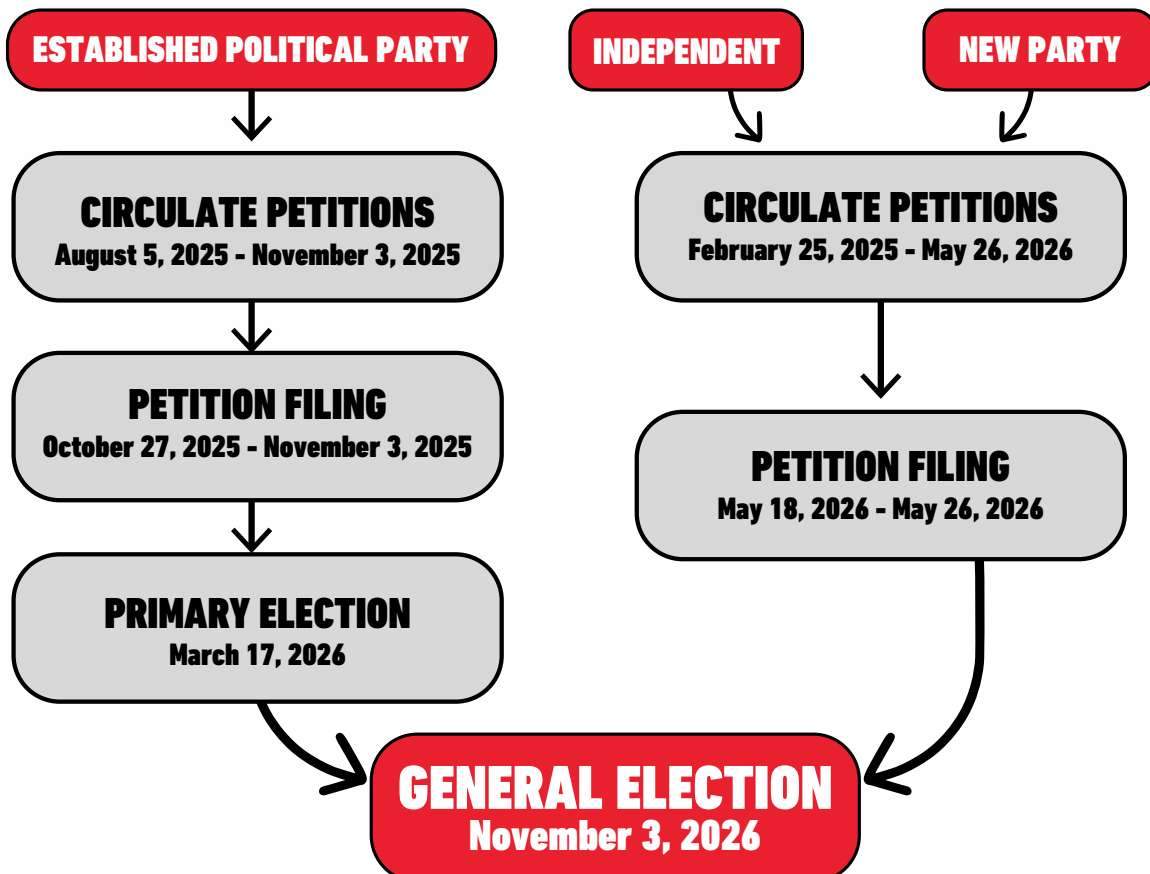
- You must be a United States citizen.
- You must be at least 17 years old on or before the date of the primary election and turn 18 on or before the date of the general or consolidated election (16-year-olds may preregister to vote).

- You must live in your election precinct at least 30 days prior to Election Day.
- You must not be serving a sentence of confinement in any penal institution as a result of a conviction.
- You may not claim the right to vote anywhere else.

The local government impact of this election cannot be overstated. Several local officials, including countywide officers and county board members/ commissioners will be selected, the outcome giving sway to how our local governments are managed for the next four years.

