



How the Maine Clean Election System Works

FULL PUBLIC FUNDING: The Maine Clean Election system is a voluntary system in which both primary and general elections are funded with public money.

SEED MONEY: Seed Money is very limited private money that aspiring Clean Election candidates raise and spend to get their campaigns off the ground. Candidates for governor must raise a minimum of \$40,000 in Seed Money from Maine voters. In all other races, Seed Money is optional. Only people – not PACs or corporations – may make Seed Money contributions, and these contributions may be no more than \$100. Seed Money contributions are reported on campaign finance reports. Seed Money is capped at \$500 for House candidates, \$1,500 for Senate candidates and \$200,000 for gubernatorial candidates.

QUALIFYING PROCESS: Candidates engage in a Qualifying Process in order to be eligible for public funds. Through the Qualifying Process, candidates demonstrate that they have support among voters in their district and that they have a viable campaign organization.

QUALIFYING CONTRIBUTIONS: Qualifying Contributions are checks, money orders or online donations of \$5 that are collected from supporters by candidates and volunteers and deposited into the Maine Clean Election Fund. Only registered voters in a candidate's district may make a Qualifying Contribution in support of that candidate. Voters must sign a form stating that they received nothing in return for their Qualifying Contribution.

QUALIFYING PERIOD: The Qualifying Period is the time frame in which candidates may collect Qualifying Contributions. Candidates for Governor have from October 15th of the year before the election until April 1st of the election year to complete the Qualifying Process. Legislative candidates have from January 1st to April 20th of the election year to qualify.

CERTIFICATION: When candidates complete the Qualifying Process they request Certification from the Ethics Commission. The Commission checks to make sure all the Qualifying Contributions are in order, that signatures have been verified by the municipal clerk, that checks and money orders are signed, and that Seed Money is accounted for. If everything is in order, then the Commission declares the candidates to be Certified as a Maine Clean Election candidate.

INITIAL DISTRIBUTION: Within three days the Commission pays out the Initial Distribution of funds to the candidate. The Initial Distribution amount is decided prior to the election, and it varies depending on the office sought and whether the race is contested or not. After the primary election, a new Initial Distribution is paid to the candidates who will be on the general election ballot. Amounts range from just over \$500 for uncontested House primary candidates to \$600,000 for contested gubernatorial candidates.

MATCHING FUNDS: Certified Clean Election candidates may not raise any private money at all, nor may they spend their own money on their race. They may not spend more than their Initial Distribution unless additional matching funds are distributed to the candidate. Matching Funds are paid out when the sum of the opponent's spending plus any Independent Expenditures made on behalf of the opponent total more than the Initial Distribution – in other words, if the Clean Election candidate is outspent. Dollar-for-dollar Matching Funds are distributed as long as the opponent or Independent Expenditures continue to accumulate. Matching Funds are capped at two times the Initial Distribution for legislative candidates, and less for gubernatorial candidates.

UNSPENT FUNDS: After the election Clean Election candidates return all unspent funds to the State. These candidates are not in a perpetual campaign, nor are they able to build a war chest for a future race. If they run again, they start the process anew.

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Member Organizations

AARP Maine, Common Cause Maine, EqualityMaine, League of Women Voters of Maine, League of Young Voters, Maine AFL-CIO, Maine Council of Churches, Maine People's Alliance/Maine People's Resource Center, NAACP Portland, Maine State Employees Association/SEIU Local 1989, Maine Women's Lobby, Sierra Club Maine Chapter