



POSITION ANNOUNCEMENT
RESEARCHER: DEMOCRACY



About Sightline Institute

Founded in 1993, Sightline Institute is committed to making Cascadia—the region stretching from Alaska to northern California and from the Pacific to the Rocky Mountain states—a global model of sustainability, with strong communities, a green economy, and a healthy environment. In our programs on housing and urbanism, democracy and elections, climate and energy, and farms and forests, we identify and promote reforms that yield outsized improvements for the region’s people and places.



A nonprofit, nonpartisan public policy research center, Sightline provides research reports, articles, and commentary; books, maps, graphics, and tools; framing and messaging guidance; and a daily news digest. We advise, inform, and advocate to public officials, change makers, and the media, and we collaborate with diverse allies and unconventional coalitions in pursuit of our mission. Sightline is among the largest and best-known public policy think tanks in the region, and we have an organization-wide commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion. Learn more at www.sightline.org.

Opportunity for Impact: Ranked choice voting and other electoral reforms

In November 2022, in the culmination of five years of Sightline’s work with many partners, Portland, Oregon, voters approved charter amendments to convert city elections to ranked choice voting (RCV) and specifically to the proportional form of RCV. This model reform holds great potential for diminishing polarization, gridlock, and gerrymandering and for expanding voters’ choices. It yields winners who command broad support. It discourages negative campaigning. And it encourages elected officials to focus on problem solving rather than pandering to their political base.

This is the latest major win for Sightline’s Democracy + Elections program. It comes on top of similar wins for RCV in Seattle and statewide in Alaska and in addition to success with complementary electoral reforms such as democracy vouchers to dilute the influence of big money and election consolidation to double turnout. These advances have built a foundation for bolder steps in the months ahead.



The year 2024 presents six giant opportunities for progress on electoral reform in Cascadia:

1. In early 2024, Sightline and allies will push the Washington state legislature to allow cities to begin using RCV in their elections. This “local options” bill has come before the legislature before, but we’ve got a chance to help usher it to passage at last.
2. Sightline and allies also have the chance to help convince the Washington legislature to give cities the choice of moving their local elections to November of even-numbered years, when national elections are held. Doing so would double local turnout, on average.
3. In November of 2024, Oregon will vote on a Sightline-supported referendum to adopt RCV in all statewide and federal races. This is the first statewide vote on RCV ever initiated by a legislature, and victory is within reach.
4. In the same election, Alaskans will probably vote on a ballot measure that asks whether to keep or repeal the state’s new system of top-four primaries and RCV. Defending the Alaska system is essential. It’s a model for reforms elsewhere!
5. In the same election, Montana appears likely to vote on whether to adopt top-four open primaries and a constitutional requirement for majority winners in elections—a package that would lead to RCV or other alternatives to the state’s polarizing system of partisan primaries and first-past-the-post general elections. We think this campaign is winnable.
6. In the same election, Idaho voters will likely decide a citizens’ initiative to adopt a top-four primary and RCV, just like Alaska. An uphill fight, this initiative is well worth supporting.

Sightline’s Democracy + Elections program aims to seize these opportunities. We have team members in place to support the Alaska, Idaho, and Montana efforts, plus team members who will work across all of the measures. We are opening a permanent position on our Democracy + Elections team to support, with research and outreach, imminent efforts in Oregon and Washington. Although the position will focus on these priorities in the near term, we expect them to give way to subsequent opportunities as 2024 turns to 2025.

About the Position



The Researcher will staff our work in Oregon and Washington as a thought leader, policy researcher, writer, communicator, advocate, and coalition participant. They will develop and deploy expertise on electoral upgrades to make the case for reforms, especially ranked choice voting, along with other specific reforms at the state and local level that Sightline has identified as promising. They will implement strategies for using information and communications to help win passage of these reforms, typically in coordination with cross-partisan coalitions of unusual allies. To that end, the researcher will develop a mastery of Sightline’s democracy-reform research and contribute to it, including systems such as open primaries and ranked-choice voting, proportional representation, election consolidation, and democracy vouchers.

The researcher will research and develop arguments in support of these reforms; write articles, talking points, and policy memos; give presentations; advocate for reforms; conduct outreach; serve as a resource to the media; and lobby public officials. They will cultivate relationships with leaders and partners across many types of diversity, including racial, ethnic, economic, geographic, and political.

The researcher will report to a senior member of the Democracy + Elections team and collaborate with the rest of that six-member team, including staff members in Alaska, Montana, Oregon, and Washington. They will benefit from being part of a high-functioning cadre of other researchers, communicators, and advocates, supported by a well-run administrative and fundraising operation based in Seattle.

