How to Use and Download Finance Reports

All candidates and PACs must file finance reports with the Board of Elections or Federal Election Commission. These reports publicly list all campaign contributions and expenditures. Campaign finance reports filed by candidates are a very useful resource for other candidates running for office:

- These files show how much the candidate has raised and spent for that quarter and total in their campaign.
- These reports list the candidate's cash on hand, which is their future spending power.
- These files list the candidate's donors, donor's addresses, and how much that donor contributed in that quarter.
- These files list the candidate's spending including where the money was spent and how much.
- In general, campaign finance reports are used by outside observers (other candidates, media, political organizations) to evaluate the viability of a campaign. The more money a campaign has the more voters it can reach.
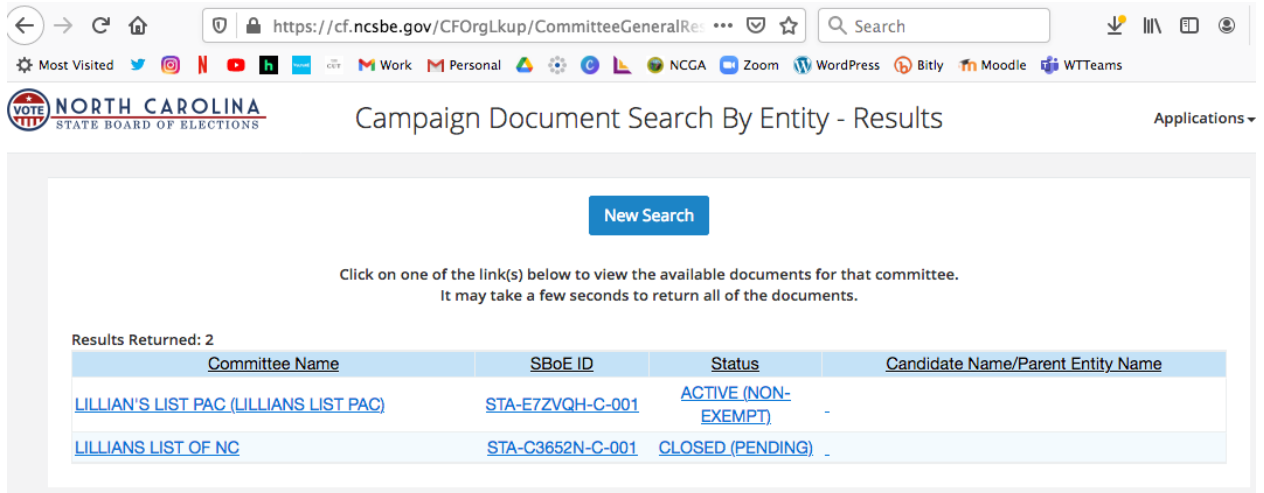
Using campaign finance reports to fundraise

- All candidates reach a point in their campaigns where they need to go beyond their personal circle for donations and downloading campaign finance reports from other candidates is how they access new donors. There are two groups of donors to keep in mind when you look at these reports. Not every donor on the report falls into one of these categories.
  - Personal circle donors - just like you have donors who are donating to your campaign from your personal circle so does every other candidate. Personal circle donors are unlikely to donate to another candidate.
  - Common Political Donors - there are politically engaged people who regularly give to candidates each election cycle. Their names are often on multiple reports or other candidate's fundraiser sponsor lists. These are typically people in a wealthier income bracket who donate to candidates who have the best chance of winning.
    - These donors are being asked for donations from almost every candidate running that cycle and "donor fatigue" sets in early. The earlier in the campaign cycle you reach this pool the more likely you will receive a donation.
    - It's not a rule, but it's often easiest to bring new donors in by inviting them to an event.
    - These donors can sometimes fall into the "power circle" of donors and they typically want to know how it is you will win.

- It is worth it to do background research on these group of donors to learn if they are political engaged for ideological, ax-to-grind, or some other reason.
- Donor research - the reports you'll download contain three helpful pieces of information 1) donor name 2) donation amount 3) donor's address. These reports *do not* contain the donors' phone number or email address. **You will need to create a donor research system to find (ideally) the phone number but also the email address for these donors.**
  - Budget A LOT of time for donor research. Ideally, you will start donor research as soon as you start your campaign and before you use up your personal circle so you can get started with a new donor pool as soon as you need to. This is why it is so important to expand your network and find contact information before you run for office.
  - This is typically a project for an intern or finance assistant or someone with a more data-minded brain who has the patience to google all of these people.
  - You will never get perfect donor research. You will not find contact information for everyone. This process is more about quantity that quality. Trying multiple phone numbers for one person until you get one that works is common.
  - Keep good records of wrong numbers so you don't try them twice.
  - You will mostly find work phone numbers. It is typically alright to call people at work. Teachers, healthcare professionals, and people with assistants are not good to contact via their work phone numbers.
  - We typically advise that if you can't find a donor's contact information in five minutes to move onto the next donor.
  - As with everything else, donor research should be highly organized in a spreadsheet.
    - Download the "Detailed Receipts" section of the report into a CSV or Excel and use this to do your research.

