

How to Distribute CEEP's Non-partisan Candidate Guides And Why They Matter



When students don't vote, it's often because they feel they don't know where the candidates stand, and because they mistrust politics in general. When CEEP founder Paul Loeb was speaking at Minnesota's Winona State, he asked students in a classroom where half hadn't voted point blank why they hadn't participated. "I don't know enough," one woman said. "All the ads, all the lies, you can't believe what the candidates say, and I don't want to vote for the wrong person." "If I only had a list where I could see what they actually stood for..."

"Well actually," Loeb said, "we're creating lists exactly like that." He described the [nonpartisan candidate guides](#) that our national [Campus Election Engagement Project](#) (CEEP) creates in response to these kinds of hesitations, to help students sort through contending candidate claims, and to help get past the reflex response that "they're all the same." The student and her peers said having lists like these would make all the difference in giving them the confidence to turn out at the polls.

Two days later, Loeb spoke at Viterbo, a Catholic university in La Crosse Wisconsin. Again he asked why students do and don't vote. "Students don't vote," said one, "because it takes a lot of effort to find out what the candidates stand for." Another then said, "It really helped last year when there was a printed list in everyone's mailbox and you could go down the list and see where the candidates stood on the issues." The other students enthusiastically agreed, and 90% said they had voted.

The professor coordinating Loeb's visit said they were CEEP's nonpartisan guides to the Presidential and Wisconsin Senate races. After schools asked for a concise way to help students reflect on different candidates, we began creating them from candidate statements and stands, cross-checked with major media coverage. The Viterbo administrators liked our guides so much, they printed several thousand copies and distributed them to every student mailbox on campus.

Our guides have continued to get similarly terrific responses. When we survey schools after each electoral cycle, they give the guides an average rating of nearly 9 points on a 10-point scale. Our team that produces them is led by a 19-year senior editor and manager at Encyclopedia Britannica, and a former Associate Director of the National Service-Learning Clearinghouse. We find them a strong and useful tool to help students and other citizens past the reflex response of "they're all the same. They're all just lying and spinning."

Here are ways to distribute our guides, drawn from other schools.

The more parallel ways you distribute them, the more they'll become a key part of student decisions whether to vote and who to vote for:

- Distribute them through all-campus email—the most efficient way to reach everyone.
- Distribute them through social media outlets and text blasts. If possible, let us know how many students viewed them.
- Ask students to forward them to friends.
- Encourage your student newspaper to use them as a starting point for their election coverage, printing them as inserts or adapting them for longer stories. See our guide [for how student newspapers can help engage their campuses](#). The earlier you get your paper the guides (and create a more general working relationship), the more likely they'll be able to use them.
- Distribute printed copies of the guides in students' physical mailboxes, as Viterbo did. Have student volunteers hand them out as part of your nonpartisan voter engagement effort. Make them a starting point for conversation and reflection.
- Post them prominently on your school's election-related website, and then link to them.
- Use them to help spark discussions in classrooms and residence halls. The goal is not to get agreement. It's to get students weighing in on how their own values relate to candidate stands.
- Think big: Blow the guides up in large posters. Display in high-traffic areas of the student union, classroom buildings, or residence halls. It's an inexpensive way to get major visibility.
- Distribute them off-campus, like by posting printed versions in places like cafes and bars where students congregate.
- [Use our resource on creating your own nonpartisan guides](#) to do so for down-ballot races, like Secretary of State, Attorney General, Congressional and local legislative races, and local and statewide initiatives. Have students draw up these guides under the supervision of political science, communications, or honors faculty. Distribute them in the campus, community, and online as you would the CEEP guides.
- Use these same approaches to distribute guides from other nonpartisan groups, like your local League of Women Voters. Encourage students to visit some of the key websites we draw on, like [Votesmart.org](#), [Vote411.org](#), [FactCheck.org](#), and [Politifact.com](#).
- Add your own creative ideas, and let CEEP know so we can pass them on.

Here's a sample meme that you can distribute on social media to link to the guides. You can [download or copy it from our website](#) and then link the image either to our [main guides page](#), or to any specific guide, like for a Senator or gubernatorial race in your state.

