



Advancing Reproductive Freedom Through Local Elections

A TOOL FOR ADVOCATES

THE LOCAL REPRODUCTIVE FREEDOM INDEX: EVALUATING U.S. CITIES 2017 (LOCAL INDEX) is a first-of-its-kind initiative by the National Institute for Reproductive Health (NIRH) that evaluates the reproductive health, rights, and justice policies of the 40 most populous metropolitan areas/municipalities in the United States. As the federal government and many state legislatures continue to attack reproductive freedom, now is a pivotal time for cities to ensure that their residents and all who come there have the ability to control their reproductive and sexual lives. The Local Index can help local advocates, community leaders, elected officials, and others interested in encouraging a locality to use the full extent of its policy and programmatic powers to foster thriving families, support people's reproductive and sexual health decisions, and destigmatize abortion and contraception.

This tool provides guidance to local advocates on how you can use the Local Index in your electoral work to seize the opportunity that local elections offer to create change in your community and to turn supportive local candidates into champions for reproductive freedom.¹

Why Engage Local Candidates on Reproductive Freedom?

Diminish stigma around abortion, contraception, and other reproductive and sexual health issues.

Elections offer an opportunity for the general public to engage with political topics they may not often think about. Candidates speaking clearly and effectively about abortion access and other potentially contentious topics in a respectful, non-stigmatizing way influences the public discourse.

Secure allies and build champions for reproductive freedom. Successful candidates will become lawmakers, so building those connections early will ultimately improve your working relationship with local government and ensure you have local allies and champions.

Demonstrate the intersections between reproductive freedom and other issues. Working with candidates will give you opportunities to demonstrate how reproductive freedom ties into their larger platform by drawing connections with the other issues they may champion, such as economic justice, immigrants’ rights, or LGBTQ rights. It will also allow you to build your relationship with allies in those movements.

Endorsing Champions for Reproductive Freedom

If your organization can make endorsements in local elections, you may wonder at which level of government to get involved. Although government structures are different in each city, this chart is a starting point for your own research and strategizing around how best to achieve your goals.

RACE	TYPICAL AREAS OF JURISDICTION
Mayor, City Council	<i>Legislation on many issues, including reproductive health care and education; resolutions; budgetary decisions; zoning; oversight of city agencies, including those addressing health care, education, consumer affairs, and employment issues.</i>
School Board	<i>Sexuality education policy; support for LGBTQ students; access to reproductive health care in school-based health centers.</i>
County Commission	<i>Health-related policy or initiatives, including funding (many departments of health are county level); legislation on many issues related to reproductive freedom; budgetary decisions; zoning.</i>
Criminal Justice Positions (District Attorney, Sheriff, Local Judges)	<i>Police reform; treatment of incarcerated women and others who need reproductive health care, such as prenatal care, abortion, access to menstrual supplies and other basic needs; decisions about whether to use criminal laws, including arcane abortion laws, to prosecute women or health care providers.</i>

Guide to Your Endorsement Process

Research and understand the local political landscape. It is important to know not only who is running, but also who the other local political players are. Who else in your community makes local endorsements? How can you engage with them?

Create an endorsement questionnaire. An endorsement questionnaire is an outward facing document distributed to candidates that gives them an opportunity to answer questions so you can see where they stand. It should be based on your electoral agenda, which includes all of the policies your organization supports and that you want endorsed candidates to support as well. In addition to putting candidates on the record on the key issues for you and your constituencies, it is also an opportunity to educate candidates on these topics ([see sample questionnaire](#)).

Consider including not just your core issues, but others that may be deal-breakers for you and your community. For example, in addition to questions about reproductive health, rights, and justice, what do you need to know about a candidate's understanding of and commitment to economic justice, racial equity, or immigrants' rights?

Consider conducting endorsement interviews. Once candidates submit an endorsement questionnaire, you may decide to endorse them or you can invite them to have a further conversation in an endorsement interview. If they aren't familiar with your organization, use the interview to introduce them to your work and your priorities. You can ask them specific questions about the issues, and also discuss their campaign, fundraising strategy, how they will use your endorsement, and how they plan to govern. These conversations often help organizations distinguish between an elected official who will be a champion as opposed to simply a supporter, and can help you prioritize where you invest time, energy, or money.

