



Seattle
Ethics & Elections
Commission



DEMOCRACY VOUCHER PROGRAM

Biennial Report

2019

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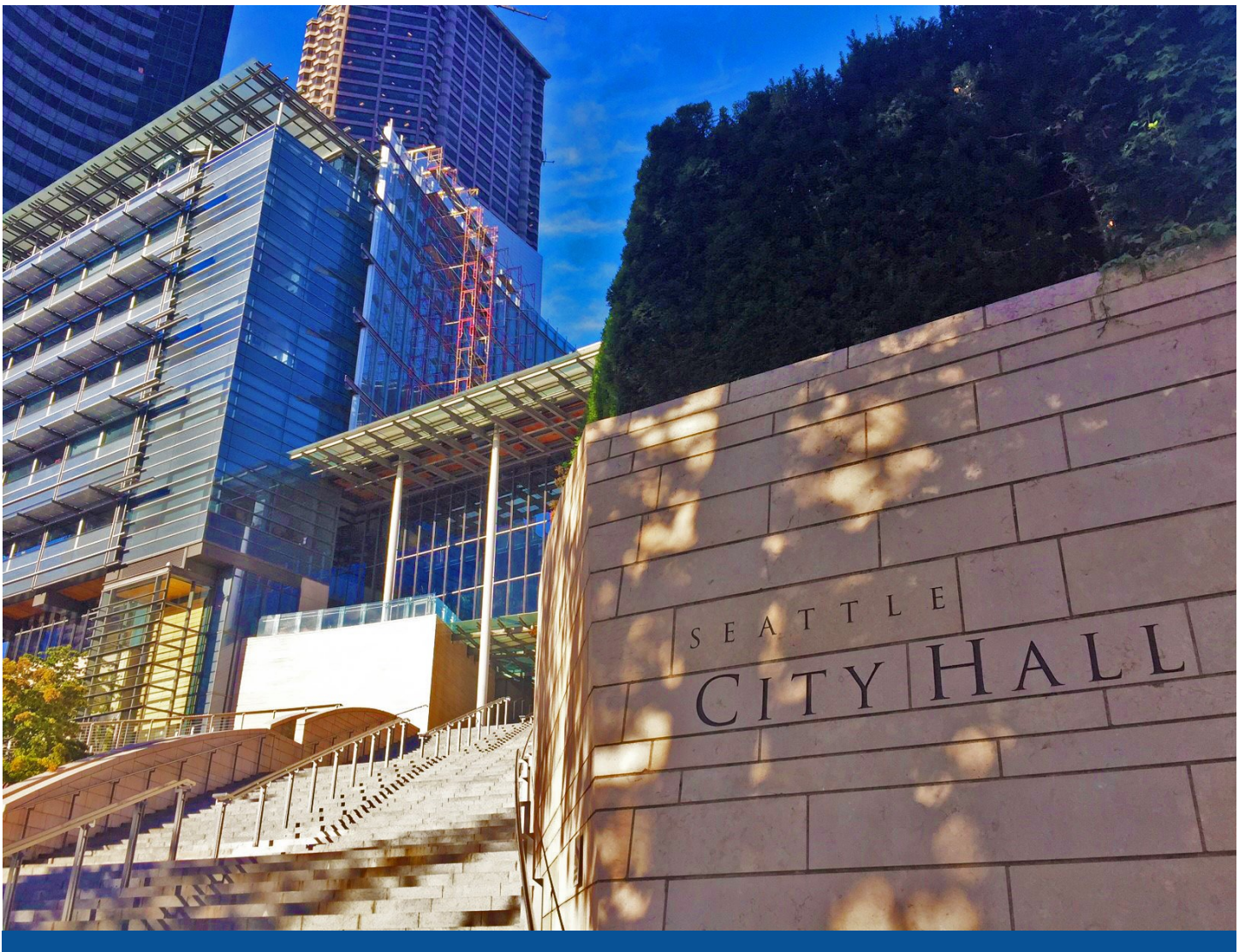


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Message from the Executive Director

It is an honor to present the second Democracy Voucher Program biennial report. The Seattle Ethics and Elections Commission (SEEC) is deeply committed to upholding the spirit of the “Honest Elections Seattle” initiative, while ensuring accountability and transparency for how public dollars are spent.

