

NICAR 2019 - Tracking dark money tips

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The following resources and obscure public records are among the best places to look for information about how dark money groups are spending money in elections and who funds them.

Issue One's "[Dark Money Illuminated](#)" project, with [profiles](#) of the largest dark money groups and a [searchable, sortable, online database](#) featuring more than 400 unique dark money donors. [Methodology](#).

OpenSecrets.org allows you to search data on [dark money spenders](#) and [over 4.9 million ad records](#).

Business records - for LLCs, nonprofits and corporations

- Charitable solicitation records - NC, FL, NY, CA, WV (among others) require lots of information.
- State-level business documents - annual reports often list directors.
- IRS Form 1023/Form 1024 applications for tax-exempt status

IRS Form 990s

- [IRS exempt-organization business master file](#) can help you ID the EIN of a dark money group
- [IRS tax exempt organization search](#)
- [Foundation Center/Guidestar.org](#)
- [CitizenAudit.org](#)
- [ProPublica's Nonprofit Explorer](#)
- Pro tip: Request 990s from the organization itself and ask for a (redacted) Schedule B, which shows amounts each donor gave (while redacting the donors' names).
 - In person request: Response required same day
 - In writing request: Response required within 30 days
- List of [past nonprofit dark money donor organizations and when their next Form 990s are due](#)

Ways to find nonprofits' receipts and grants (which are reported on Schedule I of IRS Form 990s)

- [CitizenAudit.org](#) - you can search for any word, phrase, or number across multiple Form 990s (!)
- [OpenSecrets.org Nonprofit Data Search](#)
- [Center for Public Integrity's Nonprofit Network search tool](#)

Other good ways to look for money flowing into dark money groups

- LD-203 filings for contributions from lobbyists ([House version search](#) / [Senate version search](#))
- [LM-2 filings](#) by labor unions with Dept. of Labor - search "payer/payee" field
- [FEC expenditure data](#) - search "recipient name" field
- Voluntary corporate disclosures (often posted annually on their websites)
 - [Center for Political Accountability-Zicklin Index](#) - tracks corporate disclosure policies
 - CPA's [TrackYourCompany.org](#) search tool - search by "recipient" for 2015-2017
 - Center for Public Integrity [database of 2012 corporate disclosures](#)

Other good ways to look for money flowing out of dark money groups

- OpenSecrets.org [FCC political ad file data](#) - search any word or phrase across all documents
- Online political ad resources from [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [Google](#)
- ProPublica's [archive of political ads on Facebook](#)
- [Spending reported to the FEC](#) (also tracked by [OpenSecrets.org](#) and [ProPublica's itemizer tool](#))

Resources for Tracking Dark Money