Consider whether your city's electoral landscape might allow for a pledge. Consider asking candidates to make a pledge, such as pledging to support policies that will make your city a Model City or not to vote for restrictions on accessing reproductive health care, including abortion. This can be a controversial strategy, but it can provide a way to hold candidates accountable after they are elected. You should know the local electoral landscape well and have accumulated a lot of political capital before deciding if you should make such an ask.

Beyond Electioneering: Engaging Candidates on Reproductive Freedom²

Even if your organization does not endorse local candidates, you can still achieve many of your goals through candidate education and evaluation. Some possibilities for candidate engagement are:

Highlight the Local Index and City Scorecard. Meet with local candidates to brief them on your City Scorecard, and highlight how these issues affect your community. Offer to work with them to craft reproductive freedom positions and policies. Use the Local Index to create relevant informational

materials for local candidates. Give them your City Scorecard and highlight where there is room for your city to advance.

Create a voter guide or non-partisan scorecard. Evaluate every candidate in the race on the issues you are championing in your city. Though it may be difficult to get responses, especially from anti-choice candidates, you can try to gather this information by creating a survey for candidates on their views. Fill in gaps by doing your own research on those who do not respond ([see sample non-partisan voter guide](#)).

Engage in candidate debates and forums. These are opportunities to air candidates' positions, ask specific questions, and gauge where to focus your candidate education efforts. Host a candidate forum on your own or in collaboration with other community groups – a great way to build partnerships, strengthen your progressive coalition, and illustrate the connections between various issues to candidates and voters. If this is beyond your capacity, engage with an existing forum or debate. Submit questions in advance, or send a representative to ask a question in person.

Moving Forward

Every community is different, and NIRH encourages you to adapt this tool, and the resources in the Local Index, to your community's unique culture, opportunities, and challenges. NIRH is available to provide support and technical assistance to you as needed. Contact us at localrepro@nirhealth.org with questions or for individualized guidance on using the strategies or choosing policies included in these tools.

1 For guidance on the differences between the kind of work you can engage in if your organization is a 501(c)(3) or a 501(c)(4), including how you can engage with policymakers and political candidates, contact NIRH or visit the Alliance for Justice, bolderadvocacy.org.

2 Certain organizations, such as those organized only as 501(c)(3)s, have limitations on the type of work they can do with reference to elections or candidates. Please contact us or Alliance for Justice if you have questions about your organization's ability to engage in these and other related activities



THE NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH (NIRH) builds power at the state and local level to change public policy, galvanize public support, and normalize women's decisions about abortion and contraception. Through our partnership model, we provide state and local advocates with strategic guidance, hands-on support, and funding to create national change from the ground up. We build connections within and across states, arming our partners with the latest knowledge and best tools to advance reproductive freedom for the people in their communities.

Contact us at localrepro@nirhealth.org | 14 Wall Street Suite 3B, New York, NY 10005 | Tel. 212-343-0114 | nirhealth.org



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SAMPLE CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE

Name: _____ Office: _____ District: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____ Fax: _____

Party Designation: _____ Email: _____

Campaign Contact: _____ Website: _____

Candidate's Signature _____ Date _____

Please refer to the attached document for background information on each of the issues addressed below. If you have questions or require additional information while completing the questionnaire, please contact _____.



Source: National Institute for Reproductive Health Action Fund PAC, 2017 New York City Candidate Questionnaire

PART 1

The Right to Abortion

1. The Supreme Court ruled in *Roe v. Wade* that the United States Constitution protects a woman's right to have an abortion before fetal viability (as well as after viability if her life or health is endangered). Do you support or oppose this legal precedent?
2. Do you support or oppose abortion bans that violate the standards established in *Roe v. Wade*, including so-called partial birth abortion bans and 20-week bans?
3. Do you support or oppose legislation that would incorporate into New York state law the right to safe, legal abortion care as provided by *Roe v. Wade*?
4. Do you support or oppose the Reproductive Health Act, state legislation that would remove abortion from the criminal code, and guarantee every woman in New York the fundamental right to safe, legal abortion care, especially if her health is in danger?
5. Do you support or oppose legislation that undermines a woman's right to abortion by granting legal personhood status to an embryo or fetus?
6. Do you support or oppose legislation that undermines a woman's right to choose by banning abortions allegedly motivated by a preference for a specific sex?

