

# SEATTLE DEMOCRACY VOUCHER PROGRAM EVALUATION

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NO CASH VALUE • NON-TRANSFERABLE  
VALID JANUARY 3, 2017-NOVEMBER 30, 2018



## Seattle Democracy Voucher 2017 Primary & General Election

I am assigning this voucher to the qualified candidate for the office of Seattle City Attorney or Seattle City Council whose name is listed below.

**Candidate Name:**  
Print qualified City Council or  
City Attorney candidate's name

I certify that I obtained this Democracy Voucher properly and make this assignment freely and not in exchange for payment. This assignment cannot be changed and there is no guarantee of availability of funds. Assignment is complete upon the date of this assignment. Vouchers may only be assigned to the candidate, or her or his registered representative.

**Date:**

## Executive Summary

The Democracy Voucher Program (DVP) is a first-of-its-kind public municipal campaign financing program that enables eligible Seattle residents to contribute to candidates for public office using paper certificates issued by the City of Seattle. This program launched in the 2017 election cycle and was open to candidates for City Council and City Attorney. Candidates who chose to participate in the DVP pledged to comply with more stringent campaign spending and contribution limits. In return, those who qualified received public funds for each voucher submitted in their name by Seattle residents. The program aims to improve the democratic process in Seattle elections by making candidates less reliant on large donors and more accountable to average Seattle residents.

The DVP is administered by the Seattle Ethics and Elections Commission (SEEC). SEEC engaged BERK Consulting (BERK) to independently evaluate how effectively the DVP achieved its goals during the 2017 election cycle. This report presents findings and recommendations.

### ***Many more Seattle residents contributed to local campaigns, but disparities in representation remain.***

Over 20,000 people used their vouchers, more than double the number of cash contributors in the 2015 election cycle. Nearly 9 out of 10 of voucher users had never previously contributed to a candidate for local office in Seattle. This resulted in a significant increase in the number of campaign contributions from all areas of Seattle, including neighborhoods that are typically under-represented in local politics. However, some residents were more likely to use their vouchers than others. These include people who are regular voters in local elections, older residents, those who live in majority-white neighborhoods, and those who live in upper-income neighborhoods. As a result, residents of neighborhoods that are lower income or have a majority non-white population continue to be under-represented among contributors to candidates for local office.

### ***Thirteen candidates participated in the DVP, but many struggled to qualify to receive funding.***

2017 featured a bumper-crop of candidates for local office, and our findings suggest the DVP played a role in encouraging more candidates to run. Among 15 candidates for two at-large City Council positions, 12 pledged to participate in the DVP. One of the two City Attorney candidates pledged to participate. While over 76% of all candidates participated in the DVP, only six candidates (35%) eventually qualified to receive voucher funding. While a few candidates for City Council were able to effectively utilize the DVP to run competitive campaigns in the primary and general election, others struggled to collect the 400 verified contributions of \$10 or more from Seattle residents that were required by SEEC to qualify to receive voucher funding.

To ensure continued high rates of candidate participation and encourage more candidates to run for office, SEEC should find ways to streamline the qualification process. This report includes recommendations for doing this while still maintaining an appropriate check to ensure public funds are provided to only serious campaigns for local office.

### ***While average contribution size shrank, the role of big money in Seattle elections persists.***

In 2017 the average contribution amount for City Council candidates was only \$82, about half of what it

was in 2015. This reflects the influx of smaller voucher contributions as well as the reduced individual contribution limit for candidates participating in the DVP. However, total campaign spending *increased* by 60% compared to the at-large City Council races 2015.

Writers of the DVP legislation had hoped that the program design would provide an incentive for both candidates and funders of independent expenditures to keep their combined campaign spending below the DVP campaign spending limit. However, candidates in the City Attorney and City Council position 8 races applied to be released from spending and contribution limits when their opponent's campaign spending plus independent expenditures exceeded the DVP spending limit. This enabled the increase in total campaign spending as well as a 55% *increase* in independent expenditures by candidates for the two at-large City Council positions compared to 2015.

This study finds that the availability of public funding can help make more races competitive. And when races are more competitive, there is increased incentive for outside groups to use independent expenditures to sway election outcomes. BERK offers recommendations for clarifying the process by which candidates may be released from spending limits to provide more predictability to campaigns. However, SEEC is limited in its ability to shape the role of independent expenditures in Seattle elections.

