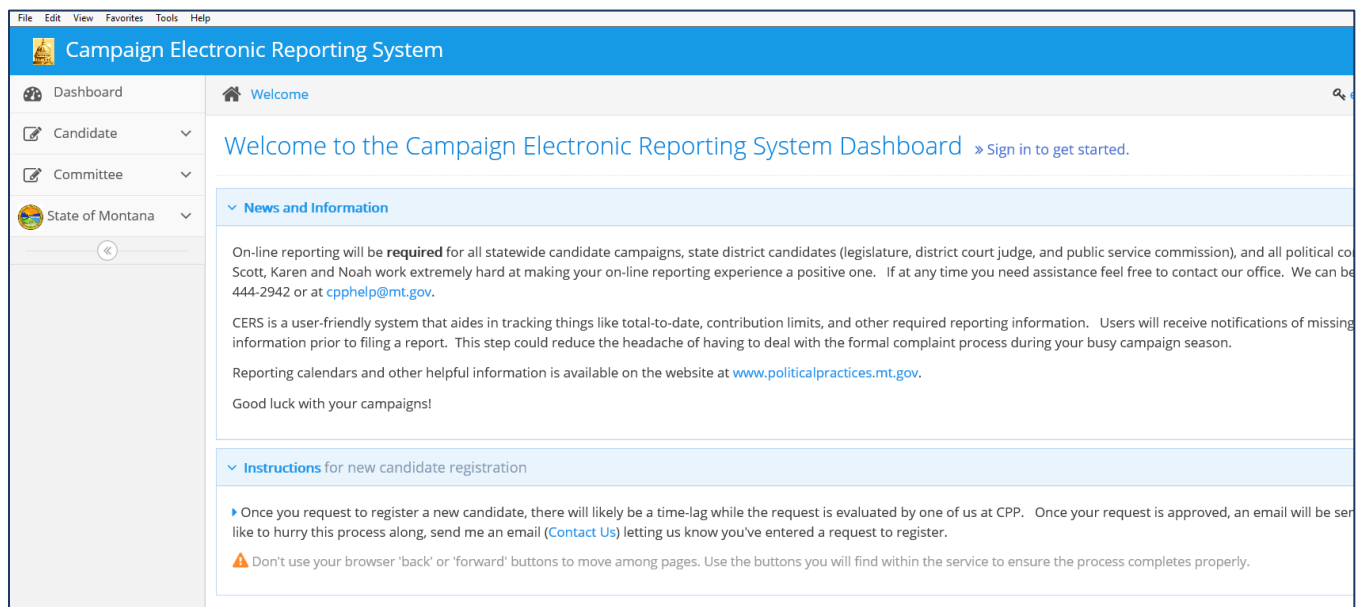


# Candidate Guide to Navigating the Campaign Electronic Reporting System (CERS)



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Updated December 2019

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## Introduction to the Campaign Electronic Reporting System

### What is the Campaign Electronic Reporting System (CERS)?

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CERS is a user-friendly system that helps candidates and committees disclose and report the money they receive and spend to support or oppose candidates and ballot issues.

Montana's campaign finance laws ensure that the public can engage with a transparent reporting of money in elections. CERS makes campaign finance reports publicly available. Candidates and committees ensure transparency in Montana's democratic processes by periodically filing legally-required campaign finance reports.

The COPP reviews all financial reports filed by candidates and committees ([13-37-121\[1\], MCA](#)). COPP Compliance Specialists are available full-time during work hours (8:00 am to 5:00 pm, Monday-Friday) to provide campaign finance reporting support to candidates and committees.

### Who must use CERS to register and for campaign finance reporting?

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As of October 2019, and in accordance with [13-37-225](#) and [226 MCA](#), all candidates must:

1. File all forms electronically in the Campaign Electronic Reporting System (CERS).
2. All candidates will follow the same reporting schedule (See the [Reporting Calendars](#) webpage for report periods and report due dates).

When you file a Statement of Candidate in CERS, you must first create a CERS account. This same account will be used to enter campaign finance reports. Creating a CERS account and filing a Statement of Candidate is detailed below in Part 1.

## Part 1: Create an Account and File a Statement of Candidate

### Step 1: Access ePass and Create a User Login

- To register a candidate or a candidate’s campaign using the CERS system, you will first need to log into the CERS system ([Guide to Registering as a Candidate](#)). Access the CERS database through <https://camptrackext.mt.gov/CampaignTracker/dashboard>. This link is also available at the COPP’s [Online Services](#) page, through the “Access the Campaign Electronic Reporting System (CERS)” link.
- From the CERS dashboard, select the **Access my Accounts** icon. This will take you to the ePass Montana login page.
- Login via ePass Montana. If you already have an active ePass Montana account, you may log in using that username and password. If you do not already have an active ePass account or cannot remember your login information, ePass gives you the option to create a new account (See the text: *If you do not have an account, you can create one [here](#)*).
- After you successfully login via ePass, you will automatically be redirected back to CERS. If you have successfully logged in, you will see your username in the upper right corner in CERS.

After logging in, you will see the below image. To register a new candidate or campaign, make sure you have selected the **Candidates** tab, and then click **Add new registration**.

Welcome to the Campaign Electronic Reporting System » You are now logged in.

