

Procedure For Determining Cost of Political Ads on TV Stations (revised 2024)

HOW MUCH DOES IT COST for a presidential candidate (or Super Pac) to buy time for a 30 second commercial on local TV? For years I have shared the answer (because mostly people don't ask or know.)

The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) requires all TV stations to provide this information on its publicly available [website](#). That's where you can also find the details.

Example: WLTX (CBS Columbia SC): I found in February 2024, the Nikki Haley campaign paid just \$60 for a spot in their 3:00pm weekday programming; but paid \$1100 for the same spot during the 6:30pm CBS Evening News. (The difference in price is related to how many people are watching.)

NOTE: TV stations must charge legitimate candidates the going rate for time; they cannot raise their advertising rates during political seasons.

Meantime, a SUPERPAC- Americans for Prosperity Action (not considered a candidate), which can by law be charged above the going rates, paid \$11,500 for a spot in the January 2024 NFL AFC championship game.

AND WHO BENEFITS: the owners of the stations, in this case [TEGNA](#).

Here's the procedure for locating the cost of a candidate's ad on your local TV station:

1. Go to <https://publicfiles.fcc.gov/>
2. In the search bar, type the CALL LETTERS of the TV station,

then click SEARCH.

Cable, DBS, and SDARS entities also have public and political file requirements. These entities' political file requirements are substantially similar to those of television and radio broadcasters. Apart from the political file, however, cable, DBS, and SDARS entities' other public file requirements differ somewhat from the public file requirements applicable to broadcasters.

[View the complete list of the items](#) that must be placed in the file.

FIND A TV / FM / AM STATION, CABLE SYSTEM, DBS PROVIDER, OR SDARS LICENSEE

For broadcast stations, you may enter a call sign (e.g., WXYZ), network affiliation (e.g., NBC), channel number (e.g., 26), or facility ID number (e.g., 123456). For CABLE systems, you may enter PSID or a ZIP code. For DBS providers or SDARS licensees, you may enter the name of the entity.



3. On the next screen, select FILES

Entities 1

Files 532

Search Results



Broadcast Stations TV 1

4. In the right margin of the next screen, I selected OFFICE, and then clicked the box next to PRESIDENTIAL and CAMPAIGN YEAR (I selected 2024 because I am interested in ads from the current election cycle) From the drop down menu, click the box next to 2024.

Entities 1Files 20

Sort By: Best Match

Filter Results By: Clear All Filters

Filters: 2024 Presidential

Returned 20 results in 952 milliseconds.

POL_HALEY_2851200

in Political Files / 2024 / Federal / President / HALEY

TV 37176 | Presidential | Last Updated: Tuesday, January 23rd 2024 12:06 pm

POL_HALEY_2860172

in Political Files / 2024 / Federal / President / HALEY

TV 37176 | Presidential | Last Updated: Wednesday, February 7th 2024 5:05 pm

POL_HALEY_2853405_ADDITION

in Political Files / 2024 / Federal / President / HALEY

TV 37176 | Presidential | Last Updated: Wednesday, February 7th 2024 12:14 pm

POL_HALEY_2860165

in Political Files / 2024 / Federal / President / HALEY

TV 37176 | Presidential | Last Updated: Wednesday, February 7th 2024 5:05 pm

Political Files

Type of Ads

Office

Presidential

US Senate

US House

State

Local

Campaign Year

2020 (50)

2021 (3)

2022 (136)

2023 (119)

2024 (37)

Entities

Entity Type

Major TV Networks

5. The results, which appear in the image above in the space under BEST MATCH, will bring up PDFs of the actual contracts the political ad buyer made with the TV station. Opening any one of these will reveal the price paid for an ad (or groups of ads) during special times on that station.

For example: I found Americans For Prosperity Action (a Super Pac)— paid just \$150 per spot in that station’s 4am newscast, but paid \$11,500 for the same 30 seconds during the broadcast of the NFL AFC championship game played in late January.