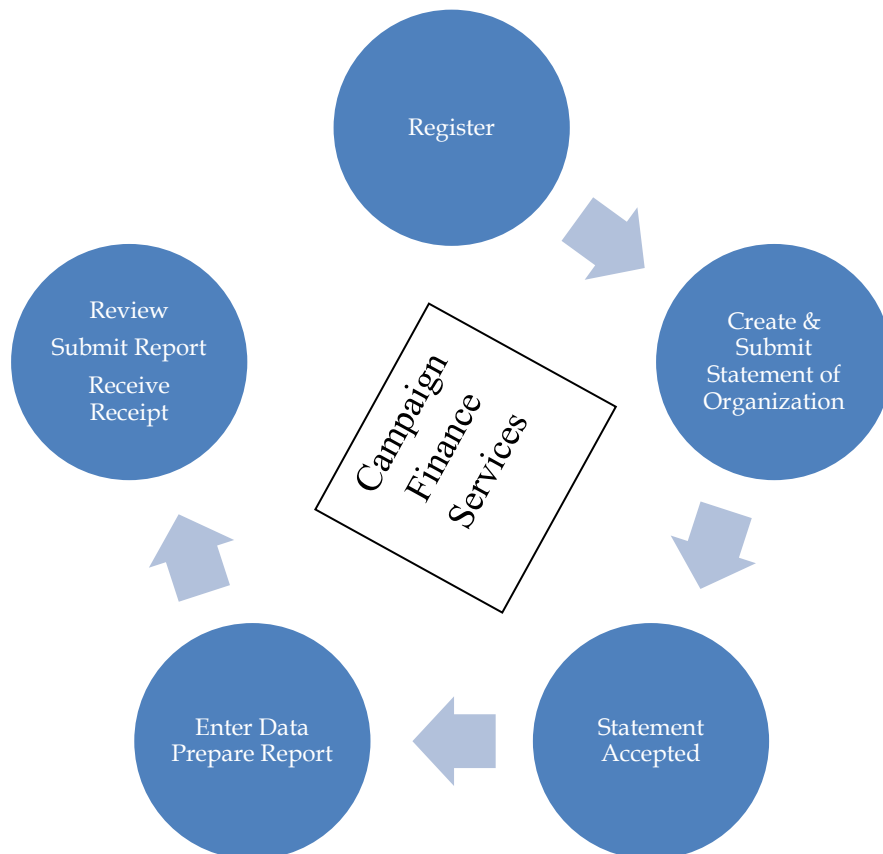




Quick User Guide



★ VIRGINIA ★
DEPARTMENT *of* ELECTIONS

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The Virginia Department of Elections (ELECT) provides, free of charge, an online application for candidates and political committees to file campaign finance reports. As of 2012, COMmittee Electronic Tracking – known as COMET – replaced the desktop VAFiling software, which had been in use since 1999. This guide provides detailed information to assist users with properly reporting all transactions required under state law. For additional information please visit our website at elections.virginia.gov.

Register as a COMET User

All users must first register as a user of COMET. Go to this link: elections.virginia.gov/COMET

1. New users should click on “Register here if you don’t have an account.”
2. Enter your email address and password. Passwords are required to have at least 1 number, 1 upper case character, and 8 or more characters in length.
3. Enter verification letters or numbers shown on your screen in the CAPTCHA box.



If you cannot read the letters or numbers, click on refresh on the vertical blue bar. Continue to refresh until it is readable.

4. Click on the Register button at the bottom right.
5. You will receive a “New Account Confirmation” email. Click on the supplied link to activate your account.



If you do not receive the email, check your spam and/or junk folders for mail from efiler@elections.virginia.gov.

6. Create a contact record. **You must create at least one contact record to use the system.**

Register Your Committee

Choose the statement of organization on the left for your committee type. The committee types to choose from are candidate, federal PAC, inaugural, out of state, political action and political party.

