

County Party Committees and How to Get Involved

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Most people are familiar with national political parties – like the Democratic and Republican parties. These parties try to influence elections by choosing which candidates they will endorse and helping those candidates with their campaigns. Political parties are made up of their members and are not a part of the government.

However, there are also local versions of these parties!¹ In our region, “county party committees” are the local organizing bodies for the larger, national political parties. County committees shape how each party operates locally, determine who receives party endorsements, and how campaigns are supported.²

In Erie County, the four major political parties are the Democratic, Republican, Conservative, and Working Families parties.³ Each party has its own local committee or local organizing body, but their internal rules and structures may vary, especially among smaller parties.

- The **Erie County Democratic Committee** is the county party committee for the Democratic Party.
- The **Erie County Republican Committee** is the county party committee for the Republican Party.
- The **Erie County Conservative Party Committee** is the county party committee for the Conservative Party.
- The **Western New York chapter** of the **Working Families Party** is the local organizing body for the party. Right now, it doesn’t have an official county party committee. However, the regional chapter is active, and it does organize and endorse candidates at the local level.⁴

What do county party committees do?

Committee members attend meetings and elect party leadership.⁵ Committees also endorse candidates for public office, such as county executives and city mayors, in party primaries.⁶

This fact sheet was written by Haley Diagostino (who was a Masters of Social Work intern at PPG at the time) and edited by Sarah Wooton (Director of Community Research at PPG). This guide explains what county party committees are, how members are elected, and how you can run to become a member. We reached out to the four major political parties for their feedback on this fact sheet. Thank you to the Erie County Democratic Committee and the Working Families Party for providing feedback on this guide.

Why do county party committees matter?

Once a county committee endorses a candidate for public office, the committee often supports the candidate's campaign by gathering petition signatures, canvassing voters, purchasing lawn signs, and assisting with other details of running a local campaign for public office.¹⁰

Technically, committee members do not directly choose who appears on the ballot for elections. The candidates still need to get the necessary number of signatures to qualify to be on the ballot. However, committee members' involvement in building campaign infrastructure can significantly boost a candidate's visibility and momentum.¹¹

Members can also:

- Organize neighbors and engage voters
- Advocate for change within the party and with elected officials
- Bring attention to issues they care about
- Build relationships with local elected officials¹²

How members are elected

Counties are divided into small voting areas called election districts. Across all municipalities in Erie County, there are 651 total election districts, including 207 districts in the City of Buffalo alone.¹³ All the county party committees use the same election districts.

Under New York State Election Law, each recognized party can elect two members from each election district to serve on the party's county committee.¹⁴ This means a party could have up to 1,302 committee members across Erie County. However, vacant seats are relatively common, especially in smaller election districts, and party officials can fill vacant seats through appointment.¹⁵

Committee members are elected every two years, during each party's primary election, and serve two-year terms.¹⁶ If only one or two people run for a district's party committee seats, they will automatically become the committee members for that district; there won't be an election. However, if three or more people run for a district's seats, those names will show up on the ballot.¹⁷ In 2024, the **Democratic, Republican** and **Conservative** parties had a few contested county committee seats on the ballot in primary elections in Erie County.¹⁸

Ballot Lines vs. Political Parties

Not all ballot lines represent official parties.⁷

To qualify as an official party in New York State, a political organization must have had:

- A candidate on the ballot in the most recent presidential election who received at least 130,000 votes or 2% of the total votes cast (whichever is greater) and
- A candidate on the ballot in the most recent gubernatorial election who received at least 130,000 votes or 2% of the total votes cast (whichever is greater).⁸

Some candidates run for office on an independent ballot line rather than on an official party line. This is done through an independent nominating petition.⁹ These ballot lines allow candidates to appear on the ballot for the general election, but they do not automatically establish an official party or county committee.

- The 2024 Democratic primary included races for county committee members in 10 election districts in Erie County, nine in the City of Buffalo and one in the town of Brant.¹⁹
- The Republican Party had races for county committee members in 24 election districts in Erie County, 10 in the City of Buffalo, one in Amherst, three in Elma, and 10 in Grand Island.²⁰
- The Conservative Party had races for county committee members in 14 election districts in Erie County, one in Amherst and 13 in Evans.²¹

Only registered voters of a political party can vote in their party's primary, including for party committee candidates. For example, someone registered with the Republican Party can only vote for Republican committee members in their district. In most other elections, the winner of a primary simply advances to the general election. Since county committee members are elected by members of their own party, the winner of the primary wins the committee seat.²²

