

Module 14



Follow the Money Trail: Who's Getting Paid?

Modern-day election systems are run by private for-profit corporations, rely on a few cronies for oversight, using a certification system so fundamentally flawed that it allows machines to miscount and lose votes, with hidden back doors that enable "end runs" around the voting system. Many elections officials consider the vendors to be "like family."

What's the missing ingredient? The citizens who actually own this system.

When things just don't seem to make sense, look for the money. Modern-day influence peddling takes many forms, mostly legal. It's called "Pay to Play," and just because it's legal doesn't mean it's ethical. If you doubt for a moment that government corruption actually exists, go to a news search engine like Factiva or Lexis-Nexis (or even Google "News") and search for terms like *alderman, convicted* or *supervisor, indicted*.

Guide to Following the Money Trail

Goals:

At the very least, find out who you're dealing with and what connections they have.

Where to look for information

- Where to find filings of publicly traded companies: <http://www.secinfo.com>
- Where to find a phone number: try <http://www.bigbook.com> or, for Canada, <http://www.telus.com> . You can do reverse phone number and reverse address searches at <http://www.whitepages.com> and, for Canada, <http://www.whitepages.ca> .

Another excellent tool is <http://www.anywho.com> , which often lets you find phone numbers and addresses by spouse name as well. Also try Google, of course.

- If you have a phone number or an address or an IP address, Google it. Try several of the Google search options, like Google Groups, Google Blogs, and more.
- Where to find out more if you have an e-mail: Enter the email in Google, but then do another search: Hit the tab that says "groups" and you may find more.
- Where to find employee names if all you have is the company's general information e-mail: enter the end of the e-mail into Google. For example, Black Box Voting has e-mails that end in "@blackboxvoting.org", so if you were searching for employees of Black Box Voting, you could enter @blackboxvoting.org into Google.
- Where to find donations to candidates: For federal, go to <http://www.opensecrets.org> – most states have their donation lists online also. Start by looking at the secretary of state site, and also use Google with terms like *Virginia, campaign finance* or *Alabama, candidate, disclosure*.
- Where to find lobbyists: www.fecinfo.com and <http://www.sourcewatch.org/index.php?title=SourceWatch>. Most states also require county-level lobbyists to register. The voting machine companies make a lot of use of the county-level lobbyists. You can usually get those by going to the county clerk's office. They have to provide them for you when you come in to ask. Call first.
- Where to find contact info for public officials: Go to <http://www.congress.org>. This also has very good info for local officials.
- Where to find the town someone lives in: Enter name and guess an age (doesn't need to be accurate) in USSearch.com.
- Where to find who owns Web sites and trace IP addresses: <http://www.whois.sc> or <http://www.geektools.com>
- Where to find web pages that have been removed: <http://www.archive.org> – and here's a great tip: When you get to archive.org, enter the web site in this format: *websitename.com/** – the "/" tells it to look in all sub-directories and the "*" tells it to pull every page from every sub-directory.

Corporate information:

- Start with corporate registrations. Go to Google. Enter this kind of search phrase: *washington secretary of state* or *oregon secretary of state* or *ohio secretary of state* (some locations, like Virginia, it is secretary of the commonwealth)
- Go to the main secretary of state page. Hunt around for a "corporations" or "business search" section. Most states allow you to enter a business name and perform a search, which will lead you to the registered agent.

- Some states, like Ohio, let you search by name of agent, a very good feature. A few states make you pay to see anything. Florida has our favorite site, floridasunbiz.com, which lets you search by company name, corporate agent, or other offices, and lets you see photocopies of the documents.
- Corporate Search Tips:
 - The corporate agent is sometimes a corporation that makes a business out of acting as the corporate agent. CT Corporations is one of these. That's not too helpful, is it?
 - The corporate agent isn't as important as the corporate officers. Many states let you see the names of all the officers. Some companies have a corporate agent who is also an officer.
 - Corporations are supposed to register in each state where they do business. Therefore, if you are looking for information on a corporation that does business in a lot of states and its home state is obstructive about corporate documents, you can go to a more open state.

How to search old news archives:

- You can do a daily fee on Lexus-Nexus or Factiva.com. Both will provide you with pay-per-article searches of newspaper archives that have lots of information in them. However, this can get expensive if you want to eyeball a lot of articles. Go to the library and you may be able to get unlimited use for free for an hour or more. University libraries are very good for this.
- Lexus-Nexus also shows judgments and some legal cases. Factiva is very good, and available in a lot of libraries.
- Tips for using news search databases
 - One way to search is to have it sort from oldest to newest. You will find some of the best stuff in the oldest articles. This is because whoever you're looking at was not very careful when they first got media coverage. After all, they often didn't know they'd become an important person later on!
 - Also, make a habit of cutting and pasting everything into a Word file. Later, you can easily find something you remember seeing by opening that big ol' file and doing a word search.
 - Learn the shortcuts for copy and paste. On a PC, it is ctrl-c for copy and ctrl-v for paste. Much faster that way (and it sure baffles any keyloggers! (spyware))
 - Another tip, when dumping the information into Word Files, is to make sure you've got icons on your menu for color text. Quickly highlight all the **people's names** and **companies** in red, and highlight **really interesting stuff** in purple or pink. Then, later, you can quickly find stuff when you scroll through the file.