It has been inspiring to watch Seattle residents and candidates use the Democracy Voucher Program to amplify their voices in the political process. From candidates who said they would not have considered running for office, to residents who made their first-ever contributions to support candidates in their communities, the Democracy Voucher Program continues to engage our city.

I am pleased to present the following accomplishments from the second election cycle. Thank you to our community partners, residents, and candidates for championing this program!



Wayne Barnett
Executive Director

2019 Accomplishments



INCREASED PARTICIPATION

- 38,092 residents returned more than 147,128 Democracy Vouchers, nearly doubling the 2017 participation rates.
- 53 candidates pledged to participate in the program and 35 candidates completed the qualifying process.



CONDUCTED OUTREACH IN SEATTLE’S SEVEN DISTRICTS

- Staff and community-based organizations (CBOs) attended 356 outreach events and interacted with more than 28,000 residents.
- The SEEC managed \$150,000 in contracts with 10 CBOs to conduct outreach in hard-to-reach communities.



LAUNCHED ONLINE PORTAL IN 15 LANGUAGES

- 6,204 residents successfully assigned 24,105 vouchers using the Democracy Voucher Online Portal.

Introduction

This report summarizes the administration and implementation of the Democracy Voucher Program (DVP) in the 2019 election cycle.

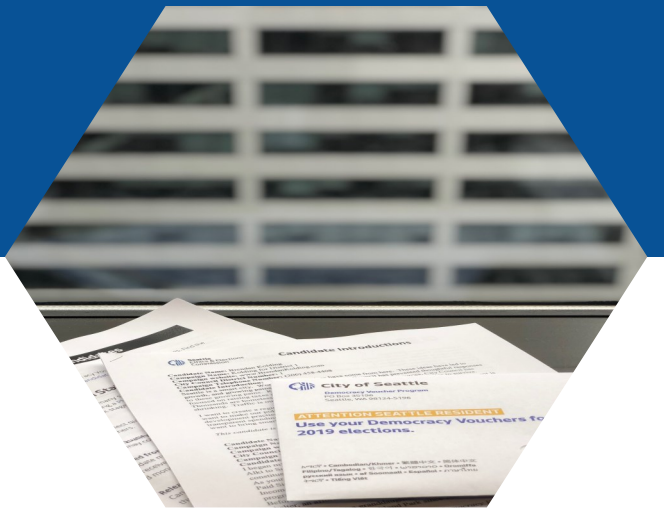
Seattle’s program remains the only form of public campaign financing of its kind. Residents receive four \$25 Democracy Vouchers they can use to support candidates running for local office.

In 2019, the races eligible for DVP funding were the seven city council district positions. Residents could give their vouchers to candidates in any council district.

Program Background

In November 2015, Seattle voters approved a citizen-led initiative known as "Honest Elections Seattle" (I-122).

Among the many campaign finance reforms included in I-122, one led to the creation of the public campaign finance program known as the “Democracy Voucher Program.” I-122 required the Seattle Ethics and Elections Commission to implement and administer the DVP with a high degree of transparency and accountability. The DVP is funded by a 10-year property tax levy of \$3 million per year.



Program Objectives

The program aims to increase civic engagement in two key ways.

First, encourage more Seattle residents to run for local office.

Second, increase the number of Seattle residents active in local elections.



2019 Program Updates



Changed Mailing Date

In 2017, both residents and candidates felt the January mailing date for vouchers was too early.

In 2019, vouchers were mailed to residents on February 12, 2019.

Launched Online Portal

For 2019, the SEEC launched the Democracy Voucher Online Portal. This secure portal allows residents to assign their vouchers online and is available in 15 languages.

In its first year of operation, the online portal accounted for 17% of returned vouchers.