Ideal Candidate Skills/Experience

Sightline is a think tank, not a pressure group, so our influence depends on the depth and breadth of our researchers' expertise and their persuasiveness in presenting analysis and arguments. We aim to draw attention to and build support for data-backed solutions to specific public problems through close engagement in policy debates. And we seek strategic deployment of our skills in the multilayered complexities of political processes, typically as part of creative, even unusual, cross-partisan coalitions. The successful candidate will have a record of effecting influence in at least some of these ways. We are specifically interested in candidates who have:

- A record of influencing policy progress through careful research and analysis, excellent writing, persuasive presentations and advocacy, and strategic engagement in complicated coalitions and through generating media attention
- At least five years of relevant professional experience using ideas and information to advance the public good—preferably in the field of this position but at least in similar or related ones. We care more about your skills than your subject-matter expertise
- Demonstrated experience building respectful and effective relationships and collaborating with people across difference, including racial, ethnic, gender, and cultural difference and also across differences in values and political beliefs
- A pragmatic and long-term approach to policy reforms and political change
- The ability to be self-directed and motivated and to work independently

- Experience weighing diversity, equity, and inclusion in research, advocacy, and communication
- Commitment to Sightline's mission and values

Flexibility

We most likely will hire a candidate who is at the “researcher” level of skill and experience, as described. However, depending on candidates' experience and skill level, we will consider hiring for this position at Sightline's (lower) senior associate level or (higher) senior researcher level. Duties, expectations, and compensation would ramp up or down, commensurately. At Sightline, we believe in mentoring talent and providing opportunities for growth. We look for the overall promise of the candidate to contribute to our mission over the long term. Therefore, if you are somewhat underqualified or overqualified for the position as described, or have relevant experience and transferrable skills different from those listed here, but still feel you could be a good fit, please apply. If you seem a promising match for Sightline, we will discuss with you which level we are considering you for.

Location

This position is based in Oregon or Washington, and we prefer candidates with existing expertise and professional connections in these states. Candidates willing to relocate from elsewhere are welcome to apply, however. Sightline is a virtual-first organization. We retain a small office in Seattle, but all staff members work remotely. Our staff, contractors, and fellows are in Alaska, British Columbia, Idaho, Montana, Oregon, and Washington and beyond Cascadia as well.



Compensation and Benefits

The salary range (for the researcher level) is \$65-79,000 (plus 10 percent retirement, as noted below). Candidates at the senior researcher or senior associate levels would be eligible for salary bands above or below this range. Sightline is committed to supporting team members along their career pathway by encouraging learning and providing mentoring and training. Employees can earn annual merit raises and periodic promotions.

We offer a robust package of benefits including a 401(k) plan with employer contribution of 10 percent of salary (added to—not subtracted from—pay so, for example, a \$70,000 salary at Sightline is equivalent to a \$77,000 salary at an organization that makes no employer contribution to retirement). Benefits also include full medical, dental, and vision insurance for the employee and partial coverage for dependents; a monthly remote-work stipend; regular staff gatherings for in-person connection; four weeks of paid vacation, ten paid holidays, and two weeks of paid sick leave per year; and a three-month paid sabbatical every seven years. Sightline's staff members work hard but enjoy balanced lives and a collegial organizational culture.

To Apply

Please send us a resume and cover letter detailing your interest in the role and how your skills qualify you for it and succinctly summarizing your experience advancing diversity, equity, and inclusion. Please include at least one writing sample of which you are sole author and that is similar to Sightline's published works in its style and form of argument. For models of comparable work, you might review articles published by Sightline's democracy team [here](#). Also welcome are other supporting materials, such as other publications and videos of speeches or media appearances. We prefer that you assemble all application materials in a single PDF, labeled with your name. Send everything to jobs@sightline.org. Please put "Sightline Researcher, Democracy" as the subject line of the email. Please also tell us in your email where you learned about this position; this information helps us streamline our recruiting processes. Applications that do not include at least a cover letter, resume, and writing sample will not be considered.

THE APPLICATION DEADLINE IS AUGUST 31, 2023, and applications received by that date will be given priority, but we will accept applications until the position is filled. Interviews will take place in early September. We will likely invite finalists to complete a work assignment that is designed to test their skills in the specific functions required for the position. We anticipate extending an offer by the end of September.

Sightline Institute is an equal opportunity employer and all qualified candidates are encouraged to apply. Applicants will not be discriminated against because of race, color, creed, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, age, religion, national origin, citizenship status, disability, ancestry, marital status, veteran status, medical condition or any protected category prohibited by local, state or federal laws.

