



STATE OF CALIFORNIA
FAIR POLITICAL PRACTICES COMMISSION
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FPPC Task Force recommends State create archive for digital political ad transparency

A Fair Political Practices Commission (FPPC) task force charge with looking into issues surrounding social media and other digital political advertising is recommending California create its own archive for digital political advertising. The Digital Transparency Task Force (DTTF), created by the FPPC last year and consisting of members with expertise and background in the subject matter, also issued two other recommendations for transparency around the ever-growing phenomenon.

The full report can be found here: [Digital Transparency Task Force Report and Recommendations](#).

The DTTF's main recommendation is the creation and upkeep of a public, statewide database containing the digital ads from all State (not local) elections. The Task Force found these types of ads are growing in use and present unique challenges to regulators like the FPPC. It found some jurisdictions, such as the cities of Los Angeles and New York, already have government-run digital campaign ad archives available to the public. The Task Force also found various online platforms have certain information available to the public, but the information varies by platform and there are discrepancies in what is retained and for how long. Besides the aspect of more uniform transparency, the DTTF also determined a state-run archive will benefit campaign finance enforcement, as the information will be available to journalists, watchdog groups, and other members of the public.

“California voters should be able to easily find out who is responsible for each ad they receive and a state-run Ad Archive would provide this,” said FPPC Chair Richard C. Miadich. “As one of the national leaders in government ethics, with this work the FPPC is leading the way in setting standards, regulations and best practices in this fast-changing digital political media environment.”

A second, related recommendation regards the content, design, and functionality of the archive, including the types of ads to be included information required relating to the ad itself, and who is responsible for making sure the ad is uploaded timely to the Archive. The emphasis of the Ad Archive is for it to be easily navigable by voters, allowing them to search for information most relevant to them, but also helpful to researchers and others who want to dig deeper into the data. (See report).

In its third and final recommendation, the DTTF recommends the Legislature commission a study to examine the types of disclosures which could be required on the digital political ads to provide the most effective way for voters to see who is paying for the digital campaign advertising. This recommendation



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includes a request for widespread public engagement in the study, to determine what the public and voters themselves would find most understandable, convenient, and effective.

The members of the FPPC Digital Transparency Task Force come from a variety of backgrounds related to the digital, political and media world, ([Roster](#)) including campaign practitioners, representatives of the social media and tech companies, academics, and representatives of citizen and good government groups.

The group also received presentations and testimony from a variety of organizations and groups involved in political campaigns and political advertising. This included major tech companies such as Google and Facebook, representatives from other cities, such as Los Angeles and New York City, and other states, such as Washington and Maryland, which already have or are discussing similar types of digital ad databases.

“I want to thank all the Task Force members for their time, energy and devotion to this project,” said Chair Miadich. “If implemented, it will help Californians for years to come in terms of transparency around our elections. I’d also like to thank all those who contributed with presentations and information, for public comment, and to FPPC Staff who all did extraordinary work to help the Task Force understand some complicated issues.”

The FPPC Digital Transparency Task Force recommendations will now be presented to the full Commission for action. If approved, the FPPC will send the report and its recommendations to the Legislature and Governor’s Office for their consideration, respectively. The FPPC Digital Transparency Task Force hopes this will become a national model in digital political ad transparency.

The full FPPC Digital Transparency Task Force report and recommendations can be found above or on the home page of the FPPC website <https://www.fppc.ca.gov/>.

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