New online tool maps the 'who' and 'where' of Oakland campaign contributions

The Public Ethics Commission oversees compliance with Oakland campaign finance, lobbying, transparency, and government ethics laws.

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October 28, 2020 — Today, the Public Ethics Commission released an innovative new app to help voters explore the finances of local candidates for office and political committees. "Show me the money" is an interactive disclosure tool that puts information on the funding sources of local campaigns at Oaklanders' fingertips. The app provides an easy way to drill down to see candidates' contributors and to make comparisons across races and years.

"Over half of campaign contributions to Oakland candidates in the last three elections came from donors outside of Oakland and there is substantial research indicating that non-constituent donors have more influence on policymakers than constituent non-donors, so knowing the source of campaign money matters," said Whitney Barazoto, Executive Director of the Oakland Public Ethics Commission and lead author of the Commission's recent report, "Race for Power: How Money in Oakland Politics Creates and Perpetuates Disparities Across Income and Race." "The 'Show me the money' app enables Oakland residents to view key data points on a map so people can see exactly where campaign money comes from."

To use "Show me the money," enter the name of a candidate in the search box to generate a map showing the sources of campaign cash. The application also shows a bar chart of top contributors and a graph of contributions over time. Up to three candidates may be selected at a time for comparison. Like the Commission's other campaign finance projects, the app is updated daily with data exported directly from the city's campaign finance database.[1]

The tool builds a map showing the geographic source of campaign contributions to the candidate and totals donated from that location. Dig deeper by clicking each location point, and the application will reveal the names of top contributors from that area, or research past campaigns by selecting a different election year in the upper left-hand corner of the webpage. Campaign reports back to the 2014 election cycle are available.[2] Followers of Oakland elections can find the "Show me the money" application via links on the Public Ethics Commission website and OakData portal.

"Oakland is driving more transparency in the election process with the launch of the Campaign Finance app," said Franklin Williams, president of Tyler Technologies' Data & Insights Division. "This app gives the public easy access to candidates' financials so they can be more informed and active participants in elections."

The "Show me the money" tool was developed by Tyler Technologies for the Socrata data platform, the platform supporting the OakData Open Data Portal for the City of Oakland. Tyler approached Public Ethics Commission staff earlier this year to collaborate on the pilot launch of the tool, citing the Commission's commitment to innovative disclosure tools and experience with publishing high-quality datasets.

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[1] App developer Tyler Technologies does not make election software and the app does not support voting or election systems.

[2] Only candidates and campaign committees that file campaign statements electronically with the City of Oakland appear in the app. Oakland candidates that spend under $2,000 are not required to file detailed campaign statements and therefore will not show data.