1. Complete the form. If the form is left “Incomplete” you may select the “Save as Draft” radio button.



Remember that saving the form is not the same as submitting the form. Follow the instructions below to “Submit.”

The filing start date is the date of the earliest activity entered in “Committee Activity.” The Statement of Organization must be submitted within ten (10) days of receiving monies, spending monies, opening a bank account, filing a qualifying form or appointing a treasurer.

Once your Statement of Organization is accepted you will see that there is a filing schedule found under Reporting.

Submit the Statement of Organization (SOO)

If you are ready to submit:

1. Select the “Submit statement of Organization” radio button.
2. Click on the Save button on the bottom right of the form.

This will electronically transmit the Statement of Organization (SOO) to the Department of Elections for acceptance.



Remember that your committee is not registered until the Statement of Organization (SOO) has been accepted.

Once your SOO has been accepted, your filing schedule will show under the reporting button. Now you may enter receipts, expenditures, and any loans or debts you have incurred.

View, Print, Download Statement

Statements of Organization can be viewed, printed or amended from the home page by selecting the appropriate tab above the committee name.



When a change is made to the SOO on file, an amended Statement of Organization is required within ten (10) days.

To Amend a Statement of Organization

1. Select the Amend tab.
2. Complete the form. Enter the date changes took effect. Select the “Submit Statement of Organization” radio button.
3. Click on the “Save” button. This electronically transmits the amended Statement of Organization to the Department of Elections for acceptance.
4. Under “Election Information” enter the correct date of election for the office sought.
5. Under “Committee Activity” enter the first date of activity in the appropriate field.

Once the committee has been accepted by the Department of Elections you may begin entering receipts, expenditures and any loans or debts you have incurred.

How to Add a User

Committees may add users to the account. Users may be authorized to complete various actions for the treasurer, such as data entry and/or submitting reports.

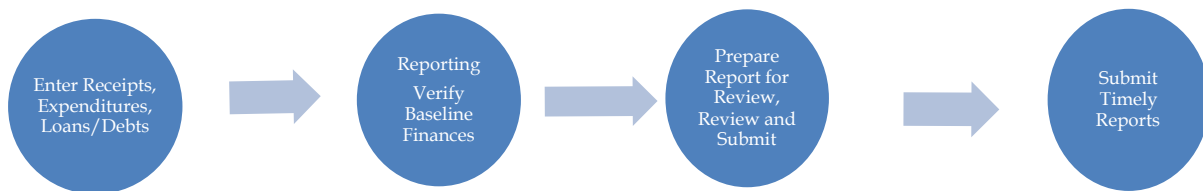
1. The new user must first register as a COMET user.
2. Click on the “Users” tab in the red ribbon.
3. Click on “Add New User” button.
4. Enter the new user’s email address.
5. Check the box “Is Admin” if you want the user to have full access to the account. If the box is not checked the user can only enter data.

Enter Receipts, Expenditures, Loans/Debts

To access or enter data you can either choose or click on a category.

Enter Data

Click on the appropriate tab to enter data. You may choose from Contacts, Expenditures, Loans/ Debts, or Receipts and Reporting.




The COMET information flow

Receipts

- Itemized contributions show on Schedule A.
- Non-itemized contributions show on Schedule G.

Please refer to the Campaign Finance Summary Guide for detailed information. There are restrictions on the use of campaign contributions.

 *In Virginia, committees must disclose all contributions. Contributions in excess of \$100 must be itemized. For each itemized contribution, the committee must also disclose: name, address, occupation or business information, principal place of employment or business. All committees, even those with no activity during the reporting period, must file reports disclosing activity. When contributor and payee information is entered and saved on a form in COMET, it is auto-saved under contacts allowing the user to pre-fill information for repeat contributors.*

Choose the “Type of Receipt” by highlighting the radio button. You have the option of choosing In-Kind Contribution, Refund, Rebate, Interest and Cash. The default receipt type is Cash.

