

Agenda – voting roundtable
5/8/13
Attendees

Start: 6:10 pm

1. Welcome/Introductions (Sharon/Rich)

Sharon – opened, Luis is at university, will be here shortly and is also a political science prof and expert on voting. He is more knowledgeable of co-chairs but we have Rich Stolz from one America who will help get meeting started. Wanted to thank everyone for coming – all busy community people. Taskforce is part of RSJI – Mayor McGinn appointed 15 of us last year to look into issues related to barriers and solutions on getting greater voter participation of new Americans. Mayor Murray is looking forward to our report. Fortunate to have continuity in what we are doing. Rich is a national expert on a lot of things so I will ask him to say a little about national scene and what is going on, in WA we aren't as bad off as in some states – esp in south voter suppression is extreme.

Rich – sure, it's nice to be able to fill in for Luis Fraga, will do my best. Voting rights taskforce session happened a few weeks ago at UW – opportunity to present a number of issues based on WA residents. National fight around voting rights, there is legislation moving thru Congress on Supreme Court decisions – holds municipalities for history of discrimination in voting practices. Today this is an opportunity for us to explore an issue of voting here in King County and Seattle – hear from folks about your perspectives on the state of voting, perspectives with regard to solutions and things you would like to see. This is a great opportunity to have this conversation – as taskforce begins to prepare final report. Scheduled to have something due in next couple of months – feedback and suggestions, testimony from this meeting will play major part in drafting. Group went around introductions – community members gave name and organization.

2. Barriers to Access (Heather/Trang) –

Heather and Trang introduced themselves – barriers to access and how does voting play a role. Two categories – logistical barriers what are physical barriers – are there enough drop boxes. Another possible logistical barrier is are there people who are eligible to vote but can't or don't – logistically. We also want to talk about cultural barriers – different people's background – education – language – what is the experience of people in home country. Is there a motivation gap?

Let's start with logistical – take sticky notes and write down ideas about logistical barriers. Other types of barriers – write those down too. Take 5 min.

Heather intro Luis

Luis – sorry late – associate vice provost, co chair of taskforce, happy we are finally making it to point of listening to community voices. Thank you for being here. Graciella (?) Luis's research assistant – also really great leader at UW, undocumented.

Heather – some of these things are things we have talked about at length, some more unfamiliar. Will read quickly – if I see 3 hands, will put a star on it – prioritize convo moving forward.

Logistical

- a. Drop boxes – too far away, barriers to submit ballots, drop box long lines, can't part, not enough, not widely advertised, vans only open 10-5
- b. Lack of support for communities of color outreach and voter registration
- c. Meaningful partnerships between stakeholders, elections, office and community groups
- d. No access to tech

- e. No outreach to i/r communities
- f. Legal – costs of citizenships, prevent ppl from becoming citizens
- g. Language – tied to lack of access to information
- h. Too many ppl from poc convicted of violations that result of loss of right to vote
- i. Hassle of voting – registering, identifying, places to vote, getting there
- j. Need driver's license or id to register to vote
- k. Voter registration need to be automatic –
- l. Lost ballot – inability to get replacement
- m. Cost of stamps
- n. Don't know where to go
- o. How to coordinate resources
- p. Not a citizen
- q. Misinformed about felon voting rights
- r. Earlier voter registration deadlines
- s. Not enough languages
- t. Lack of portable voter reg
- u. Lack of competent civic ed in public schools
- v. Under 18
- w. Too many things to vote on
- x. Opt out vs opt in
- y. All residents able to vote in county elections

Cultural

- a. Language
- b. Disbelief in one vote matters
- c. Outside of kc adequate monitors for each cultural group
- d. Public forums – more educ, who is running, what does it mean to vote
- e. Heavy gov campaigns to encourage voting
- f. Funding for voting rights restoration
- g. Gov not willing to make effort to increase voting access

Sopha – was at workshop – 50% registered to vote.