Once a resident signs up for online vouchers, they will no longer be mailed paper vouchers. Instead, they will receive an e-mail with access to their online vouchers.

Targeted Outreach Through Community-Based Organizations

The SEEC contracted with 10 community-based organizations for a total cost of \$150,000. The goals of the contracts were to increase program awareness and participation in Seattle's hard-to-reach communities.

In total, the 10 organizations completed 276 outreach events and interacted with more than 23,000 residents.



Lake City Collective/Literacy Source interpreting at a candidate forum at North Seattle College.



Chinese Information Service Center explaining the program to a resident at Byrd Barr Place.

How the Program Works



During City of Seattle elections, the SEEC mails four \$25 Democracy Vouchers to Seattle residents.

Residents may assign their vouchers to any candidate participating in the program. Residents may give their vouchers to a single candidate or to multiple candidates.

Residents may return their vouchers by:

- Using the prepaid envelope addressed to the SEEC,
- Giving their vouchers directly to a campaign or candidate,
- Accessing the Democracy Voucher Online Portal to assign their vouchers,
- Dropping their vouchers in a King County Elections ballot box (during an active election), or
- Handing in their vouchers at any of the Seattle Public Libraries or City of Seattle Customer Service Centers.

Once the voucher is received by the SEEC, there are several methods to verify the voucher.

- King County Elections verifies the signatures on paper vouchers from registered voters.
- Trulioo, a third-party verification system, verifies Online Portal users when they create an account.
- The SEEC verifies signatures from residents who apply for vouchers.

For candidates who have completed the qualifying process, the SEEC releases the value of the verified vouchers to the candidate's campaign.

Eligibility

Participant eligibility requirements align with the federal requirements establishing who may contribute to political campaigns. To receive vouchers, an individual must be:

- At least 18 years or older,
- A U.S. citizen, U.S. national, or lawful permanent resident, and
- A Seattle resident.

The SEEC receives participant data from two sources. Under an agreement with King County Elections, the SEEC receives the list of registered voters in Seattle. Residents who are not registered voters may apply to receive vouchers.

Distribution of Vouchers



The SEEC mailed vouchers to 450,293 residents on February 12, 2019. Thereafter, the SEEC periodically mailed vouchers to newly registered voters and to those who applied to receive vouchers.

In total, more than 476,000 residents received vouchers for the 2019 election.

The average cost to produce and mail each voucher packet was 56 cents.

Replacement Vouchers

The SEEC and campaigns were able to issue new vouchers to residents who no longer had their vouchers.

Residents had the option to contact the SEEC to request replacements by phone, e-mail, completing an online webform, or in-person. Replacements were issued to residents immediately by mailing a new set of vouchers or emailing an invitation code to access their vouchers through the Online Portal.

The SEEC sent new vouchers to 2,215 residents. Of those residents, 52% used their vouchers.

Campaigns and their registered representatives were allowed to reissue vouchers using the Campaign Replacement Form. This made it easier for residents to give vouchers directly to a candidate of their choice.

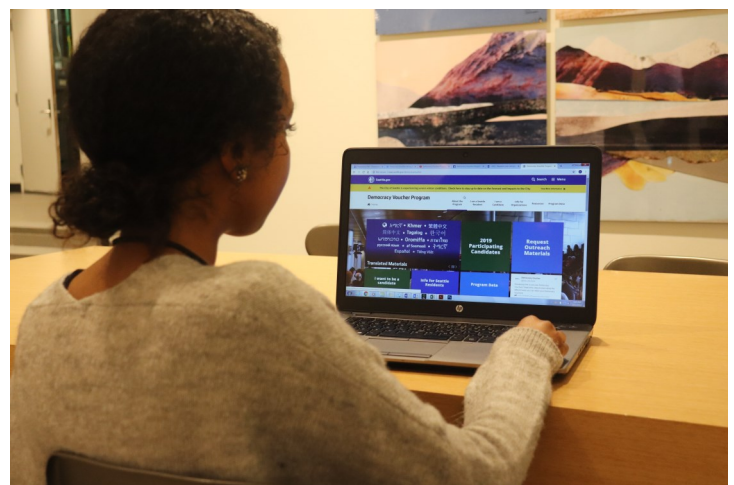
In total, 5,466 residents used a Campaign Replacement Form.