In more densely populated areas, like the City of Buffalo, election districts often cover just a few city blocks. For example, the Ellicott Common Council District in the City of Buffalo has 27 election districts, each representing a relatively small area. In contrast, less densely populated towns have fewer election districts that cover larger geographic areas. The Town of Wales, for example, has just one election district for the entire town.²³

Because election districts are often small, races for party committee seats are often decided by a relatively small number of votes.²⁴ For example:

- In the 2024 Conservative primary, three candidates ran for two open committee seats in Amherst Election District 43. A total of 10 votes were cast, with candidates receiving five, three, and one vote each, with one blank vote.²⁵
- In the 2024 Democratic primary, four candidates ran for two open committee seats in North District 21. A total of 46 votes were cast, with candidates receiving 15, 15, eight, and six votes each, with one blank and one write in vote.²⁶

Even in party committee races with higher turnout, races are often decided by small vote margins. For example:

- In the 2024 Republican primary, four candidates ran for two open committee seats in Grand Island Election District 7. A total of 206 votes were cast, with the candidates receiving 60, 59, 46, and 39 votes, with two blank votes.²⁷



Photo courtesy Sora Shimazaki

Committee seat elections can be decided by just a handful of votes.

How to get involved

Running for a county party committee seat can be a good introduction to local politics.²⁸ Here's how to get involved:

STEP 1: CHECK YOUR ELIGIBILITY

To run for a county party committee seat, you must be a registered voter of that political party. You also need to be registered in the Assembly district you want to run in.²⁹

STEP 2: PICK AN ELECTION DISTRICT TO RUN FOR

If you want to represent your neighborhood, you can run for county committee seat in your own election district. Surprisingly, you can also choose to run in a different election district, as long as you live in and are registered to vote in the same New York State Assembly district. More than half of the county committee seats in New York State are often unfilled, so if your own election district is already filled, you can avoid running against someone by choosing to run in a *different* election district.³⁰

Surprisingly, **you can run outside** of the election district you live in.

Get Involved Without Running

Even though the Working Families Party (WFP) does not have an official county committee in Erie County, you can still get involved with the party. Our local affiliate of the WFP is the Western New York Working Families Party.

What WFP Members Do

- Follow WFP in the media and take action by signing petitions or contacting representatives on important issues
- Join volunteer events
- Join local WFP affiliate
- Help identify and recruit candidates to run for office
- Mobilize and campaign for candidates

Membership

- General member: WFP defines general members as individuals who state their intent to join as a member, including through online actions, contributions, and sign-ups and pay regular dues or otherwise reaffirm their intent to remain a member
- Dues-paying member: WFP defines dues-paying members as individuals who contribute at least \$10 a month or \$120 in the past year.³¹
- Voter registration: In New York State, WFP has statewide ballot access and is recognized as a political party. While you can change your voter registration status to Working Families Party in New York State, changing your voter registration status is not necessary to join as a member.

You may also consider reaching out to the local committee if you wish to run for a seat. The Erie County Democratic Committee, for example, recommends contacting them before filing petitions, as they often know which seats are vacant and may help you secure a seat without going through a contested primary.³²

