



ETHICS COMMISSION

CITY AND COUNTY OF SAN FRANCISCO

DAINA CHIU
CHAIR

Date: February 11, 2019

QUENTIN L. KOPP
VICE-CHAIR

To: Members of the Ethics Commission

YVONNE LEE
COMMISSIONER

From: Tyler Field, IS Business Analyst, Electronic Disclosure & Data Analysis Division

Subject: **AGENDA ITEM 7 - Informational presentation on Ethics Commission campaign finance disclosure dashboards.**

NOREEN AMBROSE
COMMISSIONER

Summary: This presentation is meant to demonstrate to the Commission recent work done by Staff to provide up-to-date visual dashboards on the Commission's website presenting data from campaign filings.

FERN M. SMITH
COMMISSIONER

LEEANN PELHAM
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Action Requested: No action is required by the Commission, as this item is for informational purposes only.

Background

The Campaign Finance Reform Ordinance seeks, among other things, to “[m]ake it easier for the public, the media and election officials to efficiently review and compare campaign statements” and to “[a]ssist voters in making informed electoral decisions.”¹ The campaign finance dashboards on the Ethics Commission's website represent one of the ways that the Commission is attempting to further these goals. These dashboards represent a simplified way for interested members of the public to understand how campaign committees are funded and how they spend money. The dashboards distill a varied number of filings into a set of charts and graphs designed to answer the most common questions while allowing the public to dive deeper into the information that interests them.

For nearly twenty years, the City has provided the public with campaign finance filings in electronic format. To help promote improved public awareness of candidate filings, in 2015 the Ethics Commission approved changes to the Campaign Finance Reform Ordinance requiring campaign advertisements to feature a disclaimer stating, “Financial disclosures are available at sfethics.org.” Given that there are hundreds of pages of filings, summarizing how campaigns raise and spend money can be difficult and time-consuming. Staff developed online dashboards to provide timely and accurate analysis of campaign finance disclosures. Prominently featured on the sfethics.org homepage, the dashboards webpage (<https://www.sfethics.org/dashboards>) has become the go-to place for the public and press to access this information. In 2018 it was the second most popular page on our website, after

¹ San Francisco Campaign & Gov. Conduct Code § 1.110(b)(8)–(9).

the homepage. It received almost 2.5 times more views than the 2016 dashboards over the corresponding timeframe in 2016.

To promote further awareness of this resource, in the summer of 2018, Ethics Commission Staff conducted six informational sessions with members of the public and press on researching campaign finance activity and how to use the campaign finance dashboards. Staff received enthusiastic responses to these sessions. Over the course of the 2018 elections, at least thirty-one separate news outlets wrote stories linking to the dashboards, citing the San Francisco Ethics Commission as the source for that data.

Why Dashboards Are Used

The state Fair Political Practices Commission (“FPPC”) Form 460 is the main statement political committees use to file campaign finance information. Along with other information, it contains a summary of a committee’s fundraising and expenditure activity and details about contributors and expenditures during the defined reporting period. The Form 460 is required twice annually by every committee, and for committees active in an election, two additional times leading up to that election. Beginning this year, following passage of the Anti-Corruption and Accountability Ordinance, City law also now requires a third-pre-election report to be filed.

For a timeline representation of reporting periods and deadlines that applied to committees, see Figure 1 for the June 2018 election and Figure 2 for the November 2018 election. During the period 90 days before an election, additional filings are required that provide daily updates on large contributions and independent expenditures.

