

Candidates: Get to Know the People and the Issues

Think about which issues are important to you

This is an important first step. Take some time to reflect on your life as well as the lives of those close to you (children, family, friends, neighbors, etc.) to determine the issue(s) you may want to research and/or advocate for. Are there laws or policies that impact you often? For example, environmental issues may be important to you if you have outdoor hobbies. If you don't have access to a car, public transportation may be a key topic. If you or someone you know takes medication every day, drug pricing and quality healthcare might be priorities for you.

Get to know the candidates and issues on the ballot

Do you know who's on your ballot and if there will be questions to vote on? Your local news outlets may report this information for you. You can also find it on your town's sample ballot, which is posted online one to two weeks before each election at [MyVote.CT.gov/sampleballots](https://www.MyVote.CT.gov/sampleballots).

Once you know who the candidates are, research them further and discover their views on their campaign websites. But don't stop there! You can also hear them speak at events and meet with them one-on-one to learn more.

Attend candidate events (debates, forums etc.)

Candidates may hold their own events or participate in events that other community groups are hosting. This is a great opportunity to hear the candidates speak and to learn their opinions on various topics. Often, the audience will be allowed to ask questions. Many events are either streamed live on social media or recorded and posted afterward so you can view them even if you can't attend in person.

Volunteer with a campaign

Helping a candidate you like by volunteering with their campaign can be a rewarding experience. This might entail making phone calls to explain the candidate's views, setting up events, writing letters or emails, or other administrative tasks. Contact the candidate's campaign or check their website for a volunteer sign-up button or link to find volunteer opportunities. Be sure to tell the campaign if you have a special skill like fluency in a language other than English, graphic design, or video editing.

Donate to a campaign

If you believe in a candidate and want to help their campaign, donating money is a great option. Campaigns are expensive, and many candidates rely on donations to be able to print signs, mail postcards, send texts, hold events, etc. Campaign websites typically have a "donate" button to contribute online or mailing instructions for sending a check. Specific information may be required in accordance with campaign finance rules. Be sure to follow all instructions carefully to ensure that your donation will be accepted.

Try to meet candidates before the election for a one-on-one talk

Listening to speeches and reading opinions might not be enough for you to fully know a candidate and where they stand on the issues you care about. Don't hesitate to contact a candidate and ask to have a conversation. Meeting one-on-one virtually, on the telephone, or face-to-face is the best way to ask all your questions and get a sense of who the candidate is as a person.



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Elected Officials: Stay in Touch

Learn the roles and responsibilities of levels of government and different positions

How will you know who to contact regarding the issues you care about if you don't know who works on what? Learning about the difference between local, state, and federal government and the various government positions is an important first step to interacting with government and advocating for the issues that are important to you.

Identify who your elected officials are

Do you know who currently represents you? Take some time to note your elected officials at all levels – local, state, and federal. Once you identify the individuals, read about their experience, the committees they serve on (which is where they will have the most influence), and their opinions on issues. Go to the “Representation” tab at CGA.CT.gov to find your state and federal elected officials. Visit your town's website for your local elected leaders.

After the election, meet one-on-one with officials

Whether the candidate you supported won or their opponent won, it's important to talk to your elected officials throughout their term in office. A one-on-one meeting to discuss the topics you care about, understand their views, and express yours is a great way to start. Establishing a more personal relationship with the official will make it easier for you to follow up with them later.

Attend elected officials' events (town halls etc.)

Elected officials often hold local events to talk about certain issues. This may be a panel discussion where several officials discuss topics. Or, it might just be one official hosting a “town hall” style event where the public can ask questions about various issues. This is a great way to get up-to-date information on issues and to have direct access to the official for any questions you may have.

Contact elected officials about things you like and don't like regarding upcoming votes

People often contact elected officials when they're concerned, disappointed, or frustrated (even angry) about a bill being discussed. This is important. But it's equally important to contact officials when you support a bill and want them to vote “yes” on it! Be vocal about whether you are “for” or “against” a certain bill or resolution, so officials understand the opinions of all constituents.

Share expert information you have on an issue

Do you live on a street where new construction is being considered? You probably have insight into the area, such as traffic patterns and drainage, that could be helpful for the planning & zoning board to know. If you bring your children to local playgrounds often, you have insight into whether they are well-maintained, clean, and safe for kids. If you take a bus to work every day, you have personal experience with the reliability and quality of public transportation. This type of inside information is invaluable to elected officials who probably don't have personal experience with all issues. Don't be shy – your opinion is valuable!

Follow up throughout their term

Don't make it one and done. Build a relationship. Track their progress on an issue by watching or reading what is said in committee meetings or public hearings. Provide additional information if you think they would benefit from your experience. And remember to always be respectful.



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