

The background is a blurred, low-angle shot of many American flags being held up by a crowd of people. The flags are in various positions, some held high, creating a sense of movement and celebration. The overall color palette is muted, with a blue tint.

BallotParty Host Toolkit

Prepare to Party. Party to Prepare.
2020 Edition

Introduction

It's an election year and everyone is talking about the top of the ticket. The bottom of the ballot? Not so much... The trouble is that while many consider voting a critical aspect of a functioning democracy, the act of voting can be intimidating!

At BallotReady, our mission is to equip everyday voters with resources to get informed about their ballot and cast their vote before election day, whether in person or by mail. We're very proud of our free voter guide and encourage anyone who is able to host a BallotParty to share our resources with friends, family, or colleagues.

By hosting a BallotParty, an inclusive get together or group call to share our various resources, you can help us achieve our mission of making democracy work the way it should - with an informed and engaged electorate.

So thanks for downloading this guide to hosting your very own BallotParty! Inside this toolkit, you will find everything you need to help you prepare for and host a successful BallotParty. We've included information to help you through each step in the process:

- Before: Planning Your Party
 - Inviting Guests
 - Creating an Itinerary
- During: Hosting Your Party
 - Guidelines for Events and Discussion
 - A sample Host Script
- After: Following Up on Your Party
 - A Sample Thank You
 - Actions Your Guests Can Take

For 2020, we've redesigned this toolkit with consideration of the fact that most parties will take place remotely through videoconferencing, but there are some resources included for those who plan to safely host an in-person event as well.

Our hope is that you and your guests will not only leave your BallotParty feeling prepared to vote all the way down the ballot on Election Day, but that you will also have fun in the process. With that in mind, let's get ready to party!

With Appreciation,
BallotReady

Planning Your Party

So you've decided to host a BallotParty! That's exciting. We're glad you are ready to partake in some civically-minded fun! So, your first step is to make sure you are well-prepared. We recommend taking the following steps to ensure your party is ready to go:

1. **Start inviting your guests!** Whether your party is public or private, start inviting guests early and often. We make it easy by providing a ready-to-use email blast, social media post, and graphics you can send out (see next pages). We also recommend utilizing social media by creating a Facebook event and promoting your party on Instagram and Twitter, especially if it's a public event.

If you are struggling to invite guests, try crafting a personal message that conveys why voting informed is important to you. Write about the role that local elected officials play in your community, or talk about a candidate that you are excited to vote for after learning more about them. Above all, make sure they know the conversation will be fun, civil, and productive!

2. **Familiarize yourself BallotReady resources.** At BallotReady.org, explore the **Candidate Selection Tool** and **Make a Plan to Vote Tool**. If you think it would be useful, also check our newly launch **Vote By Mail Tool** at VoteMail.org. Getting to know our resources will allow you to assist your guests and make sure everyone makes the most of their experience.
3. **Create or Choose an Itinerary.** The format you choose for your event will impact the experience your guests have while researching and discussing their ballots, and it will also impact the kind of preparation you do in order to host the event. When thinking about the itinerary, consider who your guests are and the comfort level you expect they have with their ballot. For virtual meetings, plan to end promptly at the 1 hour or 1.5 hour mark as attention tends to decrease after that point.

Consider whether you want guiding questions or open conversation. Do you want to facilitate one large discussions or breakout into smaller groups? Be prepared to facilitate, but don't be afraid to ask someone else to take on that role for part of your discussion. We've included two sample itineraries and a [set of host slides](#) that feature different discussion styles. Use any combination of these or feel free to create your own!

Party Pro-Tip: Consider a theme for your party. Whether you are hosting through video-conference or in person, as an individual or as an organization, giving your guests a theme to plan around will help get them excited and invested. Some hosts choose to go formal (like a cocktail party) and some choose do keep it casual. Be creative!

Recruiting Guests: Sending Invites and Collecting RSVP's

1. **Make an Invite List.** There is no BallotParty without guests, so as early as possibly begin thinking about who you will invite. Set a goal for how many people you'd like to attend and think about who in your network you want to engage. BallotParties are most successful when conducted with individuals who already know each other, but it might be nice for guests to make new connections as well.
2. **Plan to Collect RSVPs.** As you begin, make sure you have a means of collecting and recording RSVP's. That might be a reply to a text you record manually on paper, but you might also consider using a platform like Facebook, Eventbrite, or Evite that will collect RSVP's for you. As a general rule, you should expect about 50% of the guests who RSVP to attend on the day of your party. Make sure to send reminders to your RSVPs as well!
3. **Make it Personal.** Realistically, the more personal your message to a potential attendee, the more likely they are to respond and RSVP yes!
4. **Be Ready to hear No.** Some of the guests you invite won't be able to make it or might not be interested. No worries. Still, send along the BallotReady resources so they can prepare to vote informed on their own!