How to download and read finance reports
- These directions are for the North Carolina Board of Elections. If you're looking for federal lists you will use the Federal Election Committee website or OpenSecrets.

1. Google "North Carolina board of elections" or go to ncsbe.gov.
2. Click on the "Campaign Finance" tab.
3. Scroll down and click on "Search Campaign Funding and Spending Reports"
4. Click on "Campaign Finance Report Search - By Committee/Entity" (This is the main page you'll use for report searches so you may want to bookmark this page. You should know how to find it so we walked you through the steps.
5. Search for the candidate or PAC's name in the search bar. For the purposes of this exercise we're using the Lillian's List PAC committee for an example. Unless their name is very common, you can just enter the candidate's surname. We typed in "Lillians List." You'll be taken to a page like this. Closed reports still have useful information, but Active

reports are more recent.

6. Click on the link that says "Active (Non-Exempt)" and it will take you to a list of all of the reports filed by this committee. Typically you will start your research with the most recent reports. If you are looking for expenditure information you want to go back to the time period you are most interested in.

LILLIAN'S LIST PAC [STA-E7ZVQH-C-001]
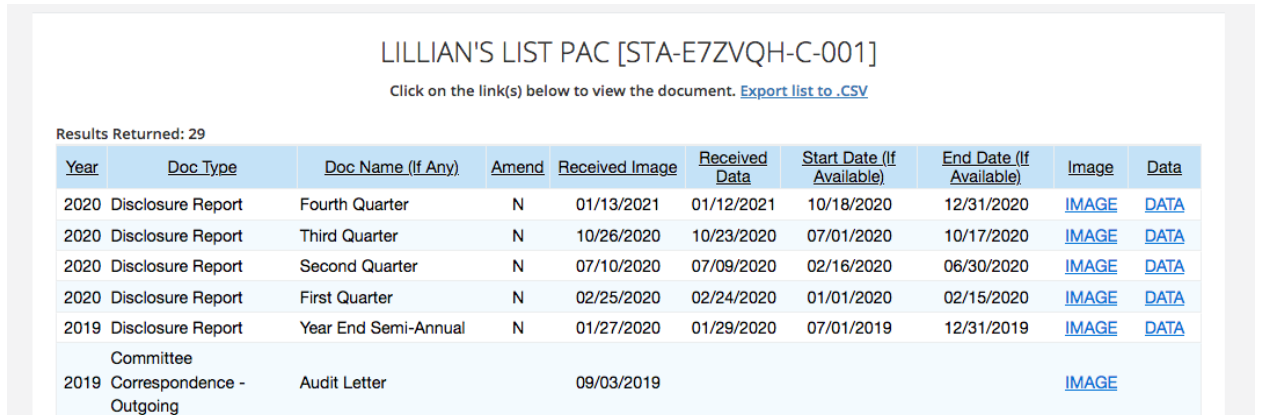
Click on the link(s) below to view the document. Export list to .CSV

Results Returned: 29

Year	Doc Type	Doc Name (If Any)	Amend	Received Image	Received Data	Start Date (If Available)	End Date (If Available)	Image	Data
2020	Disclosure Report	Fourth Quarter	N	01/13/2021	01/12/2021	10/18/2020	12/31/2020	IMAGE	DATA
2020	Disclosure Report	Third Quarter	N	10/26/2020	10/23/2020	07/01/2020	10/17/2020	IMAGE	DATA
2020	Disclosure Report	Second Quarter	N	07/10/2020	07/09/2020	02/16/2020	06/30/2020	IMAGE	DATA
2020	Disclosure Report	First Quarter	N	02/25/2020	02/24/2020	01/01/2020	02/15/2020	IMAGE	DATA
2019	Disclosure Report	Year End Semi-Annual	N	01/27/2020	01/29/2020	07/01/2019	12/31/2019	IMAGE	DATA
2019	Committee Correspondence - Outgoing	Audit Letter		09/03/2019				IMAGE	

7. Click on the "DATA" link in the first line of the list. This takes you to the individual reports that were filed by that campaign that quarter. The three lines you'll need most here are "Detailed Summary" which is an overview of the report, "Detailed Receipts" which lists every individual donation, and "Details Expenditures" which lists every outgoing payment. Detailed Receipts you'll use for donor research and Detailed Expenditures you'll use to understand the candidate's spending.
8. If you click on Detailed Summary you'll see a lot of information and not all of it is super relevant. Below are some tips on how to use this page.
   a. Total this Period vs Total this election columns - these just break down the quarter filing period vs the accrued amounts for the whole election cycle.
   b. Cash On Hand at beginning or at end of reporting period - This is very important. This figure shows how much money the candidate has in their bank account at the time of filing. This is their spending power.

c. Loan Proceeds - candidates are allowed to loan money to their campaigns and pay themselves back out of the money they raise for the campaigns. This is where you'll see if they have loaned themselves money.
d. Total Receipts - The amount raised by the campaign in total.
e. Political Party Committees - donations received from a major political party
f. Other Political Committees (PACs) - where you'd see the total PAC donations
    i. The itemized list of donations from political committees will be in the Detailed Receipts section