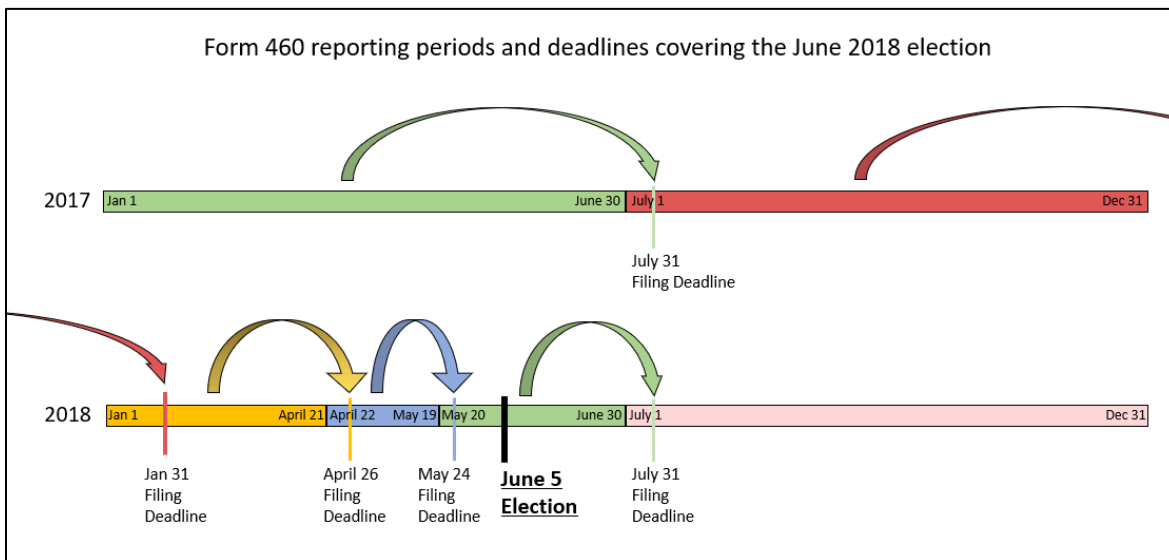


Figure 1 –Form 460 reporting periods and deadlines covering the June 2018 election. Semi-annual statements for all committees were due on January 31, 2018, and July 31, 2018, covering the period 6 months prior. In 2018, Two additional pre-election statements were required of committees participating in that election.

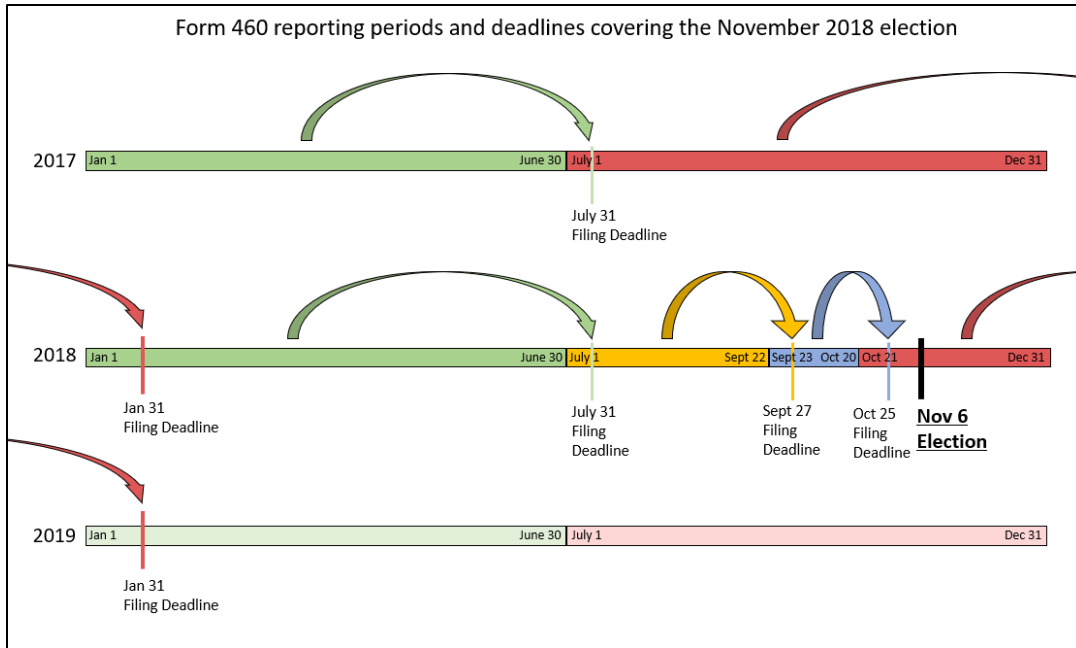


Figure 2- Form 460 reporting periods and deadlines covering the November 2018 election. Semi-annual statements for all committees were due July 31, 2018 and January 31, 2019, covering the period 6 months prior. Two additional pre-election statements were required of committees participating in that election.

In 2018 alone, there were 381 separate parties that filed more than 2,000 campaign statements with the Ethics Commission. Of these, 105 were committees formed to participate in the June 5th or November 6th elections. To get a full picture of fundraising and spending in the 2018 elections requires tracking each filing from those 105 committees, plus all the daily filings during a defined 90-day period immediately prior to the date of the election. The variety and detail of these filings, combined with the complex reporting periods and deadlines, make it difficult for the average person to properly perform research using raw campaign finance data. The dashboards automate much of the searching and aggregating that would be involved in such research and provides the same information in a more user-friendly format. To use the 2018 elections as an example, the dashboards aggregate the data from an estimated 12,790 paper pages and display it visually in a succinct and digestible fashion using charts, tables, graphs, and maps.

The filing deadline for activity that took place from roughly mid-October through December 31 recently passed on January 31 (see Figure 2). The dashboards, therefore, have been updated to give a more complete and up-to-date picture of the 2018 campaigns.

I look forward to demonstrating how this tool was used during the election cycle to further the goals of the Ethics Commission to make it easier for the public, the media, and election officials to efficiently review, compare, and understand campaign statements.