Heather – let's go back to More drop boxes

Kristina – elections had moved 2 of their drop boxes, 24 hours. Only 3 days before elections, staffed from 10-5 vans. Moved from boxes to vans. Today I found out they had 12 vans last year and it was \$36k. 10 of those drop boxes are unstaffed and those are \$16k. why are they moving from drop boxes to drop vans?

Sharon – that's ridiculous

Laura – info about distribution? Drop vans in south end and drop boxes in u district and Ballard?

Kristina – they have numbers – moved to vans for some because boxes weren't utilized

Sharon – how well publicized?

Kristina – voter pamphlet

Sharon – if you can't read voter pamphlet.

Trang – drop boxes is about access, availability, distribution. While it's relatively nuts and bolts – intensity and emphasis is strong as reflected in number of you who made comments. Not complex, but strong need.

Heather – misinformed about felony voting rights? Lack of support for communities of color, outreach, voter registration?

Nannette – bridge the gap – if something like drop boxes are readily available to people. Getting info to people in a way that they can understand.

Michael – issue of making sure ppl have right register or register to vote is extremely important – not just immigrant, communities of color born and raised in this country, it's important that part of this effort or campaign be extended in terms of registration or access – particularly working together with African American community. One thing we do in Seattle, I'm on enough committees, is that we silo out issues and community. There needs to be one uniform effort for which there is distinct outreach – and other communities of color. I would offer that to the city.

Kristina – in terms of lack of support – always seems to come down to funding. Lack of funding for cbos to do outreach, elections will say they don't have the funding to hire ppl to speak all of these languages, all needs to come down to money. There is also the support within the elected to designate that money to do the work.

Heather – cost of citizenship/naturalization prevents ppl from becoming citizens

Sharon - \$860 just to apply for naturalization, a lot of ppl can't afford it

Kripa – new form – 5 page to 21 page forms. i/r communities are dealing with notarios within community that are undermining the community from getting access. Access to info and getting out into community – still trying to figure out how they fit into scheme of things- they are completely disenfranchised.

Devon – immigration system is inherently racist – it needs to be said

Heather - hearing bias in actual system – barriers to becoming eligible to vote causes ppl to not have access to voting

Michael mckee – funding and outreach for continuum of civic engagement in addition to money, there is a huge time gap when ppl arrive before they are eligible to become citizen. Citizen engagement can start immediately. There is no funding, not enough.

Heather – economic inequality contributes to this problem – bias and economic inequality, it is individual funding for person

Diane – fear of no tolerance policy – if you make mistake on form – look back from when you became permanent resident. That is a huge problem in the future – if you were born with one name, came in, changed your name, some place along the way they will strip you of whatever rights you have.

Heather – not a citizen – thoughts? Can't register to vote if you're not a citizen

Kripa – if you inadvertently register to vote you can't become citizen and you can't register to vote if you're not a citizen. Wa – drivers license will sometimes automatically register you to vote – but if you aren't eligible, you are no longer allowed to be citizen.

Diane – esp in central wa – may feel compelled when they are asked. It's not illegal to register to vote, it is illegal to vote. If you receive a ballot and you feel compelled – then you are voting.

Michael – I heard a discrepancy – I think clarify the law – consequences sound pretty severe. Req sig public education

Luis – when you register to get driver's license, it asks if you want to register to vote – yes, but then it asks if you are a citizen and if you say no – then you aren't allowed to go further. Person is asked explicitly whether they are a citizen. Issue of education is extremely important.

Diane – could be a simple change in the form to clarify – wa is unique in that we don't require a lot of documentation

Sharon – another element totally different – there are some places in local elections it's ok to vote if you are resident – school board

Michael – some of us indicated that's an issue we want to talk about

Heather – lack of civic educ competency in public schools

Trang – additional comments about information and education here

Tania – I'm a uw ambassador – when we have students come from across the state, we have to refresh their memories about difference between local and state on leg day – makes it harder for them to know who they are voting for

Heather – voter reg needs to be made automatic

Kristina – also lack of political will for systems change

Heather – cultural – language barriers. Reading level of translations/conceptual v literal, lack of info in other lang, need ass with tansl ballot, less common languages, lack of info about how to register to vote, language accessibility info – partic of candidates, not enough languages, Portland has 12 languages!, lang access incl beyond sec 203, lack of outreach that targets new Americans

Sopha – more than just lang – goes back to relationship, why are you not voting? They say we don't know the reps, the process. Have talked to people who are big leaders in community, the same thing, don't have trust or relationship.