Online Portal

An I-122 requirement was to have an Online Portal available for the 2019 election cycle.

The web-based portal allows residents to validate their identity and assign their vouchers online.

The Online Portal was launched and had 6,204 users assign 24,105 vouchers.

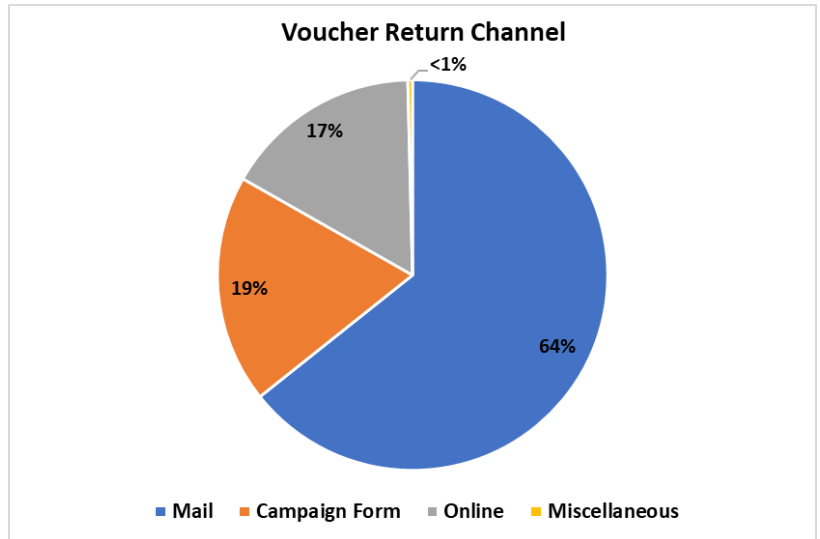


Processing Vouchers

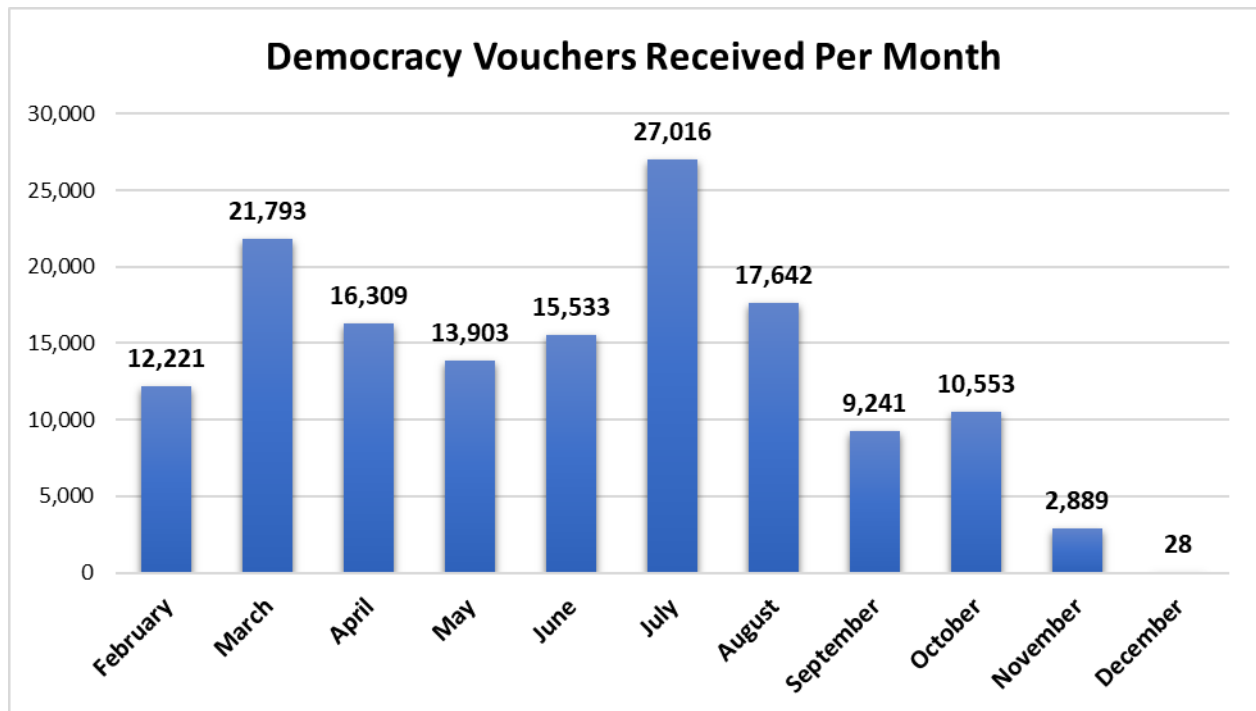
The SEEC hired 3.5 temporary staff to process vouchers. Vouchers received were recorded in the Democracy Voucher database.