Recruiting Guests: Sample Email Blast

Copy and paste the following email message to send out to guests, or customize it to make it your own:

Private Ballot Parties (for hosts inviting friends, families, and neighbors):

While preparing to vote this November, I realized how many candidates will be on my ballot that I don't know enough about. I want to make sure I'm voting informed, and I know many of you do too, so I've decided to throw a virtual BallotParty! This event will allow us to look over our ballots and get prepared to vote together using a nonpartisan voter guide called [BallotReady](#) to look at our ballots! Please let me know if you are able to join!

Public Ballot Parties (for hosts inviting the community-at-large):

Voting is important. Knowing who you're voting for is just as important, so we're throwing a BallotParty! These events give the community a chance to research our ballots, engage in some civic discussion, and get informed to vote in a fun setting. We'll use a nonpartisan voter guide called [BallotReady](#) to look at our ballots; all you need to bring is to connect using a smartphone or internet-ready device! Please let me know if you are able to join!

Using Social Media to Promote Your Party

Whether you're hosting a public or private event, consider using social media to increase RSVPs and bring attention to your party. Creating a Facebook event, for example, is a great way to drive interest in your party since guests can see who else is attending.

Plan to post during and after your BallotParty as well. We just ask that you and your guests keep the content positive and family friendly 😊.

Feel free to use some of the language included below for your pre-event posts:

Facebook: *I'm hosting a BallotParty this October, and you're invited! BallotReady is launching a BallotParty initiative this fall to help voters prepare to vote informed all the way down ballot and have some fun doing it. I hope you'll join me as we party and prepare to vote this November!*

Twitter: *I'm throwing a #BallotParty to make preparing to vote a lot more fun and a lot less intimidating. We'll use nonpartisan voter guides by @BallotReady to preview our ballots and get ready to vote informed in November. See you there! #partytoprepare*

Instagram: *It's party time! The General Election is almost here, so I'm throwing a #BallotParty to help us vote informed with @BallotReady! We'll use nonpartisan voter guides to preview our ballots and get ready to vote in November. See you there! #partytoprepare*

Use our [Custom Graphics](#) to Spruce up Your Posts!

Use these Hashtags along with your BallotParty Posts!

We might even feature your party on our social media channels!

#BallotParty #BallotParty2020 #PrepareToParty
#PartyToPrepare #VoteInformed #Vote2020
#IStudiedForThis #Election2020

Party Pro-Tip: Given the discussion focus of the event, avoid recording video since this might make guests uncomfortable and prevent genuine engagement. Do take pictures for Social Media! Just make sure to get consent from your guests.

During Your Party

Kicking Off Your BallotParty

As a BallotParty host, it will be your role to set a tone for the evening. We all want your event to both a fun, festive party and also a setting where guests feel comfortable having a political discussion. So many Americans are wary to engage in these types of conversations in today's political climate, but you can help to make your guests feel comfortable by starting the party off on the right foot.

As you think about kicking off your party, consider the following:

- Who are your guests? Will they all have the same ballot or different ones? Are they coming from similar or different political backgrounds and knowledge bases?
- What is the tone you want to set for you event? Is it more celebratory, educational, or something in between?
- How will people engage in conversation? If in person, will they be sitting in small groups, one big groups, pairs, or just mingling throughout the event? If online, will you have the ability to create breakout rooms?
- How will you explain and show BallotReady resources to your guests? Will you do a live demonstration? If online, will you share your screen?
- If you are an organization/business, is there any additional content you want to provide that aligns to your mission?
- If you are an individual, is there a particular issue, election, or question you'd like to start off the conversation?
 - Will you use the [Pre-created slides](#)?
 - Will you print and distribute the Ballot Party on-pager and FAQ on Toolkit pages 12 and 13?

BallotParty Guidelines

Many of your participants may also be new to getting to know all of the candidates up and down the ballot. In this learning process, we encourage you to step outside of your comfort zone, ask questions and learn as much as you can. These guidelines can help set the tone for discussion and ensure you have norms in place to help you moderate:

- 1) **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 be today. Don't be afraid to ask questions, not know an office or candidate, we are all here to learn together!
- 2) **Challenge the idea, not the person.** Politics are hard, right? Understand that it is inevitable to run into some challenges in regards to political stance or ideology. We are all coming from different places that have influenced our political opinions. For the sake of respect and kindness, let's narrow our disagreements to the idea in question rather than the person.
- 3) **Speak your Experience, not your Truth.** To help each other understand differing points of view, it is best to speak from your own experience. This prevents us from overgeneralizing and restating.
- 4) **Assume good intentions, but own the impact.** During the conversations, another partygoer 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 teachable one. If you say something offensive, consider why/how that statement might have hurt others rather than immediately trying to defend yourself.
- 5) **Respect each participant's right to contribute.** Try and monitor how much each partygoer is contributing to the conversation. Make sure your voice isn't the only one heard. Invite others into the conversation, and make sure to be present when listening to others.
- 6) **Video Conference Courteously (Online Only).** When on video conference software, it is courteous to mute when others are speaking and unmute when you are ready to speak. Additionally, unless you are not equipped to do so, plan to keep your camera on for the duration of the meeting.