Support

Oppose

Support

Oppose

Support

Oppose

Support

Oppose

Support

Oppose

Support

Oppose

Access to Reproductive Health Care Services

7. Do you support or oppose the current NYC Health + Hospitals policy of integrating abortion care as a standard part of training for OB/GYN residents at public hospitals?
8. Do you support or oppose efforts to prevent the harassment and intimidation of patients, providers, and staff at reproductive health care facilities?
9. Do you support or oppose public funds from going to so-called "crisis pregnancy centers," anti-choice facilities that intentionally deceive and misinform women about their reproductive health care options?
10. Do you support or oppose bans on private and public insurance coverage for abortion?
11. Do you support or oppose the Comprehensive Contraception Coverage Act, which would improve New Yorkers' access to a variety of contraception methods?
12. Do you support or oppose proposals requiring a woman seeking abortion care to undergo a medically unnecessary ultrasound and to view it or to hear an oral description of the embryo or fetus?
13. Do you support or oppose proposals that require health care providers to present state-scripted, medically unnecessary materials to patients seeking abortion services?

Support

Oppose

Support

Oppose

Support

Oppose

Support

Oppose

Support

Oppose

Support

Oppose

Support

Oppose

14. Do you support or oppose proposals that force women to endure medically unnecessary delays before they can receive abortion services?	Support	Oppose
15. Do you support or oppose Targeted Regulation of Abortion Provider (TRAP) laws, which impose medically unjustified regulations on abortion providers that are far more onerous than regulations required of other outpatient medical facilities?	Support	Oppose
16. Do you support or oppose continued state funding for providers who deliver family planning services to uninsured and underinsured women and families, including state Medicaid funding for abortions?	Support	Oppose
17. Do you support or oppose efforts to prohibit state family planning funding from going to health care providers who include abortion care among their services?	Support	Oppose
18. Do you support or oppose amending state labor law to prohibit an employer from discriminating against an employee based on his or her individual reproductive health decisions?	Support	Oppose
19. Do you support or oppose the denial of care by institutions or individuals to patients due to religious refusal clauses?	Support	Oppose
20. Do you support or oppose requiring insurance plans to cover abortion services without cost-sharing or copayment?	Support	Oppose

Promoting Teen Health and Safety

21. Do you support or oppose a city-wide policy requiring comprehensive sex education in grades K-12 along with meaningful tracking and implementation?	Support	Oppose
22. Do you support or oppose providing teens with confidential access to preventative reproductive health care services, including all forms of contraception?	Support	Oppose
23. Do you support or oppose current NYC DOH and NYC DOE efforts to provide teens with access to reproductive and sexual health resources through the school environment such as the Connecting Adolescents to Comprehensive Healthcare (CATCH) program and the Condom Availability Program?	Support	Oppose
24. Do you support or oppose the right of individuals to obtain emergency contraception over the counter, regardless of age?	Support	Oppose
25. Do you support or oppose requiring parental consent or notification before a minor can obtain abortion care from a medical provider?	Support	Oppose

PART 2

The following questions address issues that we believe intersect with and impact a person’s ability to exercise their right to make decisions about their reproductive lives. In particular, the ability to control one’s reproductive future is contingent upon the degree to which issues of economic, racial and gender injustice are being addressed in a given community, and is all too often linked to a person’s economic status. This concept is frequently termed “intersectionality” because it recognizes that there are multiple aspects of one’s identity that can both enrich lives and add to marginalization. This section of the questionnaire seeks to discover how a candidate understands the interconnectedness of reproductive rights with societal injustice.

Please indicate if you agree or disagree with each statement, and give a short explanation of your answer if you choose.