Signatures on the vouchers were verified by King County Elections or the SEEC. Vouchers assigned in the Online Portal were pre-authenticated.

Voucher signatures passed with a 99.5% success rate. For vouchers that did not pass, the SEEC notified participants and provided an opportunity to correct the issue. Nearly half of those participants corrected their signatures.



Sixty-four percent of vouchers were returned directly to the SEEC by mail. In addition, 19% of vouchers were given directly to candidates and 17% of vouchers were assigned through the Online Portal. Less than one percent of vouchers were returned to King County Elections’ ballot boxes, Seattle’s Customer Service Centers, libraries, and through e-mail to the SEEC.



Voucher return rates peaked in July, just before the August primary. In total, the SEEC office processed 147,128 vouchers from 38,092 residents.

Democracy Voucher Program: 2019 Participation by City Council District

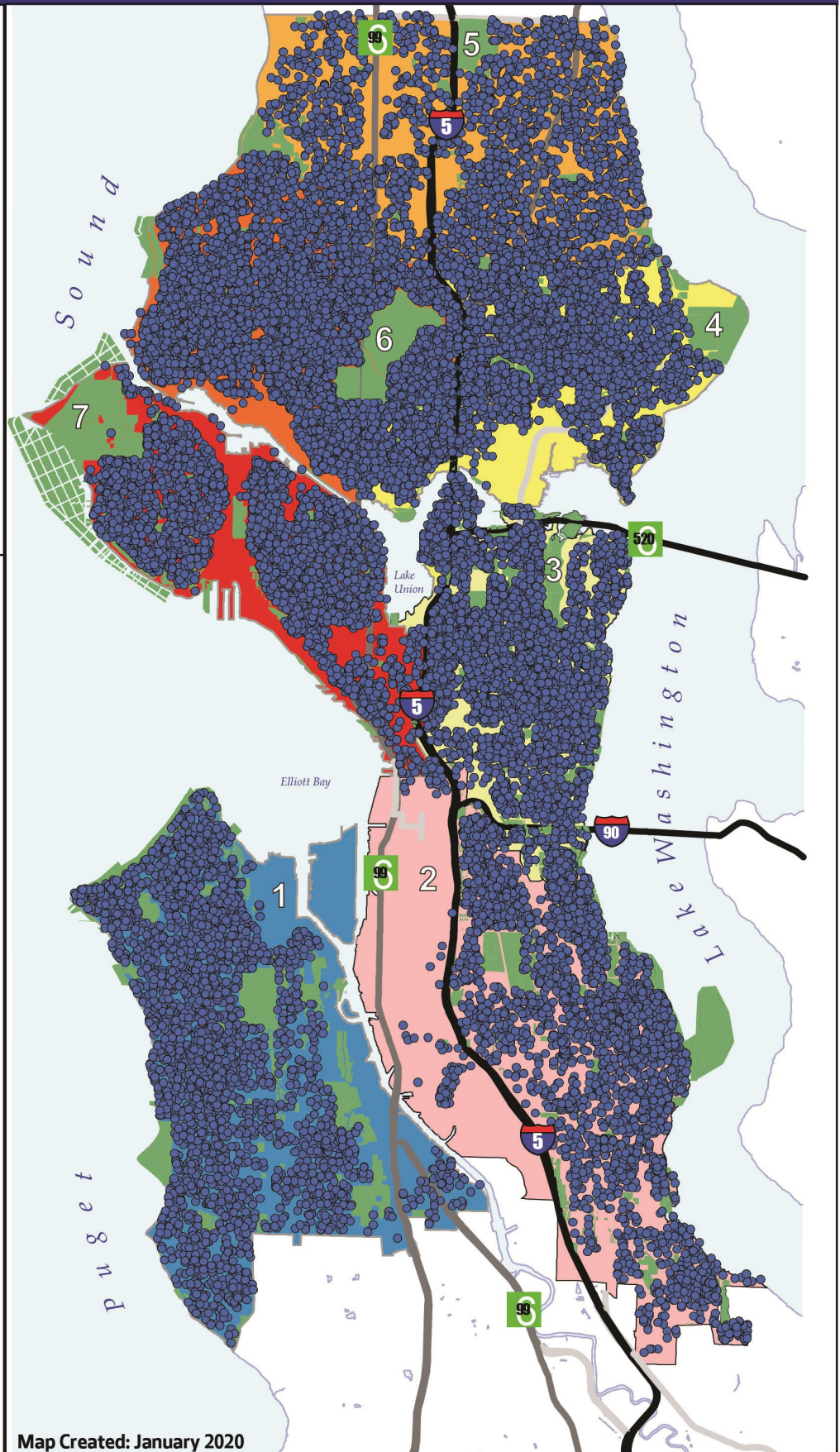


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This map shows Seattle residents who submitted at least one Democracy Voucher to a participating candidate for the 2019 election.

Legend

- Democracy Voucher Participant
- Parks
- Waterbodies
- 520
- 99
- I-5
- I-90
- Council District 1
4,278 residents participated
- Council District 2
4,584 residents participated
- Council District 3
6,941 residents participated
- Council District 4
6,189 residents participated
- Council District 5
3,397 residents participated
- Council District 6
7,089 residents participated
- Council District 7
5,614 residents participated



Map Created: January 2020