Candidates Committees Access ID Search

Candidate List

Display 5 records Search:

|                          | Candidate Name | Year | Status | C-3 | Address                               | Campaign       | Office                | County        |
|--------------------------|----------------|------|--------|-----|---------------------------------------|----------------|-----------------------|---------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | [REDACTED]     | 2019 | Closed | Yes | 123 MailingAddress, Helena, MT 59601  | City           | City Treasurer        | Lewis & Clark |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | [REDACTED]     | 2018 | Active | No  | 1234 Big Dreams Way, Helena, MT 59601 | State District | House District No. 01 | Lewis & Clark |

Showing 1 to 2 of 2 entries

« < 1 > »

✓ Add New Registration ✓ View Registration ✓ Amend Registration ✓ File/View C-3 ✓ Finance Reports

## Step 2: Determine if Your Candidate Name Already Exists in CERS. If Needed, Register Name

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The screenshot shows a web application interface for searching candidates. At the top, there are tabs for 'Candidates', 'Committees', 'Access ID', and 'Search'. On the left, a sidebar lists search options: 'Candidate Search', 'Committee Search', 'Contribution Search', and 'Expenditure Search'. The main content area contains four input fields: 'Last Name' (with placeholder 'LastName'), 'First Name' (with placeholder 'FirstName'), 'Middle Initial', and 'Election Year' (a dropdown menu). At the bottom of the form, there are three buttons: 'Add New Registration' (highlighted in yellow), 'Search Candidate', and 'Reset'.

Before you can add a new registration, the CERS system requires you to search for the candidate's name in case the candidate already created a candidate CERS account. To search:

1. Fill out the **Candidate** name and the election year.
2. Then, click the **Search Candidate** button.
  - *If the candidate previously registered* in the CERS system for a prior election year, select that candidate by clicking the box to the left of the prior registration for that candidate, and select the **Add New Registration** icon.
  - *If the candidate's name does come up* for the current election year, that means that the candidate has already registered in the CERS system for that current election year. If this is the case, ***please contact the COPP for assistance accessing the existing account*** instead of creating a second profile.
  - *If the candidate's name does not come up* from a search, click **Add New Registration** to add a new registration for that candidate for the current election year.

## Step 3: Enter in Your Candidate Campaign Information

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1. Click the upper dropdown option from the Statement of Candidate form and select your **Campaign Type** (City, County, School, State District, or Statewide).
  - a. Are you uncertain which specific office you will run for? Read about your options for filing as an exploratory candidate [here](#).
2. Fill out all information in the **Candidate Information** section.
  - a. In the section for **Affidavit of Reporting Status** (***city, school, and county candidates only***), select the correct 'box' designation. Choose B box for campaigns that will spend and receive under \$500 combined, or C box for campaigns that will spend and receive over \$500 combined.
3. Fill out information in the **Campaign Treasurer Information** section.
  - a. A treasurer must be appointed and certified on the Statement of Candidate form. Candidates can appoint themselves to be their own treasurers. If there are changes, an amended candidate statement (C-1 or C-1A form) must be submitted within 5 days.
  - b. Treasurers are responsible for depositing and disbursing funds and keeping accurate accounts. The treasurer and deputy treasurer are the only people authorized to make deposits or draw checks on the campaign account.
  - c. Often candidates appoint themselves as either treasurer or deputy treasurer so they have access to their campaign accounts.
4. If relevant to your campaign, fill out the **Deputy Treasurer Information** section. Not all campaigns will have a Deputy Treasurer. You will need to select the purple **Add** button, enter in the deputy treasurer's information, and click **Submit**.
5. When all candidate information is entered, select **Save** at the bottom of the page.
6. Verify all candidate information is correct. If you need to make edits, click the **Edit Information** button, update info, and then click **Save**.
7. Certify all information is true by clicking the **Certification** box at the bottom of the page.
8. Select **Submit and File**.
9. You will now receive an email verifying your successful filing to the email address you provided.
10. You have the option to file a Form C-3 ([Code of Fair Campaign Practices](#)) in CERS. Any candidate who desires to subscribe to the Code of Fair Campaign Practices may file a Form C-3. Signing the form is voluntary, and a failure or refusal to sign is not a violation of election laws.
11. You will now be able to navigate back to your [CERS homepage](#). From this page, you can:
  - a. Add a new registration or campaign finance report,
  - b. View your registration,
  - c. Amend your candidate statement or a campaign finance report,
  - d. File and view C-3, and
  - e. Create a finance report (Finance Reports).

## Step 4: How to Update a Statement of Candidate

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If any of the information in a candidate's statement of candidate changes, the candidate must file an amended form providing the new information within five days after the change occurs ([13-37-204, MCA](#), [44.11.303\(2\), ARM](#)).

Your candidate registration must be updated in CERS if any of the below information changes:

- The campaign type,
- Candidate contact information (address, email, phone number, etc.),
- Political party,
- Bank information, and the
- Treasurer or deputy treasurer information.

To amend a candidate's registration, navigate to the CERS' homepage, and login via ePass Montana. Then, check the box next to the candidate's name to select their current registration, and click **Amend Registration**. Edit and amend the relevant information in the candidate's Statement of Candidate. Then, check and certify that the registration information is true, complete, and correct, and then select **Submit and File** to save the updates.

## Part 2: Create a Campaign Finance Report

### Select the Campaign Finance Report Type (C-5 or C-7) and Set the Reporting Period

Once logged in to CERS, candidates can easily file campaign financial reports. Simply select the candidate campaign account for the relevant election year and select the blue **Finance Reports** button. From the following page, select **Add New C5** to add a new campaign financial report or **Add New C7**.

- Form C-5 details all contributions received and expenditures made by a campaign during a specific time frame and must be filed periodically by all candidates who will receive or spend a total of \$500 or more for their campaign.
- [Form C7](#), the Notice of Pre-Elections Contributions, must be filed by any candidate who receives \$100 or more from a single source between the 16th day before an election and the date of the election (for both primary and general elections) and must be filed within 2 business days after receipt of a contribution of \$100 or more.

Before you create a new campaign finance report, remember that:

- A new campaign finance report cannot be created if a prior report is pending.
- A candidate accesses their accounts through the candidate dashboard. This page will also list all campaign finance reports previously filed by the candidate. These finance reports can be amended at any time (See Part 9 for details on amending reports).