PATHWAYS TO THE BALLOT

Federal, State, and County Offices



Local Offices and Issues on the Ballot in March

As the March 17 primary election approaches, news coverage will likely focus on state and federal legislative races for the Illinois General Assembly and U.S. Congress. Sometimes lost in this coverage, but nonetheless important for residents' day-to-day lives, are the races for local offices and those candidates who will advance to the general election on Nov. 3, 2026.

Additionally, many localities may also have local referenda on the ballot with far-reaching implications for residents, with subjects that range from the structure of local government to local bonding authority, emergency services and local tax rates.

Please note that what follows is not an exhaustive list of officials who may be up for election in your specific jurisdiction. You should check with your local election authority or county clerk for more information about local offices up for election or to request a sample ballot.

County Offices to be Nominated in March

County Board Members / Commissioners:

Primary Duties: The county board (counties under township organization) / board of commissioners (counties not under township organization) is both the legislative and executive branch of county government. As a legislative body, it is charged with enacting ordinances and resolutions that can apply either to the county as a region, including the cities within it, or specifically to the unincorporated area of the county.

As an executive body, the board administers the activities of county departments and offices (except those headed by the other elected county officials). The county board adopts an annual budget for the county, establishes tax rates and authorizes bond issues, subject to voter approval. In a quasi-judicial role, the board also reviews zoning, planning and land use matters and considers appeals in granting or denying certain permits and licenses.

Term of Office: Two or four years (contact the county clerk's office for further information) for county board members / six years for county commissioners.*

**In Cook County only, commissioners serve four-year terms.*

Term Begins: Dec. 7, 2026

County Clerk

Primary Duties: The county clerk is the keeper of all county records. Duties of the office range from administering elections to conducting a great deal of the state's taxation duties. The county clerk has many responsibilities due to the complexity of the recording process, volume of work and the many different types of functions required to be performed by this office.

Term of Office: Four years
Term Begins: Dec. 1, 2026

County Treasurer

Primary Duties: The county treasurer serves as the county's banker, responsible for the safekeeping and prudent investing of public funds. As the lawful custodian of county funds, the treasurer has the responsibility to receive and distribute the revenue and public monies of the county.

Term of Office: Four years
Term Begins: Dec. 1, 2026

County Sheriff

Primary Duties: The sheriff is the primary law enforcement officer in the county. As the conservator of the peace, the sheriff strives to prevent crime and maintain safety and order of citizens in the county. Although the sheriff may enforce laws within the entire county, by professional courtesy, they do not do so within municipalities, which have their own law enforcement agencies. As an "arm" of the judiciary, the sheriff is responsible for the service of civil documents by order of the court, such as subpoenas, summonses and judgments.

Term of Office: Four years
Term Begins: Dec. 1, 2026

County Supervisor of Assessments (if elected)

Primary Duties: The Chief County Assessment Officer (CCAO), or supervisor of assessments, oversees the assessment process for the county. The CCAO is responsible for assessing the value of most real property within their jurisdiction for the purpose of real estate taxation. The assessment process plays an important role in local government. Equitable assessments ensure property owners pay their fair share of the costs of operating schools, providing police and fire protection, road construction and maintenance, and other basic public services.

Term of Office: Four years
Term Begins: Dec. 1, 2026*

**Dec. 7, 2026 in Cook County*

Other Local Offices to be Nominated in March

Sanitary District Commissioners/Trustees (Prairie DuPont Levee & Sanitary District Candidates file with SBE)

Primary Duties: Sanitary district commissioners have broad responsibilities for managing, maintaining and operating the sanitary district's sewerage systems, finances, property, and personnel, ensuring public health and compliance with applicable laws

Term of Office: Four years
Term Begins: Dec. 8, 2026

Regional Superintendent of Schools

Primary Duties: The Regional Superintendent of Schools is the chief administrative officer of a Regional Office of Education (ROE). Regional superintendents exercise supervision and control over all school districts within the region and act as the official advisor and assistant of the school officer and teachers in his/her region.

Term of Office: Four years
Term Begins: July 1, 2027

Local Offices and Issues on the Ballot in March continued . . .