1. Enter the date received and amount of the contribution.
2. When adding contributor information, highlight the radio button for the contributor type. You need to select Individual or Corporate. Enter contributor address and occupation information.
3. Enter a placeholder in the field such as “Request Information” to alert you when you do not have all of the contributor information when the contributor meets the \$100 threshold for itemization. Provide proof of request. You may email or use traditional mail to send this information. ELECT will attach your supplied information to the record.
4. Click on “Save” or, if you have more than one transaction to enter, click on “Save and New.”

Enter transactions as they occur in the event that a large contribution report is required. Every dollar received must have a name attached.

The date received is the date that the contribution is in-hand.

For non-itemized contributions of \$100 and less, COMET shows the total number of contributors and the total amount given by those contributors on Schedule G.

Additionally COMET calculates the aggregate totals for contributors. Contributors that have an aggregate total in the election cycle of more than \$100 are automatically itemized on Schedule A or B.

Report the whole contribution received by a third-party vendor. The per transaction fees report are reported as an expenditure. Fees can be aggregated that occur on the same date.



Enter In-Kind Contributions

- Itemized contributions show on Schedule B.
- Non-itemized contributions show on Schedule G.

Use pull-down to choose the Valuation Basis. You may select actual cost or fair market value.

In-kind contributions are reported when goods and services of value are received. COMET automatically shows them as an expense therefore, they are not included in a committees total expendable funds or ending balance.

Contributors of in-kind contributions are required to send you a letter with their name, address, date of the contribution with an explanation of the valuation basis.

Report Refunds, Rebates, and Interest

- Refunds, rebates and interest show on Schedule C.

Sources include accrued bank interest and rebates and refunds received.

Show uncashed checks under refunds, rebates and interest. Indicate the payee for the original check; enter the original check number as well. In the item or service field enter “uncashed check, the date of the original check.”

Report Expenditures

- Expenditures and debt repayments show on Schedule D.

Click on the “Add a New Expenditure” button.

Choose the “Type of Expenditure” by highlighting the radio button. You have the option of choosing Debt Payment, Loan Payment, Surplus and Expense. The default option is Expense.



Bank fees are reported as expenditures. All expenditures must be reported no matter what the amount. Third Party vendor per transaction fees can be aggregated by date. Surplus funds are the monies left over when campaigning is over and the account is closed. Loan payments can be listed as expenditures or under loans/debts. Do not report in both places.

Click on “Save” or, if you have more than one transaction to enter, click on “Save and New.”

Report Loans & Debts

Loans Received

- Loans received show on schedule E-1.
- Unpaid loans or debts remaining unpaid show on Schedule F

To add a loan or debt

1. Click on Add a New Loan / Debt. The default option is Loan. When entering a debt, remember to highlight the debt radio button.
2. Complete the form.
3. Click on Save.

Repay a Loan

- Loans repaid show on Schedule E-2.

To show a payment on a loan or debt:

1. Click on the stack of monies on the right of the entry, enter the date and amount of the payment.
2. Click Save.

Forgive a Loan/Debt

1. Click on the pencil next to the “X.”
2. Click on “Forgive this Loan.”
3. Put a check in the box “Forgive this Loan / Debt.” Click Save.

To view a summary of loans received and paid, look to the bottom of Schedule G.

Loans that are forgiven become contributions.

Partial loan payments are allowed.

Loans and debts must be repaid or forgiven before a final report can be filed.

Edit or Delete Data

1. Click on the appropriate tab to add receipts, expenditures, or loans/debts.

On the right of the entry is an “X” and a pencil.

Click on the pencil to edit the entry.

Click on “X” to delete. You will be prompted to confirm your deletion in a new screen. Place a check mark in the box to delete. Otherwise clicking cancel will stop the deletion process.

Review and Submit Report

Once you have entered information, it is a good practice to review the information.

To view a summary for the current activity period, review Schedule G.

To view a summary for the election cycle, review Schedule H.