### ***Public support for the DVP is high.***

While the program is still new, survey results indicate a high level of public awareness about the DVP and support for the concept of the program. Public support is even higher among residents who are more familiar with the program, among those who have participated by using their vouchers, and among communities of color who are typically under-represented in local politics.

Support for the DVP was also high among candidates, campaign workers, and other stakeholders interviewed for this study. While there were gripes about some aspects of program administration, there was near universal praise for the role of SEEC staff in implementing a complex new program and their responsiveness in addressing issues as they emerged during the election cycle. They also expressed optimism that the DVP would become more effective over time as SEEC continues to implement program improvements and raise awareness of the program.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The DVP legislation includes four distinct goals that the program is designed to achieve. This report includes 15 recommendations for improving the effectiveness of the DVP in achieving each of these goals.

### ***Goal 1: Achieve high rates of candidate participation***

- Recommendation 1.1: Make no change to the number of qualifying contributions
- Recommendation 1.2: Streamline the verification process for qualifying contributions
- Recommendation 1.3: Provide online dashboard for tracking voucher returns and verification
- Recommendation 1.4: Continue to monitor candidate success in qualifying for the DVP

### ***Goal 2: Democracy and accountability***

- Recommendation 2.1: Make no change to campaign spending limits

- Recommendation 2.2: Consider clarifications and refinements to guidelines regarding release from spending limits
- Recommendation 2.3: Make no change to individual contribution limits
- Recommendation 2.4: Make no change to the value and count of vouchers issued to eligible residents
- Recommendation 2.5: Continue to monitor campaign spending and outcomes

*Goal 3: Heavy utilization of vouchers by those who have not previously donated to Seattle political campaigns*

- Recommendation 3.1: Postpone the voucher mailing date until at least March 1
- Recommendation 3.2: Elevate awareness of voucher mailing day
- Recommendation 3.3: Develop a system for instant electronic delivery of replacement vouchers to registered voters
- Recommendation 3.4: Continue working to establish secure online system for voucher returns
- Recommendation 3.5: Continue to work with intermediaries to engage communities of color

*Goal 4: High public satisfaction with the program*

- Recommendation 4.1: Create a communications plan for the next election cycle

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## Introduction

The Democracy Voucher Program (DVP) is a first-of-its-kind public campaign financing program that enables eligible Seattle residents to contribute to participating candidates for public office using paper certificates issued by the City of Seattle. The DVP was created through Initiative 122, “Honest Elections Seattle”, which was approved by voters in November 2015 and is funded by a 10-year levy. The Seattle Ethics and Elections Commission (SEEC), an independent agency of the City of Seattle, administers the DVP. The program was first implemented for the 2017 Seattle City election cycle and was open to participation by candidates running for City Council or City Attorney.

SEEC asked BERK Consulting to conduct an independent review of the DVP to evaluate how effectively the program achieved its goals during its first election cycle in 2017. These goals include achieving high rates of candidate participation, high rates of voucher usage by Seattle residents who have not previously donated to political campaigns, and high public satisfaction with the program. More broadly, the intent of Initiative 122 was to make Seattle elections more democratic by giving more Seattle residents the opportunity to be heard through contributions to local political campaigns.

This report discusses the findings of BERK’s evaluation as well as recommendations for improving the efficacy of the program in achieving its goals. Sources of information used during this evaluation are outlined below. See the Appendix for a more detailed discussion of data sources and methodology.

**Interviews and Focus Groups:** We engaged SEEC staff, the DVP Advisory Committee, City of Seattle Department of Neighborhoods (DON) staff and DON Community Liaisons, members of community-based organizations who conducted outreach and engagement, and candidates and campaign staff representing eight different campaigns, including both DVP participants and non-participants.