State and Federal Offices to be Nominated in March

The following is a list of State and Federal candidates to be nominated in this primary. Those that are nominated will run for election in November:

- Governor/Lieutenant Governor
- Attorney General
- Secretary of State

- Comptroller
- Treasurer
- Representatives in Congress - All 17 Districts
- State Senators (for four-year terms):
Districts: 2, 3, 5, 6, 8, 9, 11, 12, 14, 15, 17, 18, 20, 21, 23, 24, 26, 27, 29, 30, 32, 33, 35, 36, 38, 39, 41, 42, 44, 45, 47, 48, 50, 51, 53, 54, 56, 57, 59

- Representatives in the General Assembly - All 118 Districts

By being knowledgeable about the roles and responsibilities of local officials, the candidates seeking local office and the impact of local referenda, voters are empowered to make informed decisions at the ballot box this March.

Key Takeaways for Voters:

In the primary election, you help your chosen party decide who will be on the November ballot. You can only vote in one party's primary.

In the general election, you choose the actual officeholders from among all the parties' nominees, plus independents and new parties.

ASPECT	GENERAL PRIMARY March 17, 2026	GENERAL ELECTION November 3, 2026
County & Local Offices	Nominate candidates for: • County Clerk, Treasurer, Sheriff, Assessor • County Commissioners/Board Members • Regional Superintendent of Schools • Sanitary District Trustees • Forest Preserve District Commissioners and President	Elect final winners for: • County Clerk, Treasurer, Sheriff, Assessor • County Commissioners/Board Members • Regional Superintendent of Schools • Sanitary District Trustees • Forest Preserve District Commissioners and President
Party Officials (Elected in Primary Only)	Precinct Committeepersons <i>(all counties except Cook)</i> • Township Committeepersons (<i>Cook County</i>) • State Central Committeepersons (<i>Democratic Party only; Republicans elect at county conventions</i>)	N/A (<i>Party officials are not on the November ballot</i>)
School Board (Special Case)	School Boards Under Article 33 (<i>City of Peoria only</i>) are elected at the primary election	Chicago Board of Education - Members & President are elected in the general election

Look for Referenda on the Ballot:

What's the Difference between Binding and Advisory?

In the upcoming March election, voters in some jurisdictions will see ballot items in addition to candidates seeking public office. These public policy questions, known as referenda, are measures placed before voters by a unit of government for approval or rejection. Referenda allow local governments to seek voter input on specific actions or policy changes.

There are two primary types of referenda in Illinois: binding and advisory. The key difference between them lies in the legal effect of the vote.

Binding referenda have the force of law. If approved by voters, they authorize and require a unit of government to take a specific action, such as levying a tax, issuing bonds or exercising a particular statutory power. Once passed, the government body must carry out the result as approved by the voters.

Advisory referenda, by contrast, are non-binding and do not create legal obligations. Instead, they serve as an expression of public opinion, offering guidance or insight to elected officials and policymakers. While the results may influence future decisions, government bodies are not legally required to act on them.

In Illinois, referenda may be placed on the ballot by a local unit of government through an ordinance or resolution, or they may be triggered by a voter petition when authorized by law. Petition requirements vary by statute but typically require signatures from 5–10% of registered voters or a percentage based on votes cast in the previous election. The rules governing referenda, including who may initiate them and how they appear on the ballot, are set forth in the Illinois Election Code and other state statutes.

Referenda address a wide range of issues. The most common involves increases in local government borrowing authority, tax levies or bond issuances, often to fund infrastructure projects, public services or capital improvements. For example, a referendum approved in McLean County during the 2025 consolidated election asked voters:

“Shall a retailers’ occupation tax and a service occupation tax (commonly referred to as a sales tax) be imposed in The County of McLean, Illinois, at a rate of 1% to be used exclusively for school facility purposes, school resource officers and mental health professionals?”

Other referenda focus on changes to local government structure. During the 2024 general election, voters in Champaign County rejected a referendum that would have eliminated the office of the county auditor effective Dec. 1, 2024.

Because referenda are far more common at the local level than statewide, it is important for voters to understand how they work and what their approval or rejection may mean.

If you have questions about a referendum appearing on your ballot, contact your county clerk or local election authority. Many county clerks publish sample ballots online in advance of the election, including the full text of any referenda. Local newspapers may also publish editorials or opinion pieces discussing the potential benefits or drawbacks of proposed measures.