After creating a new finance report, select the date range the report will cover using the dropdown calendar option (see image below). This time period must mirror the reporting periods as defined on the [COPP's reporting page](#). The time period covered by the report includes up to the fifth day before the due date of the appropriate report. All accounts must be current up to the fifth day before the report due date.

The screenshot displays the CERS reporting interface. At the top, there is a 'Reporting Period:' section with '\*From' and '\*To' date pickers. Below this, a calendar for July 2019 is open, showing the days of the week (Su, Mo, Tu, We, Th, Fr, Sa) and the dates (1-31). The calendar is overlaid on a form that includes tabs for 'Schedule A', 'Schedule B', 'Schedule C', 'Payments', 'Summary', and 'File'. Under the 'Candidate' tab, there are sub-tabs for 'Loans', 'Fundraisers', 'Committee', and 'Individual'. Below these are fields for 'Election Type' and 'In-Kind Descr'. At the bottom of the form, there are buttons for 'Add', 'Edit', and 'Delete'. Below the form, there is a navigation bar with buttons for 'Save', 'Exit', 'Upload', and 'Download', along with a dropdown menu labeled '- Please Select -' and a 'Page 1 of 0' indicator.



Campaign finance information is entered into the CERS system by candidates or treasurers via the following tabs (The functions and purposes of each tab are detailed in Part 3):

**1. Schedule A: Contributions**

By law ([13-1-101\(9\), MCA](#)), a contribution is defined as a “...distribution of money or anything of value to support or oppose a candidate or ballot issue.” If an individual, political committee, or other entity provides a campaign with money or goods or services of value for free or at a reduced rate to support your candidacy, that would be considered a contribution. In **Schedule A**, report: 1) candidate contributions (contributions made by the candidate to their own campaign), 2) loans, 3) fundraisers, 4) committee contributions, and 5) individual contributions (contributions made by individuals other than the candidate).

**2. Schedule B: Expenditures (Expenses)**

By law ([13-1-101 \(17\) \(a\), MCA](#)), an expenditure is defined as “a purchase, payment, distribution, loan, advance, promise, pledge, or gift of money or anything of value made by a candidate or political committee to support or oppose a candidate or ballot issue.” Expenditure details must be disclosed in **Schedule B** using the **Other Expend** subtab. An expenditure is any money a campaign spends in support of that candidate, with limited exceptions (see [13-1-101 \(18\) \(b\), MCA](#)).

**3. Schedule C: Debts**

A candidate must report the full name and mailing address of each person or entity to whom the campaign owes a debt or financial obligation. Debt details must include: the amount, the date the debt or obligation was contracted, and the purpose of the debt or contracted obligation. If the exact amount is unknown at the time of filing, the estimated debt amount must be reported (see [44.11.506 ARM](#)).

**4. Payments**

A candidate must report information about all payments made on the campaign’s outstanding debts or loans in the **Payments** tab. In this tab, previously reported debts or loans can be selected to record payments.

**5. Summary**

The **Summary** tab keeps a running total of money received and spent by the campaign during the current reporting period. The summary details the campaign’s bank balance at the start of the reporting period, all reported contributions received by the campaign, total campaign expenses, and the ending bank balance for both the primary and general election accounts.

**6. File**

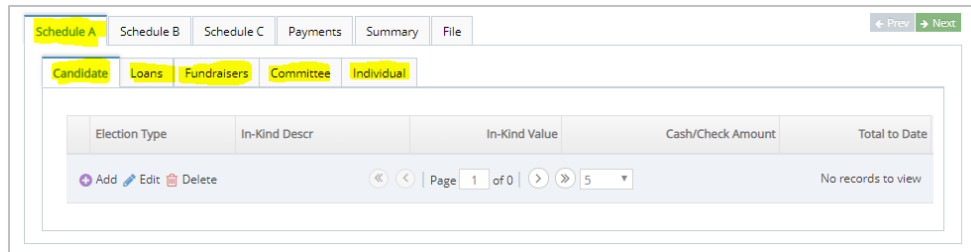
The **File** tab is where the final steps of filing a campaign finance report are completed. To file a report, check the box to certify that all information is correct, and then click the “Certify and File” button.

## Part 3: Add Contributions (Schedule A) in CERS

### Types of Contributions

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Contributions can come from individuals, committees (political committees, political action committees (PACs), and political party committees), and the candidate. [Contributions limits](#) exist for both a primary and general election and apply to all contributions received from committees or individuals (candidate contributions to their own campaign are exempt from contribution limits. If a candidate does not have a primary election, they can receive contributions *only* for the general election.



Enter contributions based on the relevant **Schedule A** subtab:

#### 1. Candidate Contributions

Enter in information about the candidate's contributions (both monetary and in-kind) to their own campaign in the **Candidate** subtab. Candidate contributions would only include personal funds given to the campaign for which the candidate will not seek reimbursement. Candidates should record personal funds given to the campaign as loans to the campaign if they will seek reimbursement.

#### 2. Loans

By definition, any loan to a campaign is a contribution ([ARM, 44.11.405](#)) and all contribution limits apply. Any loan (regardless of its amount) made to the campaign during the current reporting period is reported in the **Loans** subtab, even if the loan is repaid during the same reporting period. A candidate must report personal loans made to their campaign in this subtab (reference [this step-by-step guide](#)).

#### 3. Fundraisers (and rebates, refunds, and interest)

Enter in contributions received from fundraisers, rebates (e.g. if a candidate was invoiced for a project and the total was less than originally paid), refunds, and interest (e.g. from a bank account) in the **Fundraisers** subtab.



- To report contributions from a fundraiser or mass collection event (pass the hat, auction event, raffle, etc.), the following information must be disclosed: Whether the contributions received at the event go to the candidate's primary or general account, the date and location of the event, the type of event, the approximate

number of attendees, the number of tickets sold (if relevant), and the total amount raised ([44.11.406 ARM](#)). Any individual contributions of \$35 or more received at a fundraiser event must be reported using the **Individual** subtab in Schedule A.

