



CCN Election Assignment Templates

Assignment 5: Pitch a 2024 election feature story to your “editor”

The Center for Community News' Election & Democracy Program has created a series of sample templates for faculty to give to students for the Fall 2024 semester. Faculty are welcome to use any and all of these and amend them as they see fit for their classes.

For any questions, comments or suggestions, email Elections & Democracy Program Manager Sarah Gamard at scbgamard@gmail.com.

When to assign this project: October to December

Why: Firstly, it's a great opportunity for students to go in-depth on important elections in their community. Secondly, in some cases, they might be the only reporter in the whole state covering these races. What a great opportunity for the students and a gift to local readers!

How: After fact-finding for the voter guide, students can and should use this time to write more in-depth stories informed by their initial reporting on the candidates or races in their voter guide profiles. They can start with a “pitch,” which can be its own assignment, followed by a feature story that needs to meet certain criteria, e.g. at least three different sources interviewed and a minimum of 800 words, based on findings from previous reporting this semester on the election. These stories would start before the election and continue after the election. (Note: We plan to share any election-related news produced by cohort-participating programs on a dedicated CCN webpage.)

- We encourage programs to alternatively communicate with participating newsrooms for feature assignments, as they may have other ideas on how students can supplement their coverage. Of course, doing every potential story would require the force of an entire full-time newsroom; but students can pick one or two of stories to supplement community news coverage. In the long run, no matter what, they'll all become more informed, engaged members of our democratic system.
- A piece of advice we heard at AEJMC: If some of your students are not journalism students, or studying other subjects such as nursing or the environment, encourage them to use that unique perspective to inform their story ideas and follow what they are interested in – as long as it's newsworthy.

Assignment: Pitch an election feature story to your “editor”

Requirements:

- After interviewing voters or candidates ahead of the 2024 election, you must make **at least two story pitches** to your professor, i.e. your news “editor,” for follow-up feature stories based on your initial findings.
- The pitch must be short and newsworthy. Once their pitch is green-lighted, write a feature story – minimum 800 words – based on that pitch containing the following:
 - Interviews with at least three new sources
 - A relevant data point from an official source related to their topic
 - At least one multimedia element, e.g. photos, video or data visualization
- Once the story is submitted and edited, it will then be submitted to a real, partnering news publication.
- Deadline: **XXX**

The possibilities of what and how you can report on the election in your community are virtually endless. Be creative! If you’re stuck, here are some ideas:

- Using social media to report on the election in innovative ways that local newsrooms are not already doing, e.g. TikToks, YouTube shorts, or Instagram reels
- Man-on-the-street interviews at the polls
- A deeper dive into voter attitudes in a neighboring community
- Graphics and data visualization related to election laws or key issues
- Explainers on new voting laws
- Explainers/voter guides/deep-dives on ballot initiatives
- Examining voter attitudes in swing districts
- Profiling candidates, e.g. following them for a day as they knock on doors
- Podcasting about the local elections
- Vetting candidates before and after the election
- Profiling and analyzing the makeup of governing bodies pre- and/or post-election
- A photojournalism essay
- Deeper dives and analyses into issues important to young voters or trends in local elections
- Diving into campaign finance reports/ad spending
- FOIA requests to the registrar of what voters wrote in for write-in votes