Itinerary A: Facilitated Whole Group Discussion

Summary: *At a BallotParty with a facilitated whole group discussion, guests will be led through a discussion about their ballots by a single facilitator. This event format is great for educational settings and groups that will have fairly similar ballots. Facilitated discussion will allow hosts to ensure guests cover a variety of topics or elections on their ballots and make the most of their time together. Facilitators should prepare in advance.*

Before your BallotParty:

- Consider how you want to lead your guests through their voter guides. Look through your own ballot in advance and decide what you intend to focus on. The more you prepare, the better this conversation will go. Be prepared to enforce discussion guidelines and answer questions that come up. To do this, we recommend each facilitator do the following:
 - Spend time before the event using **BallotReady.org** so you are familiar.
 - Determine whether you will lead guests through the entire ballot or choose key federal, state, or local races on which to focus.
 - Think through what you will say to guests at the beginning of the event to set clear expectations for engagement and discussion.

During your BallotParty:

- **Opening** (5 minutes): Set a tone for open dialogue by reviewing our BallotParty guidelines for conversation with your guests on page 7.
- **Ice Breaker** (8-10 minutes): If your guests don't already know each other, give them an opportunity to introduce themselves. Consider using an icebreaker question to get discussion going right away (Example: Who is an elected official that you admire?).
- **BallotReady Overview** (10 minutes): Invite guests to access their voter guide by entering their address on BallotReady.org. Give guests a few minutes to orient themselves then present a starting point for discussion. See page 11 for examples.
- **Ballot Discussion** (20+ minutes): Begin whole group discussion. Allow your guests to lead the conversation but be present and monitor adherence to the discussion guidelines. Keep the conversation productive, welcoming, and focused on gathering voter information, rather than starting ideological debates. Monitor how much all guests are contributing to the discussion, including yourself. Try to invite all guests to contribute throughout.
- **Check In** (As Needed): At some point, you may want to also direct your guests to [VoteMail.org](https://www.vote-mail.org) to see directions for how they can request a mail-in ballot in their locality.
- **Closing** (5 Minutes): As you approach the end time you set for your party, direct guests to some commitments they can take including continuing to research their ballots before they go vote and hosting their own BallotParty. Record any commitments that your guests make if you want to keep them accountable. Thank your guests for their attendance and invite them to stay to ask you questions if they need.

Itinerary B: Small Group Discussion

Summary: *At a BallotParty with small group discussion, guests will research and discuss their ballots in small groups so that everyone can contribute to conversation and groups can discuss as many races as possible. As a host, you will need to do important pre-work to ensure your guests have all the information they need to access their voter guides and are clear on guidelines for a productive, civically-minded discussion.*

Before your BallotParty:

- For small group discussions, we recommend that you have one individual present per small group that is prepared to enforce discussion guidelines and answer questions about BallotReady resources. To do this, we recommend each facilitator do the following:
 - Spend time before the event using BallotReady.org so you are familiar.
 - Determine how guests will be divided into small groups. We recommend either sorting randomly or by geographic location so guests are discussing similar ballots.
 - Think through what you will say to guests at the beginning of the event to set clear expectations for engagement and discussion (page 7).

During your BallotParty:

- **Opening** (5 minutes): At the beginning of your event, set the tone for open dialogue by reviewing our BallotParty guidelines for conversation with your guests on page 7.
- **Ice Breaker** (8-10 minutes): If your guests don't already know each other, give them an opportunity to introduce themselves. Consider using an icebreaker question to get discussion going right away (see conversation starters on page 11).
- **BallotReady Overview** (10 minutes): Invite guests to access their voter guide by entering their address on BallotReady.org. Give guests a few minutes to orient themselves and then present a starting point for discussion (Example: Let's start on the top of the ballot and work our way down through each race).
- **Ballot Discussion** (20+ minutes): Begin small group discussions. Allow your guests to lead the conversation, but be present and monitor adherence to the discussion guidelines. It is your role to keep the conversation productive, welcoming, and focused on gathering voter information, rather than ideological debate. Monitor how much all guests are contributing to the discussion, including yourself. Try to invite all guests to contribute throughout.
- **Check In** (As Needed): At some point, you may want to also direct your guests to VoteMail.org to see directions for how they can request a mail-in ballot in their locality.
- **Share Out** (15 Minutes before End): Have small groups come together to share out highlights of their discussions and findings with the whole group.
- **Closing** (5 Minutes): As you approach the end time you set for your party, direct guests to some commitments they can take including continuing to research their ballots before they go vote and hosting their own BallotParty. Record any commitments made. Thank your guests for their attendance and invite them to stay to ask you questions if they need.

