



Dear 2022 Candidate:

The Village Reform Democratic Club is interested in knowing about your qualifications, thoughts and plans for the office you're seeking. We have prepared this very brief set of questions to help us know you better as we decide on our Club endorsements.

Please provide your name, website URL, the office for which you're running and contact information in case our members wish to request additional information or clarification.

Benjamin Yee

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1) What are your top 2-3 issues going forward? If elected or re-elected, what will be your specific approach to each of them?

1. Ethics Reform

The ethics rules of the State Democratic Party have not been updated since 1989 and currently include no language regarding sexual harassment, sexual misconduct or discrimination of any kind. Given the attention to ethical issues by Trump administration, movements such as #MeToo, and spate of racial motivated attacks in the last several years it is more important than ever that the Democratic Party's ethical process actually reflect the ideals it purports to espouse.

In 2019, I put forward language to change the ethics rules of the Democratic State Committee starting serious debate on the direction of our Party. This led to the creation of an Ethics Subcommittee to which I was appointed. Now, after several meetings and months of work, we have almost completed a new and improved proposal to be considered by the State Committee.

2. Civics Education

Between 2017 and 2020, I taught civics workshops across New York City (see next question). While still held occasionally, the workshops were greatly reduced when the Coronavirus pandemic struck. My goal for 2020 is to restart the workshop program in preparation for organizing volunteers for the 2022 and 2024 elections.

3. Organizing for 2022 and 2024 and messaging committee

Today our democracy sits on a knife's edge. Closer to home, our local politics are in tremendous flux, creating threats, but also opportunities, for our neighborhoods. In my next term as State Committeeman I plan to continue working with my local Democratic clubs to organize and inform local voters so that our values are heard in City Hall, Albany and Washington, D.C.

As part of this, I have been asked to join the new Messaging Committee of the Democratic State Committee. Started after the abject rejection of three "slam-dunk" amendments to the New York State Constitution in the last election, its mandate will be to develop, for the first time, statewide messaging campaigns on key Democratic issues.

Please list 2-3 things you have done for our community (the greater Greenwich Village area) and the results you achieved. What were the challenges, how did you address them, and how did you involve the community?

1. Civics education

As mentioned in question 1), after the election of Donald Trump in 2016, I co-founded You Matter Nation, a group focused on political training, civic education and electoral work. Between 2017 and 2020, I personally trained over four thousand New Yorkers in all five boroughs, including many in lower Manhattan. Hundreds of the attendees to the trainings have become local leaders and activists -- including Presidents of Democratic Clubs, dozens of County Committee members and over 100 hundred activists right in Lower Manhattan.

2. Improved the transparency of the Democratic Party

One of the reasons I ran for Democratic State Committee was to directly improve the functioning of the Democratic Party. I believe a more open and inclusive Party is critical for building the infrastructure required for winning critical elections, and for ensuring local voters have access to a central institution in our politics.

While we have much more work to do in this area, I am very happy to say that since my election to State Committee, I have been one of the most prolific members in authoring, and passing, resolutions and rules changes. Among these include new rules that have the Democratic Party to livestream all its meetings on YouTube to the general public, post online a list of the Democratic State Committee members with the Assembly District they represent, and post online the rules of the Democratic State Committee.

3. Pandemic Response

When the pandemic hit New York I stopped my civics workshops, but I did not stop being involved. Along with local organizations like Downtown Independent Democrats and Vision Urbana to distribute free food and PPE to homebound New Yorkers.

What do you most want our club members to know about you and why you believe you're the best candidate for the position?

I am a lifelong New Yorker and resident of Lower Manhattan. I love this community and have seen it grow alongside me. This is my home, and as new challenges arise I am dedicated to helping our community meet them. For the last 10 years I have dedicated my time and energy to organizing and community work. For the last 5 of them I have had the honor to do so on the State Committee. On the Committee, I have been one of the most active members using the powers of the State Committee role to make lasting improvements to the Democratic Party and push our elected officials on issues critical to our community such as cost of living, development and climate change. It would be a great honor to continue in this role and humbly ask for VRDC's endorsement to another term.