



State Board of Elections
Public Campaign Finance Board
MTX Group

April 30, 2024

Dear Public Campaign Finance Board and MTX Group,

Thank you for offering to hear suggestions on how state campaign finance data should be reported.

We greatly appreciate the Board's efforts to consult with public stakeholders about the BOE's data systems. However, there are three persistent issues with the current "public reporting system" that we ask your team to address as part of its overhaul:

- 1. The search function.** The search function presented on the front page of most data fields is too confusing. First-time users are not sure where to start, as there are often many different search buttons, and there are also multiple ways to enter queries. For some searches, users must take as many as six steps to reach the data they seek. This setup creates a steep learning curve for a portal that should be as easy to use as possible, and we frequently receive questions from journalists about how to navigate the system. The vendor should simplify the search function so that a first-time visitor will know how to use it immediately.
- 2. Data cleaning and deduplication.** The underlying data in the current system is inconsistent and results in unreliable search results. For instance, many campaign committees have multiple candidate names for a single account, or spell donor names in multiple ways. This forces users to spend hours reviewing data for accuracy before they can begin to analyze it. The Board and vendor should make sure that filing data is standardized, with the use of features like auto-population and unique IDs, and as few self-reporting fields as possible.
- 3. Usability.** Though it has come a long way, the website produces mysterious error messages, logs out users, or takes too long to load – particularly during searches. We strongly recommend the vendor rigorously beta-test the new portal to ensure that it is usable upon release.

In the coming weeks, we will send a memo with more robust recommendations for state campaign finance reporting.

Thank you,

John Kaehny, Executive Director
Tom Speaker, Legislative Director
Reinvent Albany