Michael mckee – that's what I meant in terms of candidate perspectives – to understand what candidate believes, there is no lang accessibility

Sopha – goes back to Kristina – not a one shot deal – let's go deal with communities of color – becomes that face for that district .

Trang – synthesizing here – the common thread or theme is meeting voters where they are at – three aspects of that – ppl understand context of us based voting system, 2 is actual language trans/materials, and 3 is accessibility of content. Then we want more – 3 distinct dimensions

Devon – since the vra is based on census every 10 years – in wa state where we have such a large number of i/r, that doesn't work for us – voter reg forms translated to Somali/tagalong – was told to talk to census 2020 people. Sec of state acknowledges we have more than just Spanish and Chinese.

Sharon – only Chinese and Vietnamese in kc

Heather – invisibility of poc to gov

Nanette – so much of this is off of census – is everyone being counted? It gets deeper

Kristina – how they determine the criteria – for section 203 qualifications – it needs to be changed it's off

Sharon – threshold is too high when we have a gazillion diff ethnic groups

Kristina – based on your community filling out acs and them determining their reading level. I can't tell you my reading level. It's flawed.

Veasna – cultural piece – finding that bridge between community leaders and community itself. want to bring up notion of natural leaders who don't have degrees or are very prominent in city events but have strong rltnghp with community – they trust them because speak lang. the barrier – they don't have support, they wear many hats, some are undocumented, they have the will. They are the ones going to the places and mtg with elders and fam members and talking with them in ways they need to be respected

Heather – we shifted to cultural things, I want to see if there are any ideas

Diane – language – kc elections board talk about how expensive it is to do translation, not just of ballot but also background materials which they get late – it seems as though one solution would be to do trans in many lang and make it available on internet it seems like it would be easy to make ballot as well as background materials available, where it could be viewed, d/l, printed, and cost isn't on gov. does that perspective make sense to the communities

Dorothy – we should talk about in solutions

Heather – making voting available for all residents?

Devon – yes

Michael mckee – fully support, what do other communities do

Devon – in Holland – you can vote for mayor, local, so they have to listen

Luis – Tacoma park md and argument was that he wanted to vote for school board. First restriction – noncitizen, legal res, child enrolled in public schools then you could vote in school elections. They have since expanded to incl other local elections. Just city? County? Both? San Francisco voted about 10 years ago, voted to allow legal noncitizens – voted down. Interesting cultural distribution of who said no – interestingly analysis showed that Chinese descent American citizens who voted no. nothing in our law that would prevent city from being able to do

Michael mckee – conceptually it's brilliant

Rich – it is a different registration form

Arsalan – how is this done in city of md – how is it put into place?

Luis – just vote?

Heather – under lack of motivation, their vote will make a diff, perception rooted in fear, voting is not cultural/social norm, not seeing value of voting vs other life priorities, fear/retaliation in home country, train outreach workers esp working populations, come from culture that doesn't allow voting, diff understanding/beliefs abt roll/gov, not seeing communities of color, fear/threatening opposition. Also – public forums, don't know issues, not prepared, understanding pol system, confusion on what to vote, understanding of issues of ballots, hs curriculum, leaders need to push, dem has resp, understanding who can vote on what. We will bring into solutions. 2 min break

Dorothy – welcome back everybody – this section will focus on solution. What is natural/logical – we will work off of some of these issues. We want to throw out – this is a brainstorming session. We welcome all the feedback.

Diane – idea is that there is ballot on the internet – kc elections website – would be relatively easy to have that trans into many diff languages, not just Chinese and Vietnamese. Then would make the info available to voters – you cannot vote online, might be an option to all about as well, you could see info – print if out, put it next to English ballot sent to you in the mail and figure out which box to check. Step in the right directions?