Candidates



Pledging

Candidates signed a pledge agreeing to program rules, which included limiting individual contribution amounts and overall campaign spending. Candidates also agreed to a minimum number of public debates.

Once pledged, the candidate’s name appeared on the SEEC website and as an option on the online portal as a voucher-eligible candidate.

Of the 72 City of Seattle candidates who filed to run, 53 pledged to participate in the Democracy Voucher Program.

Qualifying

To receive funds, candidates completed a qualifying process by collecting at least 150 (minimum \$10) contributions and 150 signatures from Seattle residents. At least 75 of the qualifying contributions and signatures each had to come from within the candidate’s district.

The SEEC audited the campaign filings, signature forms, and online donations. Signatures were validated by King County Elections.


Campaign Disbursements

During the 2019 election cycle, the SEEC generated 273 checks, distributing nearly \$2.5 million to campaigns. Unused voucher funds remain in the program budget for future election years.

Democracy Voucher Program Contribution and Expenditure Limits	City Attorney	City Council At-large	City Council District	Mayor (2021)
Individual Contribution Limit*	\$250*	\$250*	\$250*	\$500
Campaign Expenditure Limits Primary Election Only	\$150,000	\$150,000	\$75,000	\$400,000
Campaign Expenditure Limits for Primary and General Election Combined	\$300,000	\$300,000	\$150,000	\$800,000

****These limits do not include Democracy Voucher values.***

Communication Channels



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공할 수 있습니다.