- Contributions of \$35 or less received at mass collection events may be recorded and reported in the **Fundraiser** subtab as one lump sum entry.
- Each individual fundraising event held by the campaign must be reported separately.
- Remember: Anonymous contributions are illegal. The source of contributions from a fundraiser must always be recorded, even if an individual's fundraising-related contribution does not meet the \$35 reporting threshold. If the source of a contribution received is not known, that money must be donated to a nonprofit organization.

#### 4. Committee

Contributions received from a political committee must be entered in the **Committee** subtab.

- Committee contribution details must include: whether the contribution is designated for the primary or general election, the date the contribution was received, information about the committee (the committee type, name, and the address), and whether the contribution was a monetary or in-kind contribution.
- All in-kind contributions must include a description of the specific items or services received by the campaign.
- [Committee contribution limits](#) apply and aggregate contributions are tracked and displayed in CERS.

#### 5. Individual

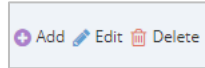
Contributions received from individuals must be entered in the "Individuals" tab.

- Individual contribution details must include whether the contribution is designated for the primary or general election, the date the contribution was received, information about the individual (name, address, employer and occupation are required for individuals who contribute \$35 or more), and whether it was a monetary or in-kind contribution.
- **Tip:** "Consultant" is too vague when detailing a contributor's occupation. Be specific. Instead, enter the specific type of consultant: "Marketing consultant," "media consultant," "political strategy consultant," "Mary Kay consultant."
- All in-kind contributions must include a description of the specific items or services received by the campaign.

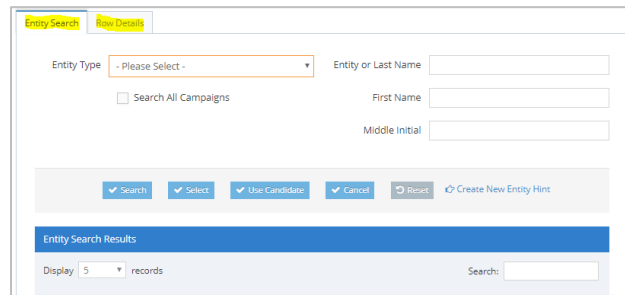
## Add a New Contribution

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To add in contribution information, open the relevant Schedule A subtab (Candidate, Loans, Fundraisers, Committee, Individual), and select the purple **Add** button. Contribution information can also be **edited** and **deleted** in the subtabs.



All contribution types *except* the **Candidate** subtab will be redirected to a screen with an **Entity Search** and a **Row Details** tab (see image below).

A screenshot of a web application interface. At the top, there are two tabs: 'Entity Search' (highlighted in yellow) and 'Row Details'. Below the tabs, there is a search form with a dropdown menu for 'Entity Type' (set to '- Please Select -'), a text input for 'Entity or Last Name', a checkbox for 'Search All Campaigns', and text inputs for 'First Name' and 'Middle Initial'. Below the form is a row of buttons: 'Search', 'Select', 'Use Candidate', 'Cancel', 'Reset', and 'Create New Entity Hint'. At the bottom, there is a section titled 'Entity Search Results' with a 'Display' dropdown set to '5 records' and a 'Search:' input field.

The **Entity Search** tab gives users the option to auto-populate previously saved contributor information. When adding a loan, fundraiser, committee, or individual contribution, once the purple **Add** button has been selected, the **Entity Search** option will appear. If an individual or entity has already been entered into CERS, this search option allows the information to be pulled up and does not require a manual entry.

To search for an individual or entity,

1. Select the **Entity Type** (Bank, Business, or Individual),
2. Enter in the entity or individual's name information, and
3. Select the **Search** button to see if the entity or individual already exists in the system.
  - *If* no "Entity Search Results" appear, click the **Row Details** tab to manually enter the information.
  - *If* the correct information is in the "Entity Search Results" section, check the box next to the relevant entity, and hit **Select**. You will then be redirected automatically to the **Row Details** screen.

The **Row Details** tab is where users enter specific and identifying information about campaign contributions.

1. Select the "Election Type" to designate which election the contribution will support (Primary or General),
2. The date the contribution was received (the date the contribution was received by the campaign must be used, ***NOT*** the date the contributions was deposited into the campaign account),
3. Enter information to identify the contributor source (e.g. the contributor's name, address, occupation and employer for individual contributions, the committee name and address for committee contributions).
4. An **in-kind contribution** means the furnishing of services, property, or rights without charge or at a charge which is less than fair market value ([44.11.702, ARM](#)). Frequently, in-kind contributions come in the form of services for which charges usually are made but which are rendered to the campaign free of charge or at a discounted amount. If something is sold to the campaign at less than fair market value, the difference must be recorded as an in-kind contribution. A detailed description is required for all in-kind contributions.
5. The **Purpose/Description** section must describe the in-kind contribution the candidate has reported receiving and must be detailed enough to distinguish between items or services that may be similar in nature.

Once all contribution details have been entered into the **Row Details** section, select the **Submit** button, and then select the blue **Save** button. The **Save** button must be selected after every entry, or the CERS system may override that entry or duplicate the entity for each subsequent entry you make.

## Often-Missed Contributions

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### 1. *Reporting Payment for a Candidate's Personal Expenditure Made on Behalf of Their Campaign:*

For a candidate to reimburse themselves for personal expenditures made on behalf of the campaign, the candidate must first report the activity as a loan provided to the campaign. This provides candidates two (2) options:

**Option 1** is for the candidate to provide a direct monetary loan from their personal bank account to the campaign, depositing those funds in the campaign bank account. This monetary transfer would be reported as a loan from the candidate in Schedule A on the relevant campaign financial report. A candidate may use campaign funds to reimburse themselves for any monetary loan they have made to their own campaign. Reimbursement payments made from the campaign account would be recorded using the Payments tab.