As a voter, taking the time to review and understand these questions helps ensure informed decision-making at the ballot box.



COUNTDOWN TO ELECTIONS

Hosting A “Meet The Candidates” Event Can Benefit Voters, Local Candidates And Your Community

In a time when everyone gathers information from a varied mix of media platforms, amidst busy lives and hectic schedules, a primary election can easily sneak up on even the best planner and informed citizen.

As leaders in the community, county Farm Bureaus® (CFBs) and collaborative partners, such as business organizations and non-partisan community organizations, can work together to effectively expose members to candidates, candidates to citizens and important issues to their community. Many candidates in statewide races have larger campaign budgets. At the local level, this is not the case, and a CFB can allow residents to see their votes at work by providing a venue for candidates to meet the public to discuss prevalent issues.

In alignment with the purpose of the LINK (Local Information, News and Know-How) publication, the following points walk through the “know-how” you will want to consider when organizing your own local “meet the candidates” event:

1. Identify a venue in a neutral location, such as a school or community center, with ample seating, good lighting, a podium, a PA system, plenty of parking and handicap access.
2. Choose an early evening event start time so community members can attend shortly after work, not on a church night or standing meeting night for collaborative organizations.
3. Request a current candidate list from the County Clerk's office or other local election authority. Review the list to narrow down local candidates (such as county board members/ commissioners, clerk, treasurer, sheriff, etc.).
4. Gather other contact information not listed on the County Clerk's list (phone number and email address).

Divide names/offices among event committee members to contact candidates to extend an invitation to the event. Calling is effective and follow-up can often be by email.

5. Determine the format for the evening as the tone is important: create a positive atmosphere and encourage all candidates to share information about themselves and their experience(s) that prepared them for the office. Provide five minutes for each candidate to answer questions sent to them the week prior to the event. If desired, plan for refreshments and brief reception following the candidate introductions so voters can meet with the candidates one-on-one.
6. Identify an event emcee (or co-emcees) to welcome guests, introduce candidates and help set a positive tone for the evening.
7. Send candidates an email one week prior to the event that includes the biographical info you would like them to share along with questions to answer at the event. Sample County Board/Commissioner questions:
 - Introduce yourself – name, residence, family (if you wish), current job/office
 - What motivated you to run for county board/commissioner?
 - Do you have any experience with local government prior to this election? What background and skills do you have (education, career, leadership, other offices held) that would make you a good County Board Member/Commissioner?
 - Agriculture is an important part of county life. It supports jobs, provides tax revenue that supports programs and services, and has a major economic impact through sales and output. Decisions at the county

level can impact agriculture and the rural way of life. These include decisions on land use, transportation, infrastructure, property taxes and many others. What are some of your priorities if you were to be elected as a county board member/ commissioner?

- How do you see yourself working to keep residents living and staying in the county?
 - How can we work with you to help you achieve your goals or support you in your role as a county board member/commissioner? The CFB has a wealth of resources and information that we can share to help partner with you on local government issues, including local government finance, land use and other subjects relevant to your role once elected.
8. Arrange for candidate seating with a skirted table and name cards.
 9. Have a communications plan. Contact local media about the event (to promote in advance to readers/ listeners and for media coverage the night of the event). Utilize Facebook events to promote the event in advance and invite your members to attend. Extend invitations to other key organizations connected to economic development, service, high school civic/government/ history teachers, 4-H/FFA/Boy Scouts/Girl Scouts (students are the next generation of voters and candidates), etc.

By following these steps and coordinating efforts with other organizations, you can plan and execute an event that is well received by the community and candidates. Whether it's for the primary election, the general election or both, a “meet the candidates” event can grow local connections and begin the process of establishing strong working relationships with the candidates who are elected.