Sharon – would work in ballot parties with big screens, could show ballot and commentary in their own lang

Many – we can always print it out right?

Diane – actually, I found this out because I lost my ballot last elections – I went on website, found a ballot, you can use that ballot on web to print out and fill out and mail it in, then you can also print an envelope thing. I took to ballard drop box at last min, it was very busy, it was difficult to park – my daughter ran out and popped it in. getting back to internet version – should be possible to print out that ballot in your language and fill ut and mail it in.

Kristina – there would still be a cost – but just putting that out there. Kc elections hiring staff that have ritnships with community and outreach plan on how they work with the community. Not just voter reg but also civic ed.

Trang – earlier discussion –which was about potential leaders

Sharon – we used to pay poll workers a little bit of money to sit at polls, why can't they pay natural leaders to go around and do voter educ

Veasna – had a comment in regards to access to online info – in the language for ethnic communities – we work with low income communities of color they don't have comp or access to internet. They would feel more confident by going in group – vote in a group too, printing things out is too much.

Michael mckee – I see this as both/and I don't see either/or. I agree – 2/3 of people have computers and that means 1/3 don't. only 50% have emails – there is a huge digital divide. It would address some barriers, but I think we need both systems.

Nanette – there is already in city don – of hiring community liaisons who are on contract basis – they do community outreach – there is already a model that works

Heather – going to criteria for section 203 and invisibility – creating a different set of threshold for county languages

Devon – make sure we are collecting the right info – use school district info, is there better data?

Nanette – many of our communities are already doing in language ballot parties – we have done this in spite of kc elections, these bodies that exist to do the work. Meaningful partnerships – walking to walk – if leg really care, then priorities need to be realized. They need to put resources where they say they will put them. A lot of work already being done – we aren't all working together.

Sharon – kc elections has to be more responsive to creative methodologies – they told us we couldn't use ipads to register voters. Imm who may or may not have tech savvy, see ipad as large cell phone.

They don't have any problem navigating - whereas desktop they freak out. We found this out by accident. Kc elections would not let us use it. Feds would.

Dorothy – noncitizen voting?

Many – feasible?

Laura – if Chicago could do it

Sharon – school board alone

Michael mckee – this is one of the most compelling solutions – to get somebody through city reso, take it to council, whatever it takes. That seems like such a powerful, tangible outcome and recommendation.

Laura – imm advocates are wary because it is such a steep penalty for accidentally voting on something you're not supposed to be voting for – has to be coupled with educ

Heather – has to be clear the cost of disenfranchisement, ppl aren't able to make decisions about schools, compelling argument

Devon – arsalan looked up Tacoma park and they have allowed 16 and 17 year olds to vote in city elections, they did it through city council passing city charter amendments.

Aaliyah – if you are allowing them to drive, and you are saying they have the ability to make judgment cal – you would think they have judgment to vote for ppl

Sharon – that would automatically effect citizen engagement – school assignments

Veasna – in regards to young people over 18, efforts to outreach to this population – look at the generational pass down of internalized oppression. They may have criminal records, barriers, how do you start that engagement process. Primarily to the taskforce

Luis – we haven't looked as taskforce – we have only had early discussions about need to focus on civic education in hs, not just think about it in terms of classroom and coursebook – opp through cbos, family educ, civic educ, simultaneously engage students and parents – imm parents. Projects, etc – in anticipation of hesitancy of school district. What is that civics engagement in the schools?

Devon – I had a convo with a teacher – wa history is req in wa state. That's where I learned it a couple decades ago, they still have to do social studies that covers it. Not sure if they get the deep down.

Sharon – los angeles a few decades ago the 1.5 gen of Korean Americans were appalled that their parents were voting repub – they created a voting rights orgs and system went through whole comm. And registered every 1.5 person they could find. It had an overwhelming effect from that community in terms of the vote – they voted for jesse Jackson for pres. You could see how it could change outcomes of elections.