1. Both the pro-choice movements and LGBTQ movements fight to protect the fundamental right to control our bodies without interference by the government. NIRHAF PAC SUPPORTS policies that ensure equal rights for all LGBT people. Reproductive autonomy is as vital to the fight for LGBT rights as it is to the rights of heterosexual women and men. Interference by the government in those private decisions limits an individual's right to choose, as well as our access to safe and affordable health care. All people need access to information and services – including sex education, contraception, and other reproductive health care – in order to determine our own sexual and reproductive lives. Sexual and reproductive autonomy are intrinsic to human rights and dignity.

Agree /Disagree: _____

2. Reproductive rights are difficult to exercise when one is facing systemic economic injustice. NIRHAF PAC SUPPORTS policies that promote greater economic equality. In every state, a woman with two children working full-time at minimum wage would live near or below the poverty line. And for tipped workers, the federal minimum cash wage is just \$2.13 per hour, a figure that hasn’t increased for more than 20 years. Raising the minimum wage — and eliminating the lower minimum cash wage for tipped workers — would help millions of workers across the country support themselves and their families. And because women are a majority of minimum-wage workers, increasing the minimum wage would also help close the wage gap. Economic policies have a direct impact on reproductive freedom.

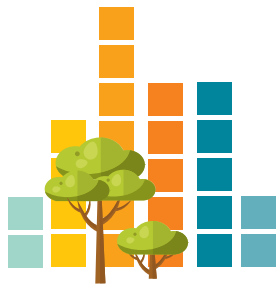
Agree /Disagree: _____

3. Safeguarding an individual's right to determine her or his own reproductive future is an integral part of an overall agenda to promote social justice. NIRHAF PAC SUPPORTS policies that lead to justice and opportunity for all immigrant groups. This includes the ability of all people, whether American-born or immigrant, to determine whether or when to have children, have healthy pregnancies, to become parents and parent with dignity, and have healthy and safe families and relationships. Anti-immigrant policies create barriers to reproductive health care.

Agree /Disagree: _____

4. The history and present day reality of reproductive health is inextricably linked with racial injustice in our society. NIRHAF PAC SUPPORTS measures to provide fairness and justice for communities of color and believes that those laws and practices that target these communities unfairly should be replaced. It is not enough for all people to be able to determine if and when they have children. They must be able to access appropriate healthcare regardless of race: yet current disparities in health outcomes indicate that is frequently not occurring. People must also be confident that when they do have children, they will have equal rights and equal protections under the law. This need is undermined by current racist law enforcement practices and other discriminatory policies. Reproductive rights are not truly meaningful so long as communities of color face these obstacles.

Agree /Disagree: _____



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SAMPLE NON-PARTISAN VOTER GUIDE

VOTE: Tuesday, November 7, 2017, Polls open 6 am – 9 pm

Each election cycle, the National Institute for Reproductive Health Action Fund PAC works to identify and support pro-choice candidates. We assess candidates and make endorsements based on incumbent voting records, candidate questionnaires, interviews, public statements, and information from community leaders.

VOTING RESOURCES: In NYC: Find your polling place and ballot information [<https://nyc.pollsitelocator.com/Search.aspx>]. Outside of NYC: Find your polling place and voter district [<https://voterlookup.elections.state.ny.us>].

CANDIDATE LIST - NEW YORK CITY

POSITION/DISTRICT	CANDIDATE	RATING
NYC Mayor	Bill de Blasio (D)	Pro-Choice - Endorsed
NYC Mayor	Nicole Malliotakis (R)	Anti-Choice
NYC Public Advocate	Letitia James (D)	Pro-Choice - Endorsed
NYC Public Advocate	J.C. Polanco (R)	Unknown
Council District 1	Margaret Chin (D)	Pro-Choice - Endorsed
Council District 1	Christopher Marte (I)	Pro-Choice
Council District 1	Bryan Jung (R)	Unknown
Council District 2	Carlina Rivera (D)	Pro-Choice - Endorsed
Council District 2	Jimmy McMillan (R)	Anti-Choice
Council District 3	Corey Johnson (D)	Pro-Choice - Endorsed

Source: National Institute for Reproductive Health Action Fund PAC, 2017 New York City election