QUALIFICATIONS FOR LOCAL OFFICE

	County Board Member/ Commissioner	County Clerk	County Treasurer	County Sheriff	County Assessor	Regional Superintendent of Schools	Sanitary District Commissioners
Age	18 years (or will be 18 by the date of the upcoming general election)	18 years or older	18 years or older	18 years or older	18 years or older	Not Specified	Not Specified
Citizenship	U.S. Citizen	U.S. Citizen	U.S. Citizen	U.S. Citizen	U.S. Citizen	U.S. Citizen	U.S. Citizen
Residency/ Voter Registration	Residents of the county for at least one year prior to the election and a registered voter in the county or county board district <i>*In Cook County only, a candidate must be a resident of the county board district for at least two years prior to the election</i>	Registered voter within the county or county board district	Registered voter within the county or county board district	Resident of the county for one year	Registered voter within the county or county board district	Registered Voter	Resident of the sanitary district/ registered voter
Other				Not a convicted felon Has completed the Minimum Standards Basic Law Enforcement Officers Training Course as prescribed by the Law Enforcement Training Standards Board or a substantially similar training program	Have a least 2 yrs experience in the field of property sales, assessments, finance, or appraisals. Pass an examination conducted by the Illinois Department of Revenue Possess one of the following: 1. A currently active CIAO designation 2. A current active AAS, CAE or MAS designation 3. A current active MAI, SREA, SRPA or RM designation. <i>*St. Clair County Assessor has a separate list of qualifications.</i>	Master's Degree / Other specific education requirements listed in 105 ILCS 5/31-1	<i>(For North Shore Sanitary District only):</i> Shall not be directly or indirectly interested in any contract, work, or business of the district, or the sale of any article, the expense, price or consideration of which is paid by the district; nor in the purchase of any real estate or other property belonging to the district, or which shall be sold for taxes or assessments, or by virtue of legal process at the suit of the district.

General Election Information



2026 PRIMARY ELECTION CALENDAR

IMPORTANT DATES TO REMEMBER

FEBRUARY 5	Early voting begins, vote by mail ballots mailed
FEBRUARY 17	Last day for regular voter registration
FEBRUARY 18	Grace period registration and voting begins
MARCH 1	Last day for online voter registration
MARCH 12	Last day to mail vote by mail ballots for the general primary election
MARCH 16	Last day for early voting
MARCH 17	Primary Election Day
SEPTEMBER 24	Early voting begins, vote by mail ballots mailed
OCTOBER 6	Last day for regular voter registration
OCTOBER 7	Grace period registration and voting begins
OCTOBER 18	Last day for online voter registration
OCTOBER 29	Last day for vote by mail application through mail
NOVEMBER 2	Last day for early voting and in-person vote by mail applications
NOVEMBER 3	General Election Day



Scan the QR code to visit
our webpage for further
information.



Thank You, County Farm Bureaus!

To date, 52 county governments have become Allies in Agriculture by partnering with their county Farm Bureaus to adopt or re-adopt a Pro-Agriculture Resolution during the 2025 – 2026 cycle:

- | | |
|----------------|-----------------|
| 1. Adams | 27. Madison |
| 2. Boone | 28. Marion |
| 3. Brown | 29. Mason |
| 4. Bureau | 30. McDonough |
| 5. Calhoun | 31. McHenry |
| 6. Carroll | 32. McLean |
| 7. Cass | 33. Menard |
| 8. Christian | 34. Mercer |
| 9. Clinton | 35. Monroe |
| 10. Cook | 36. Montgomery |
| 11. DeKalb | 37. Morgan |
| 12. Edgar | 38. Peoria |
| 13. Edwards | 39. Randolph |
| 14. Fulton | 40. Richland |
| 15. Henderson | 41. Rock Island |
| 16. Henry | 42. Sangamon |
| 17. Jefferson | 43. Shelby |
| 18. Jo Daviess | 44. Stark |
| 19. Kane | 45. Stephenson |
| 20. Kankakee | 46. Wabash |
| 21. Knox | 47. Warren |
| 22. Lake | 48. Washington |
| 23. Lawrence | 49. Whiteside |
| 24. Lee | 50. Will |
| 25. Livingston | 51. Winnebago |
| 26. Macoupin | 52. Woodford |



For more information on Allies in Agriculture please visit: www.ilfb.org/ifb-in-action/allies-in-agriculture