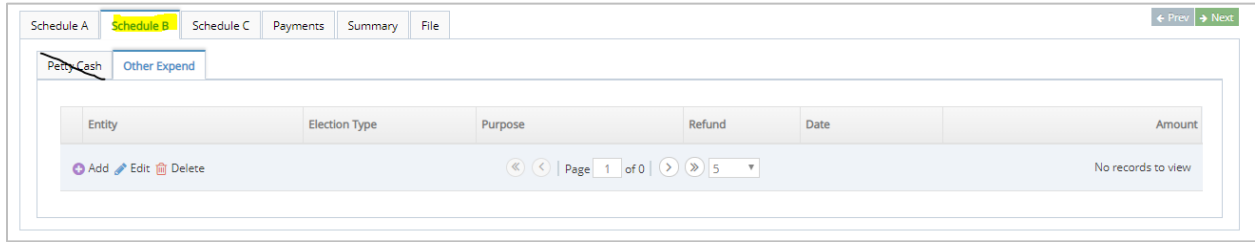
**Option 2** is for a candidate to report each campaign expenditure made using their personal bank account or personal funds as an In-Kind loan from the candidate in Schedule A. Each In-Kind loan must provide the date the activity was carried out, the monetary value of the activity, the name of the vendor or business entity the candidate originally paid, and a description of the nature of the specific item/s or service/s provided. This description would require the same level of detail or information as is required for campaign expenditures. Any reimbursement payments made from the campaign account back to the candidate would be recorded using the Payments tab.

**BEST PRACTICES REMINDER:** The Office of the Commissioner of Political Practices strongly recommends that candidates run every campaign expenditure out of their campaign bank account.

- Best practices would be for candidates to obtain a debit card attached to the campaign bank account to use for all campaign expenditures. Exclusive use of a debit card connected to the campaign bank account when making campaign expenditures ensures that campaign funds are utilized and simplifies reporting requirements for the candidate.

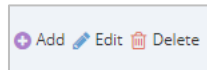
- Exclusive use of a campaign debit card also reduces the chances that a candidate would need to provide personal banking records or other personal financial information to the COPP in the event a campaign finance complaint is filed. Limited use of a candidate's personal bank account or funds for campaign purposes is allowable if the activity is properly reported and disclosed by the candidate.

## Part 4: Add Expenditures (Schedule B) in CERS

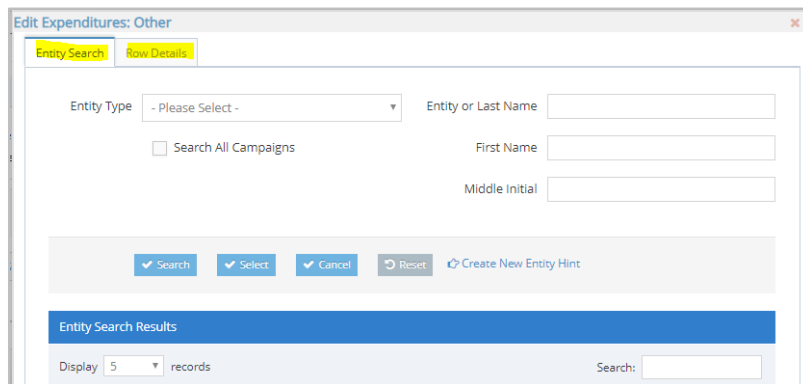


All campaign expenditures must be entered in **Schedule B**, specifically the **Other Expend** subtab.

To add in a candidate expenditure, select the **Other Expend** subtab, and click the purple **Add** button. Expenditure information can also be **edited** and **deleted** in this subtab.



In the next screen, there will be an **Entity Search** and a **Row Details** tab (see image below).



The **Entity Search** tab gives users the option to auto-populate previously entered expenditure information. If an individual or entity has already been entered into CERS, this search option allows the information to be pulled up and does not require a manual entry.

To search for an individual or entity to identify them as the source of an expenditure,

1. Select the **Entity Type** (Bank, Business, or Individual),
2. Enter in the entity or individual's name, and
3. Select the **Search** button to see if the entity or individual already exists in the system.
  - If the correct information is in the "Entity Search Results" section, check the box next to the relevant entity, and hit **Select**. You will then be redirected automatically to the **Row Details** screen.
  - If no "Entity Search Results" appear, click **Create New Entity** to manually enter the information. Once the information is entered, click **Submit**. The next screen redirects to the **Row Details** screen.

The **Row Details** tab is where users enter specific and identifying information about campaign expenditures.

1. Select "Election Type" to designate which election the expenditure will support (General or Primary).
2. "Date" represents the date the expenditure was paid to the individual, business, or other entity.
3. Under "Purpose," candidates are required to disclose expenditure details to provide enough detail so expenditures are both distinguishable from other expenses and are easily attributed back to their source.
  - Paid communications must identify: 1) the material's platform/medium (e.g. newspaper ad, Facebook boosted post, Google banner ad, billboard, etc.), 2) quantity of the materials or the dates the paid material ran, and 3) the material's subject matter. See [this link](#) for guidance on reporting paid communications.
  - **PLEASE NOTE** that the CERS software limits a **Purpose** description to a 150-character limit. If more detail is needed, include an addendum. To add an addendum, first, note in the **Purpose** description "See addendum." Then, email a copy of the addendum to [cppcompliance@mt.gov](mailto:cppcompliance@mt.gov) and explain that the addendum goes with the report dated xx/xx/xxxx-xx/xx/xxxx. While the COPP will make sure the addendum is saved with the report and easily available for the public to find, addendums cannot be uploaded or entered directly into CERS by the COPP.