Report preparation

1. Click on “Reporting.”
2. Click on the action word to the right of the report that you are preparing.
3. Click on the words **Baseline Finances** if:
 - a. *It is your first time preparing or filing a report using COMET. The entries in the fields should be zeros.*
 - b. *You previously filed reports on paper. You will need to enter the figures from Schedule H, lines 21-29*
4. Click on “Save.”

Final or No Activity Reports

Check the box “No Activity” if you have not received monies or made expenditures within the filing period.

Check “Is Final” ONLY if you are ceasing political activity altogether and have closed the committee account.

Final reports must have a zero balance and zero debt.

1. Select Prepare Report for Review button. .
2. Let it process.
3. Click on “Baseline Finances” one time. COMET uses the information to calculate subsequent report balances.

Review Report

Before submitting a report, it is strongly advised that you review your information. Use the review and submit link at the right of the screen to start the reviewing process.

1. Scroll up the page to review the information in the schedules A-H.
2. Once the schedules have been reviewed and your report is complete, you can click on the Statement of Treasurer declaration box.

The system will not allow you to submit the report until you click on the Statement of Treasurer declaration box.



You may process and/or prepare a report many times.

Reports cannot be filed on or before a reports activity end date. Reports are due before 11:59 p.m. on its due date.

3. After preparing the report for review, put a check in the box “I Declare” and click “Submit” by checking this box you are stating that all receipts and/or expenditures have been reported. COMET will email the filer a receipt when a report has been received. For assurance you can go back and click on reporting again and a green check mark will show in the filed column.

Negative balances are not acceptable. Filers make sure that lines 19 and 29 match. If they are not matching, check your figures in baseline finances.

Report Large Contributions

Threshold Amounts

Receipt of any single contribution of \$5000 or more for Statewide candidates.

Receipt of any single contribution of \$1000 or more for General Assembly candidates.

Receipt of any single contribution of \$500 or more for any other office.

1. Go to receipts.
2. Click add a new receipt.
3. Enter the receipt and SAVE.
4. Go back to receipts and click on the pencil next to the X.
5. On the lower left of the window, click “Create Large Contribution Report.”
6. Go to “Reporting.”
7. Click “File” on the LCR Scheduled report.
8. Put a check in the box “I declare” and click submit.

COMET prompts a committee to “FILE” large contribution reports based on the **amount** of the contribution. COMET leaves it up to the filer to be aware of the twelve (12) day window before an election date in which large contribution reports must be made (note: as of July 1, 2015 the window is shortened to eleven (11) days).

COMET recognizes the date that the contribution is received and the date filed for compliance.

For Candidates: File within twenty-four (24) hours only when it is within the twelve (12) day window before a nominating event, Primary or General Election.

For Political Committees: File within three (3) business days of receiving a contribution of \$10,000 or more from a single source.

Compliance and Penalty Assessment

Assessed Penalties

Notifications are sent by COMET well ahead of a deadline. Committees have fifteen (15) days to file a report after a reports activity ending period.

If under reporting when you see “fail” or “late” you are not in compliance. After sixty (60) days of “not in compliance” a committee is referred to the Commonwealth’s Attorney.

Late and Unfiled Large Contribution Reports

Penalties are assessed for late filing of large contributions. The penalty assessed is \$100 for the first report and \$1000 for subsequent reports within an election cycle.

The Code of Virginia requires the Department of Elections and local general registrars to assess penalties for late and unfiled reports.

Penalties are assessed for late or unfiled reports and “Stand by Your Ad” violations. After sixty (60) days of noncompliance the committee is referred to the appropriate attorney for the Commonwealth.

Candidates cannot receive the Certificate of Election, take the oath of office or receive a salary for the office until the post-election report is filed and any penalties assessed are paid.

Local Candidates: Make payment payable to your county/city Treasurer.

Statewide Candidates: Make payment to the Treasurer of Virginia.

Political Committees: Make payment to the Treasurer of Virginia.

The Department of Elections encourages all filers to file early in case support is needed.

The Department of Elections does not support third party vendor applications.