- Spend a few hours with a news search database learning how modern-day bribery is done. You'll get a real education:
 - Consulting deals, three-way bank accounts (dirty money goes in via clean source, gets pulled out by dirty co-signer and passed through to public officials)
 - Success-fee lobbying (contingent fee, usually illegal)
 - You may find out about the fisherman's solution (private company credit card made available to public official)
 - The Dutch sandwich (two corporations, one making profits, one taking losses, a little sleight of hand and the public official gets a tax-free windfall).
 - Run searches for the term "pass through."
 - Look for contract favors: (For example, ballot printer does a funky run of ballots, later gets a county contract from another department worth hundreds of thousands.)
 - You'll learn that the average public servant sells out for under \$10,000 (often as little as \$3,000).
 - You'll run into public officials who become consultants to the same government divisions they left in disgrace.
 - Immerse yourself in the dirt and – as well as becoming aware how much there is, you'll get a nose for what to look for in your general searches for background information.

How to get court records

- Start with the county courthouse. Go to the superior court clerk. When you get there, ask for help on how to use the computer to search.
 - If you don't know the case number, you can usually go to a special computer to search for the case number by the person's name. The system is often customized and funky, so don't be shy about asking for help. I usually get help from another citizen nearby who seems to know what they are doing, if the clerk is busy. You can get the following kinds of information:
 - ✓ criminal charges and trial records
 - ✓ civil cases
 - ✓ divorces
 - ✓ judgments
 - After you get the case number (again, this varies so ask first) you can ask to look at the case file. For old cases, this may be on microfiche. It's not hard to use the microfiche machines, and you can print off of them, usually 25 cents a copy. If it's your first time, don't be shy about asking for help. Load in the film and prepare to get seasick, and also find a lot of interesting information.

- From criminal charges you can often see depositions and transcripts of the trial, as well as evidence.
- From civil charges you can find who has sued them and what the allegations were.
- From divorce papers you can sometimes find assets.
- From judgments you can find company names and a little about the business.
- Different kinds of cases are sometimes found in different courthouses. Just ask, and they will point you at the right place.

"Waste Archeology"

- Yes, the dumpster. Look for paperwork, but you'll also find post-it notes in the gack bags.
- You cannot enter a locked dumpster. That is breaking and entering.
- In some (rare) states, there are laws that inhibit this.
- Scope it out in the daylight. If it's an important target and you have time, stake it out to observe the patterns before you go.
- Have a story ready. "Oh, I was just looking for boxes."
- Pay special attention to anything torn in half or quarters. This means someone ascribed some value to it.
- If you have the opportunity during an office visit, take a moment to study the wastebaskets in the copy room. People have some strange blind spots -- very important documents are discarded there when they happen to be printed crooked or too dark. I mean, you could go throw away a Starbucks cup, you know, if you bring it in with you as a prop.

Ask questions by phone or in person

- Prepare a list of questions and follow up questions and use the telephone. Call witnesses and simply ask them questions! You will be amazed how much you can learn.
- You may only get one shot at it, and you may only get one question. Consider your approach carefully. If you think you'll get a fair amount of time unless you ask something they don't like, load the information you need into softball questions and ask those before you hit them with the big stuff where they might shut you down.
- In many cases, you don't know if they'll be hostile or not, so craft a gentle friendly approach and then go for the most important information first. Sometimes they answer that before it occurs to they shouldn't talk to you.
- If you are very sure of yourself, grab a friend and just show up at the door. Many people -- even voting machine company employees, and especially men in the South

when asked by women -- will be too polite to tell you to go away. You will often get invited in for tea and have an amazing chat.

- Keep the door open for more contacts. The best investigative work is done by building relationships. Try to find out everything you can, because maybe you won't get another chance, and also try to keep the door open so you can come back for more.
- Never offer "protected source" status if they don't ask for it.
- Always ask for documents if you think they might have them.
- Do not surreptitiously tape record unless you are in a single party consent state.
- Visits get more info than phone calls, and phone calls get more info than e-mails. Never e-mail. It's asking to have doors slammed shut, and once they're shut, it takes less assertiveness for them to keep refusing to talk.

Your Own Additions to the Money Trail – Who's Getting Paid Module

You can share your ideas by sending to crew@blackboxvoting.org



What worked well?

What new ideas did you come up with?

Was there anything that didn't work very well?