Following Up on Your Party

After your BallotParty has ended, you'll want to make sure the warm, fuzzy feeling you've left your guests with lasts. More importantly, you want to keep them accountable for the plans they made to vote! A simple thank-you note is the first and best way to do this, but some additional follow-up could go a long way as well.

Send a Thank-You Note

Here is an example Thank-You note that you may consider sending to your guests in a group email or individual text message. Be sure to add beginning and ending salutations.

Thank you so much for attending my BallotParty! I'm so thankful for your participation and hope that you left feeling informed and confident that you'll be ready to mark your ballot. If you had any questions that didn't get answered, please let me know, and I'll be happy to advise.

Remember, Election Day is November 3rd, so I'm excited to see you share the news that you've voted!

















Follow-Up On Commitments

In addition to a thoughtful thank-you note, following up on the commitments your guests make at your BallotParty would be a great way to show your guests that you appreciate them and encourage their civic engagement. Consider asking your guests if they'd like to be held accountable for their commitments. This might look like a phone call or text message on or before Election Day to see that they've followed through with their plan. Reminders like this are built into the Make a Plan to Vote tool, but it's even more motivating when it's personal!

Conversation Starter Activity Cards

Directions: These conversation cards were created for in-person parties. To use them, print them out, cut them up and spread them around the room so that guests in small groups or pairs can use them to start conversations with other guests.

Alternately, you can use any of these questions as an icebreaker or as part of facilitating a full group conversation.

 Conversation Starters! How do you feel about the candidates for President?	 Conversation Starters! How do you feel about the candidates for U.S. House or Senate?	 Conversation Starters! What is an endorsement that matters to you?	 Conversation Starters! Who is a candidate you are really excited to vote for?
 Conversation Starters! What is a local office you feel is important to the community?	 Conversation Starters! What is a local office you feel you don't know enough about?	 Conversation Starters! How do you feel about incumbency and term limits?	 Conversation Starters! Is there a candidate on your ballot you find concerning?
 Conversation Starters! What is an issue that matters to you when choosing a candidate?	 Conversation Starters! Discuss how you feel about the candidates for one state office.	 Conversation Starters! Discuss a time you've felt proud of an elected official.	 Conversation Starters! Share the story of a time you met an elected official.
 Conversation Starters! Think of a time you didn't vote and explain why you didn't.	 Conversation Starters! What is a role you wish you could vote for but cannot?	 Conversation Starters! Who is someone you wish you would run for public office?	 Conversation Starters! What issue is most motivating to you as a voter?



This election season, you can host a BallotParty and help your community vote informed!

BallotReady creates free, digital, nonpartisan voter guides that cover every race and referendum on the ballot in all 50 states.

A **BallotParty** is a get together or group call to share our voter guide with friends, family, or colleagues. BallotParties turn preparing to vote a fun and engaging event! We'll provide the tools and resources you need to make sure your attendees get informed about their individual ballots. All you need to do is get ready to host and facilitate!

Why host?

Ballot Parties are a great opportunity for you or your organization to draw people in with powerful resources and materials for civic engagement. BallotParties are nonpartisan, so anyone can host and all are welcome!

Ready to sign up?

Go to ballotready.org and click on the "Host a Party" icon.

Want more information?

Visit ballotparty.ballotready.org

12 - Pass this around at your BallotParty!

FAQs

When is the election, and when are BallotParties happening?

The general election is November 3rd, 2020. Ballot Parties should happen anytime leading up to Election Day.

What are the requirements to host?

At a minimum, you need some people (...like, at least 2). Outside of that, anyone can host. Organizations, clubs, neighborhood groups, basrs, or restaurants, can all be hosts. We mean it when we say anyone!

Are BallotParties nonpartisan?

Yes, BallotReady.org features a free, nonpartisan voter guide to every race and every referendum. Guests of all political persuasions are welcome.

Who is BallotReady?

BallotReady is a company that creates nonpartisan digital voter guides for the entire country. Using our comprehensive voter guides, voters around the country can now see their entire ballots, view carefully sourced information about candidates and ballot initiatives, and share their completed ballots with their friends and networks. Visit BallotReady.org to learn more!

Thanks for using our BallotParty Host Toolkit!
Need more support?

**Contact our Support Team at
support@ballotpartyillinois.org.**