Language Access

I-122 requires key program materials be available in 15 languages: Amharic, Cambodian, English, Korean, Lao, Oromo, Russian, Simplified Chinese, Somali, Spanish, Tagalog, Thai, Tigrinya, Traditional Chinese, and Vietnamese.

Translated materials included the Democracy Voucher mailer, Online Portal, how-to videos, candidate qualifying documents, candidate introductions, dedicated language web pages, advertisements, and posters.

In all, 197 unique communications were translated for a total cost of \$48,000.

Website

The voucher website had more than 232,000 total page views. 193,000 of those views were unique.

Language pages offered information about how to apply for vouchers, how to run as a candidate, how to use the program, and links to candidate introductions.

Social Media

Facebook and Twitter were used to distribute information quickly to Seattle residents and media contacts. For only \$892, Facebook ads reached 31,863 people and received 58,135 impressions. Additionally, Twitter received 297,000 impressions during the election cycle.

In 2019, the program's social media presence expanded to include Instagram and Nextdoor.

Nextdoor proved to be an effective and cost-free platform for distributing key messages. Nextdoor accounted for 81,000 impressions and Instagram added another 5,100.

Voucher Hotline

The Democracy Voucher Hotline received 1,268 calls from January 2019 to December 2019. February received the highest number, with 233 calls.

In 2019, 37 callers requested language assistance. The most requested language was Vietnamese. Staff also received phone calls for Spanish, Tigrinya, Cantonese, Cambodian, Russian, Laotian, Korean, Somali, and Arabic.

Candidate Introductions

During the 2017 election, residents indicated there was limited information about the candidates available before voter pamphlets were mailed.

As a result, a new resource called "Candidate Introductions" was created. All candidates were invited to submit 150-word-statements. Introductions were translated and then made available online and in printed form.

In total, 47 candidate introductions were made available in 15 languages.

Outreach

Candidate Outreach

Ahead of 2019, staff created a candidate brochure to inform residents about how to fund their own campaign. This brochure was available in 15 languages.

In addition to distributing the brochure, staff presented to boards, commissions, and leadership groups.

Staff also created the “Candidate Toolkit”, which included information about using the Democracy Voucher Program to run for office.



Candidate resources were distributed at outreach events.

Contracts with Community-Based Organizations

The SEEC contracted with 10 community-based organizations for a total cost of \$150,000 to increase program awareness and participation levels in Seattle’s hard-to-reach communities.

Organizations awarded contracts served Seattle’s seven districts with an emphasis on populations



including communities of color, limited English proficiency, lawful permanent residents, immigrant/refugees, Latinx, low-income, LGBTQ, unsheltered individuals, unregistered voters, aging populations and more.

The following organizations conducted 276 outreach events and interacted with 23,800 residents:

- APACEvotes
- Asian Counseling and Referral Service (ACRS)
- Chinese Information Service Center (CISC)
- Coalition of Immigrants, Refugees and Communities of Color (CIRCC)
- Eritrean Association in Greater Seattle
- Literacy Source and the Lake City Collective
- Somali Health Board
- South Park Information and Resource Center (SPIARC)
- Washington Bus Education Fund (WBEF)
- WashPIRG



SEEC staff train Lake City Collective’s and Literacy Source’s community ambassadors.

Outreach



In-person Outreach

Staff conducted outreach at 80 events and interacted with more than 5,000 residents.

Activities included 26 presentations, 37 tabling events, and 15 networking events. Outreach occurred at district candidate forums, cultural events, and leadership group meetings.



The SEEC's communications intern staffing the Somali Celebration at the New Holly Community Center.

How to Use Your Vouchers Video

Residents from the first election cycle expressed a need to understand how to use their vouchers. In response, staff created a 45-second "how to" video made available in 15 languages. This three-step video informs residents how to receive vouchers, how to assign vouchers, and how to return vouchers.

Community Liaisons

The SEEC also utilized the Department of Neighborhoods' community liaison program.