**Surveys:** We developed a survey to measure public awareness of the DVP and perspectives about the program. The survey was distributed to Seattle residents via three distribution channels to elicit feedback from three different populations. Responses from each distribution channel were collected and analyzed separately.<sup>1</sup>

- The **Representative Survey** was completed by 524 Seattle residents selected as a representative sample of the adult Seattle population based on race, gender, and income. This is the default survey sample used in discussion of survey results throughout the report.
- The **DVP Followers Survey** was completed by 109 Seattle residents recruited through invitations sent via the DVP Twitter account (@sea\_elections), the DVP website, and an email to DVP Advisory Committee members and community-based organizations that have previously been engaged in DVP outreach. The invitation was then re-tweeted and shared through various email and social media channels. These survey takers were self-selected and were much more likely to have had previous experiences with the DVP. Therefore, they are not considered representative of the general population.

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<sup>1</sup> There is one exception to this rule. BERK combined responses from the Representative Survey and Community Liaison Outreach Survey to generate sufficient sample size to analyze perspectives on the DVP by specific communities of color.

- The **Community Liaison Outreach Survey** was a shorter paper survey distributed by DON Community Liaisons conducting direct outreach in communities of color that are typically under-represented in Seattle elections and politics. These communities included Hispanic/Latinos, Native Americans, Black/African Americans, Asian/Pacific Islanders, Somalis, Chinese, and Vietnamese. There were 291 respondents who completed this survey.

**Other Data Sources:** BERK gathered and analyzed other data including voucher tracking and usage (SEEC), campaign contributors and independent expenditures from 2011 to 2017 (SEEC), Washington State Voter Registration Database (Washington Secretary of State), and U.S. Census 2012-2016 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates.

## Goals of the Democracy Voucher Program

The “Honest Elections Seattle” campaign promoted Initiative 122 as a suite of campaign finance reform measures intended to reduce the role of lobbyists, city contractors, and big money in Seattle politics. The Democracy Voucher Program is just one element of Initiative 122, and the initiative text states four specific goals for this program: “democracy and accountability, high rates of candidate participation, heavy utilization of vouchers by those who have not previously donated to Seattle political campaigns, and high public satisfaction with the Program.”<sup>2</sup> Below we describe how achievement of each of these goals will be measured in this evaluation. The goals have been reordered.

### 1. ACHIEVE HIGH RATES OF CANDIDATE PARTICIPATION

The DVP cannot be successful if candidates either choose not to participate or are not able to qualify to redeem vouchers for campaign funding. Therefore, the requirements for this program had to be carefully designed to both limit the role of big campaign contributions while also enabling participating candidates to run viable campaigns for office. Furthermore, the program is designed to have requirements for qualification that ensure all campaigns receiving public funds meet some minimal threshold of viability. If anybody in Seattle could announce they are a candidate and start soliciting and redeeming vouchers, then there would be a much higher risk that the DVP results in public money flowing to frivolous campaigns, which does not further the goals of democracy and accountability and could also undermine public trust and support in the program. On the other hand, setting the bar for qualification too high could present an unnecessarily high barrier to access for new candidates who may not start with the capacity necessary to collect the requisite donations and signatures.

This study explored four evaluation questions associated with this goal. Some of the questions look at challenges that could potentially impact participation in the DVP by candidates in the future.

- **1a. What percentage of candidates pledged to participate in the DVP?**
- **1b. How many candidates qualified to redeem voucher funding?**
- **1c. What challenges did candidates experience in their efforts to qualify to redeem voucher funding?**
- **1d. What challenges did candidates experience in their efforts to leverage the DVP to run a**

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<sup>2</sup> Source: Seattle Municipal Code (SMC) 2.04.690 (b) Transition; SEEC Administration Authority; Penalties; Crimes; Severability.

successful campaign?

## 2. DEMOCRACY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

It is an overarching goal of the DVP to enhance “democracy and accountability” in Seattle elections. Our evaluation of how effectively this goal was achieved focuses on the following questions:

▪ **2a. Were there more candidates in 2017 compared to previous election cycles?**

SEEC’s website states: “The Democracy Voucher Program aims to encourage more Seattle residents to donate to campaigns and/or **run for elected positions themselves.**” (emphasis added)<sup>3</sup>

▪ **2b. Was there more candidate diversity in 2017 compared to previous election cycles?**

Honest Elections Seattle, the coalition behind the pro-Initiative 122 campaign, states that their goal is to “encourage a more diverse pool of candidates for elected office and ensure everybody has the opportunity to have his or her voice heard, not just the wealthy and political elite.” (Honest Elections Seattle, 2018).

