



FEC Press Office Tutorial # 2 (Locating, Downloading and Exporting Raw Data Files)

This tutorial is designed to help users locate, download and export campaign finance reports containing raw data, known as .FEC files. These files are accessed through the Commission's Candidate and Committee Viewer.

A .FEC file contains all the transactions disclosed in a campaign finance report, and it can be exported into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet for easier use and sortability. A .FEC file of a committee's electronically submitted report becomes available to the public within seconds of being uploaded to the Commission's server. The transactions from these files are eventually processed into a cleaner format by FEC staff and made public through the Viewer's Two-Year Summary tab; that process, however, can take from several days to a few weeks after a filing deadline to complete. That's why it's important to know how to use .FEC files if users need the data from newly filed campaign finance reports in a hurry.

Locating a .FEC file

1. From the Commission's homepage, FEC.gov, select the Campaign Finance Disclosure Portal on the left-hand side of the screen. Under Searchable Presentations, select Candidate and Committee Viewer. This will be your search gateway to locate all campaign finance reports.
2. Enter the name of the candidate or committee of interest and the state where the candidate is seeking or has sought office (when applicable). Select the Filings option in the Default Tab section and then click Get Listing.
3. You may be presented with a list of candidates and committees. You will want to select the identification number associated with a particular committee, which in most cases begins with C00.
4. After selection, you will see a list of reports the committee has filed arranged by calendar year. Locate the name of the report that interests you to download the raw data file transactions. In some cases, newly filed reports are isolated at the top of the page under the heading, "Most Recent Electronic Filings."
5. Once you have found the name of the report, use your mouse to select the right-most option, which will be the .FEC file. This file begins with FEC dash followed by several digits.

Downloading a .FEC file

1. After selecting the .FEC file, download and save a copy to your computer. The Download Report window will pop up, asking you to select one of two file formats. For purposes of downloading and sorting data into an Excel file and for purposes of this tutorial, select the CSV format. (The ASCII file format is generally for individuals or groups who already have an established mechanism in place to parse data.)
2. If you're using Google Chrome or Mozilla Firefox web browsers, right click on the CSV icon and select Save Link As. For Apple's Safari web browser, right click on the CSV icon and select Download Linked File As. For Internet Explorer, left click on the CSV icon and select Save.



Regardless of which web browser you're using, be sure to save the file in a location that can be easily accessed and recalled. You may also wish to change the name of the file, but that's not necessary. You will need to keep the file's .FEC extension at this stage. Once you've determined the location where the file should be saved and have made any optional changes to the file name, select Save.

Exporting the data

1. We've now located, downloaded and saved a .FEC file. Next we'll show you how to export the data into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet so that you can analyze the data in a more user-friendly and sortable format. From Microsoft Excel select "Open" and locate the .FEC file that you saved earlier. Be sure that the "All Files" option is selected when trying to locate a .FEC. file. Then select Open.
2. Microsoft's Text Import Wizard should appear. Select the Delimited option and then click Next. Under the Delimiters box, ensure that just the Comma box is selected and click Finish.
3. The data will be imported and separated into columns in a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet. You'll notice that the spreadsheet contains every transaction that was reported by the committee for a given reporting period – including receipts, disbursements, debts and loans. Let's review what is provided in the spreadsheet.

The First Row of Data

The first row contains information about the type and version of software that the committee used to file the report. Since this information is not pertinent, the first row should be deleted from the spreadsheet. Simply highlight the first row by left clicking your mouse. Once highlighted, right click on the shaded portion and select Delete.

The Second Row of Data

The second row of data provides information about the committee, treasurer and report. This row can remain where it is for now.

First Column of Data

The first column identifies the reporting schedule and line number of the transaction. For example, SA11AI means that it was reported on Schedule A (SA) and on line number 11AI.

For all committees:

(SA) or Schedule A transactions include all receipts such as contributions and loans.

(SB) or Schedule B transactions include all disbursements such as operating expenditures, contributions to other committees and contribution refunds.

(SC) or Schedule C transactions include all loans made to the committee, and

(SD) or Schedule D transactions include all debts that the committee has outstanding.



There are other reporting schedules that may come into play. Reporting schedules and line numbers are described on pages 3 and 4 of the PDF/image version of the reports and are available through the Filings tab of the Viewer.

4. At this point you may be wondering what each column of data means. To help you better understand, we've created spreadsheet templates with headers for each particular report type. These templates are available on the Tutorials section of the Press Office's webpage.
5. For campaign finance reports filed by a committee of a candidate for the U.S. House of Representatives, select the House Candidate Committee (Form 3) template. For presidential candidate committees, select the Presidential Candidate Committee (Form 3P) template and for party committees and political action committees, select the Party / PAC (Form 3X) template. If you need templates for other committee and report types or for templates for reports filed on paper such as Senate candidates, please contact the Press Office at press@fec.gov or (202) 694-1220.
6. Once the template is opened, you'll notice separate worksheets at the bottom of the spreadsheet representing different reporting schedules and transaction types. The first worksheet is called "Header." From your original data spreadsheet, select the data from row 1 and then select the Cut icon at the top of the page. Paste row 1 into the Header worksheet of your template by selecting the Paste icon.
7. Next, return to the original data spreadsheet and highlight all rows that have SA in the first column field. By doing this you are selecting all receipt transactions reported on Schedule A. Select the Cut icon at the top of the page and paste the data to the Schedule A worksheet of the template.
8. Repeat this process by selecting and cutting all SB, SC, SD and any additional schedules into the appropriate worksheet of the template. Remember, SB represents all Schedule B transactions or disbursements, SC all Schedule C transactions or loans and SD all Schedule D transactions or debts. Be sure to cut and paste the appropriate transactions into the proper worksheets.
9. Once all of the data has been properly transferred to the template, you will be able to understand what each column of data represents by looking at the header row of each worksheet. You may want to save the template with a new file name.

This concludes the tutorial. If you have any questions, please contact the Press Office at press@fec.gov or by calling (202) 694-1220. Thank you.