Once an expenditure's details have been entered into the **Row Details** section, select the **Submit** button, and then select the blue **Save** button. The **Save** button must be selected after every entry, or the CERS system may override that entry or duplicate the entry for each subsequent entry you make.



## Often-Missed Expenditures

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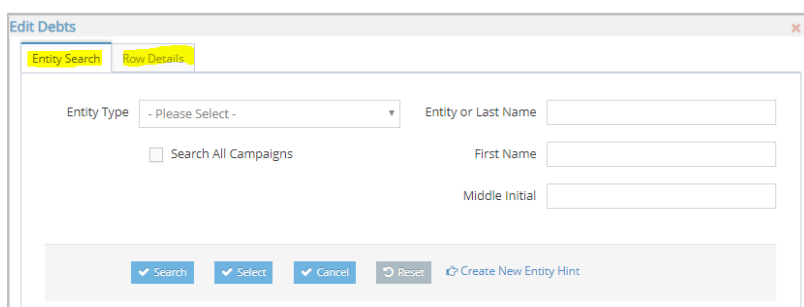
1. *Candidate Filing Fee*: The candidate's filing fee is a mandatory reportable expenditure. The filing fee can be paid either out of the candidate's campaign account (if funds are available), or out-of-pocket by the candidate using personal funds. If personal funds are used, the filing fee needs to be reported as either an in-kind candidate contribution (if the candidate does not want to be reimbursed for that expense) or as an in-kind candidate loan (if the candidate wants to be reimbursed).
2. *Social media*: Any campaign that spends money on social media ads must disclose this expenditure with the same level of detail as any other paid communication expenditure. This expenditure listing must directly reference the fact that the material was a social media ad by providing the date(s) the ad ran, the social media platform the ad appeared on, and a brief description of the subject matter. Reference the [Expenditures: Paid Communications](#) webpage and [this guide](#) to reporting Facebook expenditures.
3. *Vendor Fees*: Vendor fees for any contribution-processing vendor (e.g. PayPal, ActBlue, Revv, etc.) must be reported as an expenditure.
  - If a vendor fee applies to online contribution platforms, the following detail must be included: 1) the vendor name as the "entity" (e.g. PayPal, ActBlue, etc.), 2) the election relevant to the contribution fees, and 3) under purpose, the dates and total value of the contributions represented by the fees. For example: "\$35 in ActBlue fees for \$185 in contributions received from 10/1-10/15/19."
4. *Gas and Mileage*: Gas and mileage must be reported as an expenditure if paid for from the campaign account (e.g. with a campaign's debit card).
  - If the candidate's campaign uses a rental car for campaign-related expenses, the cost of the rental car and the cost of fuel must each be reported as expenditures.
  - The COPP recommends that candidates who use their personal vehicle for campaign-related travel report the use of the vehicle and fuel costs based on [the federal reimbursement rate](#), which accounts for both the cost of the gas and the cost of the vehicle's use. For example: a 480-mile roundtrip from Billings to Helena, has a value of \$278.40 (480 x \$0.58).
  - If a candidate uses their personal vehicle, they would report the mileage as either an in-kind loan (if they seek reimbursement from the campaign) or as an in-kind contribution.
5. *Expenses related to paid communications* (e.g. Facebook, billboard, newspaper, or radio ads) must report: the 1) platform, 2) quantities (the number of materials/ads and/or the dates the ad(s) ran, and the 3) subject matter of the ads. In-depth details are available on the COPP's [Expenditures: Paid Communications](#) webpage.

## Part 5: Add Debts (Schedule C- Debts) in CERS

All debts or other monetary obligations owed by a campaign must be reported in Schedule C.

The full name and complete mailing address of the individual or business to whom the debt is owed, a detailed description of the debt or loan, the date incurred, and whether the obligation is for the primary or the general election must be reported. If the exact amount of a debt or obligation is not known, the estimated amount must be reported ([44.10.525\(2\), ARM](#)).

To add a new debt or unpaid loan, click the purple **Add** button under the grey **Entity** bar. Just like when a contribution or expenditure is added, the next screen will have two tabs: **Entity Search** and **Row Details**.

The image shows a screenshot of a web application window titled "Edit Debts". At the top, there are two tabs: "Entity Search" (which is highlighted in yellow) and "Row Details". Below the tabs, the form contains several input fields: a dropdown menu for "Entity Type" with the text "- Please Select -", a text box for "Entity or Last Name", a checkbox labeled "Search All Campaigns", a text box for "First Name", and a text box for "Middle Initial". At the bottom of the form, there is a row of five buttons: "Search" (with a checkmark icon), "Select" (with a checkmark icon), "Cancel" (with a checkmark icon), "Reset" (with a circular arrow icon), and "Create New Entity Hint" (with a plus icon).

The **Entity Search** tab gives users the option to auto-populate a previously entered entity or individual's information. If the entity has already been entered into CERS, this search option allows the information to be pulled up and does not require a manual entry.

To search for an individual or entity to identify them as the source of a loan or debt,

1. Select the **Entity Type** (Bank, Business, or Individual),
2. Enter in the entity or individual's name, and
3. Select the **Search** button to see if the entity or individual already exists in the system.
  - If the correct information is in the "Entity Search Results" section, check the box next to the relevant entity, and hit **Select**. You will then be redirected automatically to the **Row Details** screen.
  - If no "Entity Search Results" appear, click **Create New Entity** to manually enter the information. Once the information is entered, click **Submit**. The next screen redirects to the **Row Details** screen.

The **Row Details** tab is where users enter specific and identifying information about campaign debts and loans.

1. Select the "Election Type" to designate which election the expenditure will support (Primary or General).
2. The "Date" reported must be the date the debt or obligation owed to an individual, business, or other entity was incurred.
  - Under "Purpose," candidates are required to describe debts owed with the same level of detail as is required of expenditures.

