



2020 Candidate Selection Process

Each year, Sister District undertakes a rigorous quantitative and qualitative analytic process to identify the most promising electoral opportunities for our volunteers. We look for compelling candidates running in strategic, winnable districts who will help us build progressive power in state legislatures across the country. This summary breaks down each step of our candidate selection process, explaining how we not only dive deep into the numbers, but also listen closely to the stakeholders on the ground.

STEP ONE: ASSESS STATES & IDENTIFY CHAMBERS

Each year we begin by assessing the state legislative chambers across the country and developing a list of chambers meeting one of our [three race portfolio categories](#). Here are our [2020 states and chambers](#):

Blue Flips: Minnesota Senate, Texas House, North Carolina Senate & House, Pennsylvania Senate & House, Michigan House, Arizona Senate & House

Blue Holds: Colorado Senate*

Blue Inroads: Georgia Senate & House, Wisconsin State Assembly (House), Florida Senate & House

Note about special elections: the above list is based upon the 2020 general election calendar. Special elections may also be called in these states or other states that meet our criteria, and we will evaluate those opportunities as they arise.

**Please note that while we may not ultimately endorse candidates in all of the chambers identified as our [2020 states](#), we will endorse in all of these states. The one exception is the Colorado Senate, where Democrats won a fragile 2-seat majority in 2018. Since then, the GOP has attempted to recall Democratic State Senators to recapture power. So far, Democrats have fended off the GOP's tactics. But we're watching closely and, if we see that we need to jump in to defend Colorado's blue trifecta, we can and will do so.*

STEP TWO: IDENTIFY POTENTIAL SEATS IN CHAMBERS

Second, we assess the particular composition of each identified chamber, generating a list of specific districts within each chamber that meet certain general criteria around flippability or incumbent fragility. At this step, we rely on publicly available historical voting and voter registration records for each district, as well as data from our allied organizations including Daily Kos and DLCC. This includes analyzing how voters in the district have voted at the local, state, and federal levels over the past 2-3 election cycles, as well as voter registration levels within the district and opportunities to expand the electorate through voter registration efforts.

STEP THREE: DEEPER DATA DIVE INTO SPECIFIC DISTRICTS

Third, we take a deeper dive into each of those districts. This involves assessing factors like the [Partisan Voting Index](#) and [Democratic Performance Index](#) scores for the district. We also look at whether the district is nested within other competitive elections where we might be able to force-multiply activity in-district (especially competitive Senate and congressional races, particularly in states that are presidential battlegrounds), whether the seat is open in 2020 due to the incumbent being term-limited or declining to run for re-election, and how much money candidates have raised for the seat over prior cycles. For seats held by Republican incumbents running again, we also assess factors including the strength of the incumbent and his or her prior voting record



Race Selection Process

as a legislator. With the help of dozens of dedicated volunteer researchers, we have largely completed Steps 1 through 3 for our 2020 candidate selection process.

STEP FOUR: STAKEHOLDER INPUT AND REFINEMENT OF TARGETS

Fourth, we discuss our preliminary list of chambers and districts with local and national stakeholders. This step helps us to see what numbers can't tell us; for example, a seat that may look eminently flippable may actually be held by a moderate and well-liked Republican. We may still end up pursuing this seat for a variety of reasons, but this kind of local knowledge is critical to our process. Our partners in target states, include local grassroots electoral and issue-based advocacy groups, community leaders and organizations, our local Sister District teams, partners in-state who recruit and train candidates, Democratic party and chamber caucus staff, and prior and current legislators and candidates. We also discuss our potential targets with national partners including academic researchers and other state and issue-area experts, as well as national electoral and advocacy organizations. We refine our preliminary target list based on these conversations and insights.

STEP FIVE: CANDIDATE ASSESSMENT

Fifth, we assess candidate quality in the seats we have identified as potential targets. We evaluate candidates based on a number of factors, including their leadership ability, policy platform, how well they reflect their district, the local and broader coalitions of support they have built, campaign staff quality, and the campaign's interest in our support. We support Democratic candidates from all backgrounds, and are particularly proud to support women, candidates of color, and other candidates from diverse communities and backgrounds so that we can help build a democracy that reflects the full chorus of American voices.

This step of the process involves candidates' completion of an endorsement questionnaire and interview by Sister District staff with the candidate and their campaign staff. We also follow up with our local- and state-based allied organizations to gain additional insights.

The timing of this step depends on candidate filing deadlines. Here is a [list of the state and federal filing deadlines](#) in 2020. As you can see, filing deadlines occur at different times in different states. Some states have early deadlines (e.g., Texas); other states have much later deadlines (e.g., Florida). Where we can, we have and will continue to talk with candidates to begin to get to know them early in the cycle. But generally, we wait to reach out to candidates until the filing deadline has passed in the state, such that all candidates who will be running have filed to run, and we can begin the endorsement process with a full view of the field.

In general, we do not get involved in primaries. In districts where more than one Democrat has filed to run, we will generally need to wait until after the primary to move forward with an endorsement. However, in districts where only one Democrat has announced their candidacy, we can finalize our candidate assessment and endorse shortly after the filing deadline. There are limited exceptions to the rule that we will not get involved in primaries; for example, we may get involved if the state's primary is extremely late, and we need to endorse earlier in order to have a meaningful impact in the race. Under these circumstances, we would only move forward with endorsement at the guidance of our local teams in that state, as well as other local stakeholders.



Candidate Selection Process

STEP SIX: MATCHING TEAMS AND AFFILIATES TO RACES

Our biggest strength as an organization is our people. Our groups of creative, tenacious volunteers across the country work tirelessly to help their candidates win, and we take this sixth step of our process—“sistering” candidates with teams and affiliates—very seriously. We are committed to finding good homes for both our volunteers and our candidates so that they can develop meaningful relationships. These relationships help us all expand what we think of as our own backyard to create deep, sustained engagement that results in more wins.

At the end of each year, we engage in an end-of-year debrief and prospective planning process with our teams. During this process, we identify each team’s geographic priorities and assess their capacity for the next cycle. Our Political and Organizing Departments work in close collaboration to ensure that we are maximizing support to our candidates, and load-balancing across our national capacity. Our aim is to provide an equitable amount of support to each candidate, understanding that every race is different—some may be heavily exurban and thus hard to canvass, making phonebanking more important; others may be extremely expensive because of unlimited contribution rules in a state. We take all of these types of factors into consideration as we make our pairings.

A few additional important considerations: teams and affiliates in the states where we have Sister Races will always be paired with races in their states, and we will continue to partner with other local grassroots groups to amplify each other’s efforts on the ground. And when we match non-local teams to those Sister Races, it is with the local team’s priorities in mind whenever possible.

STEP SEVEN: ANNOUNCING OUR ENDORSEMENTS

Once we have assessed the candidate(s), the filing deadlines and/or contested primaries have passed, and we have found a good match for a Sister Race among our Sister District community, we can announce our endorsements in particular districts.

This will occur at different times throughout the year, given the variation in filing deadlines and candidate recruitment landscape in the states we have identified for potential inclusion in our portfolio. Each year, we announce our support for candidates in waves. This year, our first wave of endorsements will be in early April, with our second wave in June.

We are committed to identifying stellar candidates and districts that are worthy of the passion and dedication of our community of volunteers. And we know that the best opportunities cannot be identified by numbers alone—we start with the quantitative data, and then we layer in qualitative information to paint a picture that captures the full context of the opportunity. This is how we will focus our community’s power, and this is how we will win.