Nimco – last year – Nathan hale hs had a day where leadership classes, diff elected officials and issues were discussed, student led – expand on that.

Alex – we work with a lot of public hs. Statewide practices comes from fed level – doesn't work.

Correlated with decreased interest in politics, there are innovative models – some schools have done this. Generally speaking – if you come from a community where you can't vote there is no curriculum level.

Tania – thurgood marshal lhs has some programs that teaches

Laura – sec of state does a model vote but it's hit or miss in terms of quality

Heather – I just want to make sure that ex felon voting rights is not completely lost – legal financial obligations

Rich – how many felons that can have voting rights restored have done so? Ppl don't know, should there be a drive that engages orgs in community

Laura – one solution someone mentioned to me – as part of exit package – from incarceration, it's 100%

Sharon – homeless pop can't register to vote because no address

Alex – there are ways, but the education piece is needed

Gabriella (?) – 2012 barack obama election campaign – there were 80-100 registered homeless voters- there wasn't any way to reach them to remind them to vote, under the homeless shelter.

Sopha – reality in terms of gov/private – go through employers.

Dorothy – work session

Devon – some cities have day off, I would love to have day off.

Sharon – work place break rooms, you could have someone put up signs and urge everyone that hasn't vote yet

Michael mckee – thinking of it in terms of employee health programs – health and wellness. Nugget of interest worth exploring.

Many – is this to create a discussion around what's on the ballot or just vote today

Devon – you have to be careful – I work at uw and you can't discuss – unless uw has endorsed, depends on your administrative dept.

Nimco – nonprofits have issues

Devon –if you have to be careful around some issues

Sopha – basic info – why it's important to vote, needs are met, provide some sort of pamphlet – why you should vote – family and generationally

Tania – I worked in restaurant industry for 3 years whenever I talked about dream act they made me leave the establishment because laws

3. Solutions (Laura/Dorothy) - above
4. Wrap up and conclusion (Luis/Sharon) –

Luis – I have responsibility of next steps. As a number of you know, this is designed as public report to be given to mayor – it's not to council, elections – it's to mayor. Our plan is to impose on ourselves a deadline of august, the logic is that the discussions for next budget year begins in September – we want to have an influence and consideration of how all funds could be distributed. This is expected to provide the mayor a full briefing before report goes public – but everything will go public and there will be adequate opportunity in case we miss something or disagree. As I see it – this is a report that goes to mayor that will make some recs/suggestions, begins to define a space to allow a discourse about growing civic engagement – report is not the end, just the beginning. Won't be unless ppl outside use it or engage it or critique it, with all of the other divisions that are there. Purpose is to increase the knowledge we have but also to ask you to keep us smart about how to use report and frame things – who else we should talk to who should have been here – people with fascinating stories about attempts to register to vote. All of that will make our report better. We have every expectation that mayor will take this seriously and this will fit with his own policy goals. This is a progressive cities – we have opportunity to use this as prototype for what other cities have done. Sf is decades ahead of us – we don't want to be limited we want to build on what makes sense. Last thing is that we have a lot of work to continue to do. Graciella – struggling how to figure out from data how many ppl are eligible? What is number of citizens that live in Seattle who are registered to vote. No one knows. How can county target if they don't know. How do you know you're successful? Some fundamentals qs. Why don't we get sea

community foundation to give us money to do appropriate demographic survey because acs is so inaccurate – why not generate our own data. Thank you.

Kristina – another idea – sf they have trilingual ballots, why can't we

Aaliyah – if any of you have stories that you think would be useful to include in report – they are powerful and compelling, will make report more interesting

Luis – narratives influence policy makers more than data

Heather – on another note – mayor's recs – there was a different advisory committee on income inequality that has negotiated about proposal to increase min wage to \$15/hr. this has been hot topic convo in community – mayor's advisory committee and now it's on table to be considered by city council. Want to make sure community is informed of implications – personally and professionally support. There will be a conference call at 1 pm to learn more on Monday may 12, if folks would like to get call in info heather can get it to you.

End: 8:05 pm