- PLEASE NOTE that the CERS software limits a "Purpose" description to a 150-character limit. If more detail is needed, include an addendum. To add an addendum, first, note in the "purpose" description "See addendum." Then, email a copy of the addendum to [cppcompliance@mt.gov](mailto:cppcompliance@mt.gov) and explain that the addendum goes with the report dated xx/xx/xxxx-xx/xx/xxxx. While the COPP will make sure the addendum is saved with the report and easily available for the public to find, addendums cannot be uploaded or entered directly into CERS by the COPP.

Once a new debt has been entered into the **Row Details** section, select the **Submit** button, and then select the blue **Save** button. The **Save** button must be selected after every entry, or the CERS system may override that entry or duplicate the entity for each subsequent entry you make.

## Part 6: Add Payments (on Debts and Loans) in CERS

All outstanding loans reported in **Schedule A** and debts or obligations reported in **Schedule C** will appear in the **Payments** tab. To enter payments on a loan or debt, select the check box next to the relevant loan or debt in the **Payments** tab. Then, under "Payment History," click the purple **+ Add** button to record a new payment.

Enter in the date of the loan or debt payment, the amount paid, click **Submit**, and then **Save**. The **Save** button must be selected after every entry, or the CERS system may override that entry or duplicate the entity for each subsequent entry you make.

## Part 7: Understand the Summary Tab

The **Summary** tab keeps a running total of money received and spent by the campaign during the current reporting period. The **Summary** tab details the campaign's bank balance at the start of the reporting period, all monetary contributions received by the campaign, the total amount of all campaign expenditures, and the ending bank balance for both the account (this is done for both the primary and general accounts).

- **Cash in Bank** is the ending balance of the previous report (this will be \$0 for the initial report). Please note that the beginning balance (cash in bank) includes all funds the candidate reported as having received on previous finance reports; this includes both contributions and loans.
- **Receipts** represent all contributions received during the current reporting period. These are added to the **Cash in Bank** balance and reflected in the **Subtotal** amount.
- **Expenditures** represent all campaign expenditures made by the candidate during the current reporting period and are subtracted from the **Subtotal**.
- The difference between the **Subtotal** and current reporting period **Expenditures** is show in the **Cash in Bank – Ending Balance**. This balance should correspond with the candidate's accounts as of the closing date of the reporting period; that is, the fifth day before the report is due.

## Part 8: File a Campaign Finance Report

Select the **File** tab to file a campaign finance report. To file, check the box to certify that all information is correct, and then click the “Certify and File” button.

*If* a campaign finance report needs to be amended later, this is possible by going back to the candidate dashboard, selecting the specific report, and selecting the “Update or Amend Report” button. A candidate has multiple options for closing out a report. Reference this [FAQ for Closing out a Candidate Campaign Account](#).

Filing options:

- **Display contributors’ names and addresses that contributed < \$35?** Candidates may select this option if they prefer that their finance report shows every individual contribution of less than \$35 received. If the option is not selected, CERS automatically aggregates those contributions and includes them as one mass contribution on the public view version of the report.
- The **Is this a closing report?** option should only be selected once all campaign debts have been paid off and the candidate does not intend to file any future C5 finance reports. See [this link](#) for details about how to close a campaign account and the proper ways to disperse of surplus funds.

## Part 9: Campaign Finance Report Review Process

The COPP reviews all campaign finance reports and sends the candidate an **Inspection Report**.

An Inspection Report is a COPP inspection that occurs each time a candidate files a campaign finance report leading up to an election. The Inspection Report notes all changes a candidate must make to each campaign finance report in order to comply with Montana law. A CFR Inspection Report will only detail one specific financial report, which will be stated in the “Reference Report” field. [Click here](#) to see a sample Inspection Report.

An **Exam** occurs after an election and serves as a final and cumulative inspection of all financial reports filed by a candidate or committee ( [13-37-123, MCA](#)). All campaign finance reports are included in the **Exam**, and the COPP alerts the candidate or committee to all outstanding items or issues that must be addressed by the candidate or committee.

The COPP is available to assist candidates and committees in correcting or addressing all items noted in the CFR Compliance report. However, it is the responsibility of the candidate or committee to ensure all reporting requirements have been met.

With every **Inspection Report** and the **Exam**, the candidate must amend the specific campaign finance report where issues are noted. A campaign finance report can be amended by navigating back to the candidate dashboard and selecting the blue **Finance Reports** button. Then, select the relevant campaign finance report and select **Update or Amend Report**. Update information as necessary. Save changes. Finally, re-file the campaign finance report (Read more about the COPP’s Inspection Report and Exam process [here](#)).

## Part 10: Post-Election Options for a Campaign Account

This Part 10: Post-Election Options section contains information for: 1) candidates who do not continue after the primary, and 2) candidates who continue to the primary.

### Surplus Campaign Funds after the Primary Election

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**If you don't advance to the general after the primary election**, and your primary campaign account has surplus funds, you have two options for the funds. A candidate may:

- 1) Return the contributions to contributors, or
- 2) Donate the funds to a non-profit (this must be reported in a C-5 report as a campaign expenditure).

**Note:** A candidate may not contribute surplus campaign funds to another campaign, including the candidate's own future campaign (for example, running for the same office during the next election), or use the funds for personal benefit.

**If you do advance to the general election**, leftover funds may be moved from a candidate's primary account to the general account.

- To report this in a C-5, report the transfer in the C-5 that covers the date the money was transferred. You will report the removal of money from the primary account as a primary expenditure under Schedule B. Then, you will report the transfer of the primary funds to your general campaign account under Schedule A, as a general fundraiser contribution.

**If you dispose of all campaign funds by your post-general C-5 reporting deadline**, all transactions can be detailed on the post-general C-5 report. Your options to dispose of funds by the post-general C-5 due date are to:

- 1) Return the funds to contributors. These returned contributions would be reported in your post-general C-5 report as an expenditure. You must include the full name and mailing address of the recipient.
- 2) Donate the funds to a nonprofit. Report this transaction in a C-5 report as an expenditure.

