

TIPSHEET:

Investigating state and local government

Top 10 databases to have on your computer:

- ₪ State campaign finance data
- ₪ Local (county, city) campaign finance data
- ₪ State contracts (professional/technical AND commodities)
- ₪ Local contracts
- ₪ State and local grants to non-profits
- ₪ Roster of state and local employees that includes job title, hire date, contact information, pay, disciplinary actions, changes in jobs, etc.
- ₪ Precinct level election results going back 5 to 10 years. Political professionals know a district down to this level—so should you. This becomes important when doling out contracts, public works projects, parking tickets, snowplowing, etc...Not every state and local government does business politically, but you might be surprised.
- ₪ Statements of economic interest for state and local officials. Most officials—appointed or elected—have to fill out some sort of form that reveals their personal economic ties: Property, businesses, stock, etc. Having these can immediately reveal potential conflicts of interest.
- ₪ Property records for your coverage area. Is a candidate a slumlord? Is a big contributor getting a zoning break for his property? Who owns the right of way for that new highway that's about to be approved?
- ₪ Lobbyist data. Who's lobbying for whom? Is the former lawmaker who railed against the "special interests" now shilling for Big Tobacco? Is a lobbyist you're interested in also lobbying for anyone else? How much did that industry spend to influence lawmakers?

TOPICS:

- ₪ Campaign finance.
- ₪ Lobbying and other influence-peddling
- ₪ Zoning, redlining and other shady deals
- ₪ Contracting. Any payback for favors or services rendered?
- ₪ Conflicts of interest. Any bankers sponsoring legislation that would make them richer? Anyone serving their industry more than their constituents?
- ₪ Outside business deals. Does the nominally upstanding lawmaker or city council member run some shady business on the side? One Long Island politician owned a stake in the region's largest chain of strip clubs...

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