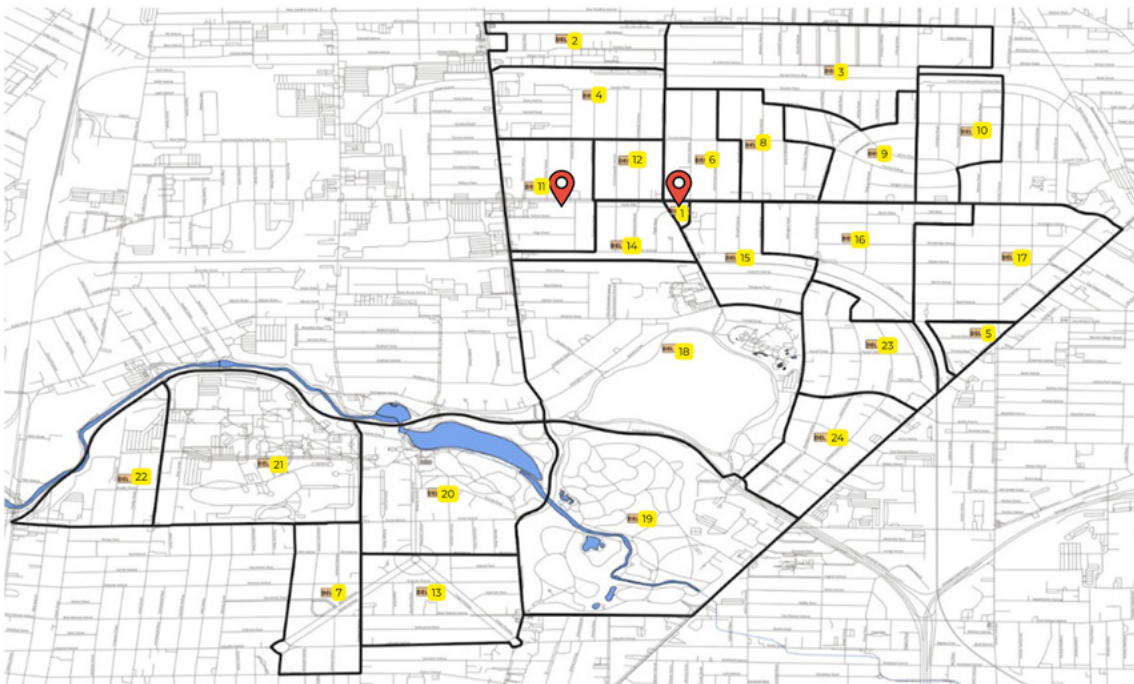
You can also decide if you want to run with someone else. For example, you might have a neighbor who is registered in the same party and lives in your election district. Working together can make things easier, especially when it is time to circulate petitions and collect signatures.

When deciding where to run, you can also consider how voting power works for your party's county committee. In some party committees, all committee members each get one vote. In other party committees, members have different amounts of voting power based on how many voters live in their district.³³

For example, the Erie County Democratic Committee rules say that each committee member gets a different amount of voting power based on how many registered Democrats are in their election district.³⁴ This helps make sure voting power on the committee is distributed proportionately. The more registered party voters in the election district you run in, the more voting power you hold on the Erie County Democratic Committee.

For example, let's say you're a registered Democrat in the City of Buffalo and you want to run for county committee member. You live in Delaware District 1.

"Working together can make things easier, especially when it is time to circulate petitions and collect signatures."



- Both Delaware District 1 and District 11 are in the 140th Assembly District.
- Delaware District Election District 1 has just 21 registered Democrats.
- Delaware District Election District 11 has 665 registered Democrats.³⁵

If you run in Delaware District 11, you will hold more voting power on the committee than if you run in Delaware District 1. However, you would also need to collect more petition signatures to qualify for the ballot.

If you choose to run in another election district, make sure it is in the Assembly district you are registered to vote in. For example, you couldn't run in Delaware District Election District 2, because it is in the 141st Assembly District.

STEP 3 - PETITION TO RUN

In New York State, if you want to run for a committee seat, you must collect signatures from voters registered in your party. You'll use a form called a "designating petition," and you must file the completed petitions within a specific time frame. If you get the necessary signatures and file the documents properly, your name will be listed on the primary election ballot.³⁶

Signature requirements:

You must collect 5% of the active enrolled voters of the political party in the election district.³⁷ It is a good idea to gather more than the minimum number of signatures in case some are challenged. Your opponent or anyone else can file a petition to challenge your signatures and get you knocked off the ballot. A good rule of thumb is to try for at least double the required number.

Say you are running for a Democratic committee seat in Delaware District Election District 11. There are 665 registered Democrats in Delaware District Election District 11. To collect 5% of voters, you must collect 34 signatures. To be safe, you should try to get at least 68 signatures.

If you decide to run with another person for the same election district, you can circulate one petition that includes both of your names. This will likely save you time. If you do this, all the signatures on a petition apply to all candidates named on that petition, unless otherwise specified.³⁸

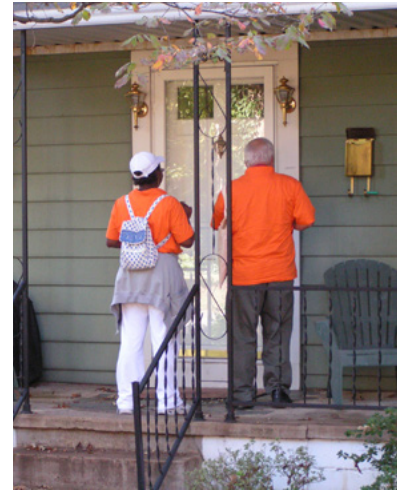


Photo courtesy NCDOT Communications. <https://www.flickr.com/photos/ncdot/16714093742>

"Voters may not sign a petition for more candidates than there are openings for an office."