**If you have funds remaining after the post-general C-5 report deadline**, you must dispose of the surplus funds within 120 days after you've filed your closing C-5 campaign finance report. You have the following options for the surplus funds:

- 1) Donate the funds to a nonprofit. These donations must be reported on a [C-118](#) campaign finance form.
- 2) If elected, you can establish a constituent services account. This requires you to file a [C-118C form](#) and put the money in a bank account with "constituent services" in the account title. Please note that there are specific legal requirements for a constituent services account:
  - a. You will need to include a copy of the transaction where you've moved money from a campaign account to a constituent services account.
  - b. The C-118 C form must be filed with 135 days after you've filed a closing campaign report.
  - c. Any candidate who opens a constituent services account is required to file C-8 reports.
  - d. Funds in a constituent services account are restricted to being used for certain activities and require detailed accounting and period reports. See [13-37-204](#) and [402, MCA](#) and [44.11.701](#), [44.11.703-705](#), [44.11.707-711](#) ARM.

### **To pay down campaign debt, you can continue to receive contributions after an election.**

- For example, if you have primary campaign debt, whether you continue to the primary election or not, you can continue to receive primary contributions to pay the campaign loans or debts down.
- Please note that contribution limits apply, they apply per election, and each contribution must be designated for either your campaign's primary or general account and kept separate. You can continue to receive contributions designated for a specific campaign as long as the individual or entity has not reached their contribution limit for that specific election. This explains why general election contributions cannot be applied retroactively to debt accrued and reflected by your primary campaign account.
- Only primary contributions can be applied to primary loans or debts, and only general contributions can be applied to general loans or debts.

**If you will no longer seek out contributions to pay for your campaign's debts or loans, you have a few options to close your account and settle outstanding loans and debts:**

1. **Option 1:** You can forgive loans you made, as the candidate, to your campaign. First, the self-loan must already have been reported as a loan in a previous C-5 report. Then, to forgive your personal loan to your campaign, simply email the COPP at [cppcompliance@mt.gov](mailto:cppcompliance@mt.gov) and state, "I am forgiving my candidate loan of \$XXXXX money for my campaign."
2. **Option 2:** If your campaign owes outstanding loans and/or debts made to entities that are not yourself (e.g. to a printing company, a vendor, a business, etc.), you may use your personal funds (not your campaign funds) to pay off those obligations.
  - i. You will report this as an in-kind loan to your campaign (under Schedule A, Loans [Use the blue "Use Candidate" button in the "Entity Search" section], list the "Purpose" as "campaign debt/loan repayment," or something similar). This will then create a candidate loan for the pending loans or debt balance. Your account will continue to reflect a negative balance with this in-kind candidate loan.
  - ii. Then, 'forgive' this 'new' loan by emailing [cppcompliance@mt.gov](mailto:cppcompliance@mt.gov) and stating in the email that you will not personally seek reimbursement from the campaign for this in-kind loan, and that the loan was made to pay off existing campaign obligations. You must include the 1) vendor, 2) date, and 3) amount information for those obligations in the email. This explanation is needed because your CERS account will continue to reflect a negative balance for the campaign even after this activity.

## Part 11: Filing a Closing Account

**Every candidate must file a closing report. Closing reports must be filed when all debts and obligations are satisfied and no further campaign activity is anticipated following an election.**

Some campaigns have continued to make expenditures after the election that are not campaign related. This is not permissible. If all the debts and obligations of the campaign have been met, the closing report has been submitted and there is still a balance in the campaign account the campaign has several options to choose from to dispose of the surplus funds or property. Review Part 10 to understand your options on pending debt and loans or surplus campaign funds.

A closing report is simply a final C-5 that is filed as a closing report. This can also be the candidate's required post-general C-5 report if no campaign account transactions (e.g. paying back outstanding loans or debts) remain.

To file a report as a closing report, simply check the "Is this a closing report" box on the File tab (see below image), certify the information is true, complete, and correct, and file the report.

The screenshot shows a web interface for filing a report. At the top, there are tabs for 'Schedule A', 'Schedule B', 'Schedule C', 'Payments', 'Summary', and 'File'. The 'File' tab is active. Below the tabs is a section titled 'Certify and File'. It contains a checkbox labeled 'Display contributors name and address that contributed < \$35?' which is unchecked. Below that is a checkbox labeled 'Is this a closing report?' which is checked and highlighted in yellow. Underneath is a blue bar with the word 'Certification'. Below the bar is a checkbox labeled 'I certify the foregoing report of campaign finances is true, complete and correct to th'. At the bottom of the form are two buttons: 'Certify and File' and 'View Report', both with checkmarks.





## Campaign Finance Resources

It is a COPP priority that campaign finance be an accessible subject for voters, candidates, committees, lobbyists, and all Montanans. For more details on campaign finance requirements for candidates and treasurers, each candidate and treasurer should familiarize themselves with this [Accounting and reporting Manual for Candidates and Treasurers](#).

This list has links to all the webpages this guide referenced:

- [Campaign Finance Laws](#)
- [Guide to Registering as a Candidate](#)
- [Filing as an Exploratory Candidate](#)
- [How to Report a Self-Loan to Your Candidate Campaign Account](#)
- [How to Report a Paid Communications, Attribution \(Paid for By\) Information](#)
- [Candidate Campaign Finance Forms](#)
- [Candidate Reporting Calendar](#)
- [Contribution Limits](#)
- [The COPP's Inspection and Exam Process](#)
- [How to Close out a Candidate Campaign Finance Account](#)

Candidates and treasurers should contact the COPP office when assistance is needed. We are available to support all candidates and treasurers!

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