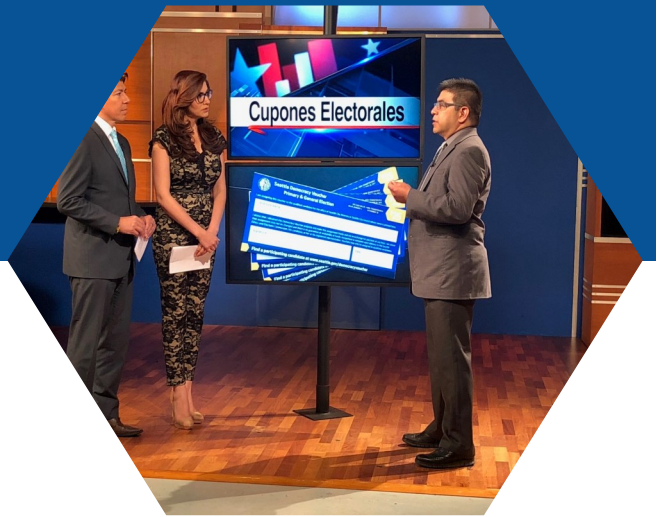
The unhoused community liaison completed five outreach events and interacted with 57 residents. Outreach efforts included visiting tiny villages and presenting to the Downtown Emergency Service Center.

The Cambodian community liaison completed seven outreach events and interacted with 26 residents. Outreach efforts included presenting at various locations in High Point and SW Seattle.



Community liaison visiting with tiny-house builders at Camp Second Chance in West Seattle.

Media



Candidate Media Campaign

Staff coordinated media campaigns throughout the election cycle. Beginning in July of 2018, staff promoted how to run for office using Democracy Vouchers.



Press releases were distributed to local and ethnic media in Amharic, English, Somali, Spanish, Traditional Chinese, and Vietnamese.

2019 Program Launch

To alert residents to look for their vouchers after February 12, staff purchased web, print, social media, radio, and television ads with general and ethnic media outlets.

Staff used a local poster company to distribute posters to 100 businesses in Seattle.

The media spend for the 2018-2019 election year was \$21,839. The program also received coverage from a number of local media outlets.

Mid-year Reminder Campaign

A mid-year campaign, launched in July, encouraged residents to use their vouchers ahead of the primary.

Television interviews were conducted in Amharic, English, Oromo, Spanish, Somali, and Tigrinya.

To remind residents they could request replacement vouchers, roughly 265 posters were placed in restaurants, community centers, libraries, markets, and gathering places across Seattle.



Closing Out the Program

By October, 11 of the 12 Democracy Voucher candidates had reached their limits. Two press releases were distributed to over 50 media contacts to alert residents to this fact.

Budget Summary Report

Democracy Voucher Program				
Budget Summary Report	2016	2017	2018	2019

Implementation				
Technology	\$263,200	\$36,000	\$17,200	\$459,497
Office construction	\$225,000			
Informational mailer	\$127,636			
Focus group	\$45,000			
Office hardware and supplies	\$25,000			
Implementation Cost Total	\$685,836	\$36,000	\$17,200	\$459,497

Administration				
Voucher production and mailing		\$358,000	\$1,140	\$326,309
Outreach media and materials	\$5,000	\$85,000	\$53,099	\$39,333
Translation	\$22,000	\$16,000	\$10,763	\$48,208
Outreach contracting and events		\$30,000		\$149,885
Program evaluation		\$30,000	\$43,410	\$22,541
King County Elections signature verification		\$18,500		\$34,580
Administration		\$84,700	\$5,077	\$91,456
Staff: Program staff	\$273,000	\$359,400	\$343,873	\$343,678
Staff: Temporary staff		\$55,000		\$103,407
Yearly Administration Cost	\$300,000	\$1,036,600	\$457,362	\$1,159,397

Candidates				
2017 Primary and General Election				
Disbursements		\$1,140,525		\$2,454,475

Total Program Costs	\$985,836	\$2,213,125	\$474,562	\$4,073,369
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Funding				
Levy	\$3,000,000	\$3,000,000	\$3,000,000	\$3,000,000
Returned unused voucher funds		\$34,958		\$22,854