For example, say you and your neighbor are running together for Delaware District 11. You are carrying petitions with both of your names on them so you can save time collecting signatures. There's a third person running against you. You ask someone on your street to sign your petition, and they say they've already signed your competitor's petition. If they then sign your petition, their signature will be invalid. That's because they've already signed for one candidate, and now they're signing for two more. There are only two election district seats, so they cannot sign for three candidates.

Each petition signer needs to be:

- Registered to vote in that election district
- A registered member for the party you are petitioning for.³⁹

Voters may not sign a petition for more candidates than there are openings for an office.⁴⁰

When collecting signatures, it's best practice to get information about where the registered voters for your party live. That way, you don't have to knock on every door. Plus, it's common for voters to be out of date on their voter registrations. You need to collect signatures from people who are currently registered for your party in your district. If you collect signatures from people who have moved into your district but who haven't updated their voter registration to reflect that, their signatures won't count.

To get that voter registration data, you can submit a Freedom of Information Request to the Erie County Board of Elections.⁴¹ When submitting a request for voter registration data, it must include a statement that the information requested will be used for an "elections purpose."⁴²

Important dates to find out:

- Dates for circulating petitions: this is typically between February and March.
- Deadline to file petitions: this is typically in late March or early April.
- State primary election: this is typically in late June⁴³

Petitions must be signed within the petition season dates. Exact petition season dates vary each year based on the state's primary election schedule. Check [New York State Board of Elections Political Calendar](#) for deadlines.⁴⁴ In general, petitioning season lasts a few weeks in February and March, with dates for filing in late March or early April.⁴⁵

County committee members serve two-year terms, and election years vary by county. In Erie County, county party committee members were last elected in 2024, so the next election will be in 2026. Check that your party's county committee will be holding elections the year you wish to run.

Before you start knocking on doors, you should **get information about the voters in your district.**

STEP 4: SUBMIT PETITION

If there are 10 or more pages in a petition, you must include a cover sheet listing the candidate's name and address, the office or party position they're seeking, the party name, and a statement confirming the petition contains the required number of signatures.⁴⁶

Only use a cover sheet if you have over 10 pages. Do not use a cover sheet if you have fewer than 10 pages. Minor technicalities can get your entire petition rejected, so only use a cover sheet if necessary. Petitions must be submitted to the county Board of Elections within a specific window of time. Make sure all petition pages are securely fastened and in numerical order. Do not use a stapler. Instead, use a round head or 2-piece prong fastener. You need to postmark your submission or submit it in person to the Board of Elections.⁴⁷

If a seat in a primary election is uncontested, the candidate is automatically nominated or elected and will not appear on the ballot.⁴⁸

If you are running against someone, connect with voters in your election district and build support before election day.⁴⁹

For more information:

Erie County Board of Elections

<https://elections.erie.gov/ElectiveOffice>

NYS Board of Elections

<https://elections.ny.gov/running-office>

Endnotes

- 1 Federal Election Commission, *Political Party Committees*, (campaign guide, Washington D.C.: Information Division of the Office of Communications, 2024), <https://www.fec.gov/help-candidates-and-committees/guides/?tab=political-party-committees>, 200.
- 2 Grant Ashley, "What are County Party Committee Races, and Why Do They Matter? WBFO Explains," *Buffalo Toronto Public Media*, June 21, 2024, <https://www.btpm.org/government/2024-06-21/county-party-committee-democratic-republican-erie-niagara>.
- 3 "Major Party Headquarters," Erie County Board of Elections, accessed May 30, 2025, elections.erie.gov/PartyCon.
- 4 The Rules of the New York State Committee of the Working Families Party state that in any county where no County Committee has been elected and organized, the State Executive Committee can assume county-level duties of the County Committee. See Federal Election Commission, *Advisory Opinion Request*, AOR 2000-14 (New York State Committee of the Working Families Party), <https://www.fec.gov/files/legal/aos/64732.pdf>, 5.
- 5 "Role of County Committee Members," Rep Your Block, May 30, 2025, https://www.repyourblock.com/members_role.
- 6 Ashley, "What are County Party Committee Races?"
- 7 NYS Election Law, Consolidated Laws of New York, § 1-104(12).
- 8 NYS Election Law, Consolidated Laws of New York, § 1-104(3).
- 9 Erie County, Board of Elections, accessed August 8, 2025, *Petitions*, <https://elections.erie.gov/pdfs/Petitions.pdf>.
- 10 Ibid.
- 11 Ibid.
- 12 "Role of County Committee Members," Rep Your Block.
- 13 Erie County, Board of Elections, 2025, *Apportionment and Enrollment*, [https://elections.erie.gov/PDFs/2025ApportionmentBook%20\(1\).pdf](https://elections.erie.gov/PDFs/2025ApportionmentBook%20(1).pdf).
- 14 NYS Election Law, Consolidated Laws of New York, § 2-104(1).
- 15 Ashley, "What are County Party Committee Races?"
- 16 NYS Election Law, Consolidated Laws of New York, § 2-106(3).
- 17 NYS Election Law, Consolidated Laws of New York, § 6-160(2).
- 18 Ashley, "What are County Party Committee Races?"
- 19 Erie County, Board of Elections, 2024, *Primary 2024 Canvass Book (Democratic)*, [https://elections.erie.gov/Files/Election%20Results/2024/Primary%202024%20Canvass%20Book%20\(Democratic\).pdf](https://elections.erie.gov/Files/Election%20Results/2024/Primary%202024%20Canvass%20Book%20(Democratic).pdf).
- 20 Erie County, Board of Elections, 2024, *Primary 2024 Canvass Book (Republican)*, [https://elections.erie.gov/Files/Election%20Results/2024/Primary%202024%20Canvass%20Book%20\(Republican\).pdf](https://elections.erie.gov/Files/Election%20Results/2024/Primary%202024%20Canvass%20Book%20(Republican).pdf).
- 21 Erie County Board of Elections, 2024, *Primary 2024 Canvass Book (Conservative)*, [https://elections.erie.gov/Files/Election%20Results/2024/Primary%202024%20Canvass%20Book%20\(Conservative\).pdf](https://elections.erie.gov/Files/Election%20Results/2024/Primary%202024%20Canvass%20Book%20(Conservative).pdf).
- 22 Ashley, "What are County Party Committee Races?"
- 23 Erie County, Board of Elections, *Apportionment and Enrollment*.
- 24 Ashley, "What are County Party Committee Races?"
- 25 Erie County Board of Elections, *Primary 2024 Canvass Book (Conservative)*.
- 26 Erie County, Board of Elections, *Primary 2024 Canvass Book (Democratic)*.
- 27 Erie County, Board of Elections, *Primary 2024 Canvass Book (Republican)*.
- 28 Geoff Kelly, "Erie County Democrats Attack Challengers," *Investigative Post*, June 26, 2024, <https://www.investigativepost.org/2024/06/26/county-democrats-attack-challengers/>.
- 29 "How to Run for County Committee," County Committee Sunlight Project, accessed May 30, 2025, <https://ccsunlight.org/how-to-run-for-county-committee>.
- 30 Ibid.
- 31 "WFP Membership: FAQ," Working Families Party, accessed December 8, 2025, <https://workingfamilies.org/become-a-wfp-member/wfp-membership-faq/>.

32 Personal Communication, Erie County Democratic Committee, August 18, 2025.

33 Under New York State Election Law, county committees can establish rules for providing additional members based on the party's vote or enrollment in each election district. If a county committee *does* establish rules for additional members, each committee member gets one vote. If a county committee *doesn't* discuss additional members in its committee rules, the voting power of each member must instead be weighted, based on the party's vote or party enrollment in each election district. NYS Election Law, Consolidated Laws of New York, § 2-104(1).

34 Erie County Democratic Committee, *Party Rules*, <https://ecdems.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/2018-ECDC-Bylaws-v2.pdf>; to our knowledge, the Erie County Democratic Committee is the only party committee that makes their rules publicly available online. As a result, we don't know how the other party committee's deal with voting power.

35 Erie County, Board of Elections, *Apportionment and Enrollment*.

36 "How to Run for County Committee," County Committee Sunlight Project.

37 NYS Election Law, Consolidated Laws of New York, § 6-136(1).

38 NYS Election Law, Consolidated Laws of New York, § 6215.4(a).

39 "How to Run for County Committee," County Committee Sunlight Project.

40 Erie County, Board of Elections, *Petitions*.

41 "Freedom of Information Request (FOIL)," Erie County Board of Elections, accessed August 8, 2025, <https://elections.erie.gov/FoilReq>.

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44 "Political Calendars," New York State Board of Elections, accessed December 8, 2025, <https://elections.ny.gov/political-calendars>.

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46 "Petition Information," New York State Board of Elections, accessed August 8, 2025, <https://elections.ny.gov/petition-information>.

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49 "How to Run for County Committee," County Committee Sunlight Project.