▪ **2c. How did the DVP impact campaign fundraising and independent expenditures compared to previous election cycles?**

The initiative writers expressed hope that Democracy Vouchers would enable candidates to run viable campaigns for public office without relying on large campaign contributions. Instead candidates could appeal to all Seattle residents, including those who cannot afford to make campaign contributions with their own money.<sup>4</sup> In other words, a major goal of this program is to give all residents a more equal opportunity to participate in campaign funding and therefore make candidates more accountable to all Seattle residents.

## 3. HEAVY UTILIZATION OF VOUCHERS BY THOSE WHO HAVE NOT PREVIOUSLY DONATED TO SEATTLE POLITICAL CAMPAIGNS

The Democracy Voucher Program is intended to greatly expand the number and diversity of Seattle residents who participate in funding campaigns for local offices. This requires engaging residents and communities who are traditionally under-represented in the democratic process, particularly communities of color. So, achieving this goal requires not just widespread voucher usage, but also a population of campaign contributors (including voucher users) that better reflects the population of Seattle as a whole.

▪ **3a. How many voucher users had never previously contributed to a political campaign?**

▪ **3b. What are the characteristics of voucher users? Are they more representative of the Seattle population than cash contributors?**

▪ **3c. What are the neighborhood characteristics of voucher users? Are they more representative of the Seattle population than cash contributors?**

▪ **3d. Were voucher users successful in using their vouchers to fund qualified campaigns?**

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<sup>3</sup> SEEC. (2018, April 4). [About the Program.](#)

<sup>4</sup> See Durning, A. (2015, April 20). [Seattle Candidates, Meet Democracy Vouchers: How Seattle’s New Public Campaign Funding System Helps You Run for Office.](#) Sightline Institute.



- **3e. How did voucher users learn about the DVP?**
- **3f. What encouraged voucher users to participate in the DVP?**
- **3g. What were the barriers to participation in the DVP?**

#### 4. HIGH PUBLIC SATISFACTION WITH THE PROGRAM

The writers of Initiative 122 recognized that if Seattle residents do not see the benefits of the DVP, or if they do not have confidence that the public campaign financing made possible through vouchers is being used responsibly, then the DVP cannot be successful. In 2010, residents of Portland, Oregon voted to end a public campaign financing program that was first implemented five years earlier. Critics there argued that program resulted in few successful campaigns that rely on public funding, and public support dwindled after a scandal involving a candidate using public funds for personal expenses. So, supporters and administrators of the DVP have a strong interest in ensuring the program is both effective and that the benefits are communicated to Seattle residents.

- **4a. What is the level of awareness of the DVP among the Seattle population?**
- **4b. Do residents feel the DVP is achieving its goals?**
- **4c. How do these perspectives vary by level of awareness and engagement with the DVP?**

## Program Overview

Democracy Vouchers are paper certificates that eligible residents can use to support qualified campaigns for public office. To be eligible to use Democracy Vouchers, individuals must live in Seattle, be at least 18 years old, and either a U.S. citizen, a U.S. national, or a lawful permanent resident (“green card holder”). In January 2017, SEEC mailed four \$25 Democracy Vouchers (totaling to \$100 in voucher value) to more than 500,000 Seattle residents, using the registered voter list from King County Elections. Periodically thereafter, until October 1, 2017, SEEC mailed vouchers to newly registered voters. Other eligible residents could request to be issued vouchers from SEEC.

The City of Seattle offered replacement Democracy Vouchers to those who lost or misplaced their vouchers. It also offered new vouchers to eligible residents who are not registered to vote. Information for applying for new or replacement vouchers was available on the SEEC website. Applicants could select to receive their voucher by mail or email. Additionally, campaigns used a Democracy Voucher Replacement Form to provide an immediate voucher replacement option when interacting directly with residents. These forms could be returned directly to SEEC by the campaign and verified by SEEC staff.

To use the vouchers, residents needed to write in a qualified candidate’s name, then sign and date the certificate. Vouchers must then be returned to SEEC for review before any funds were redeemed by qualifying campaigns. Methods of returning vouchers to SEEC included mail, city drop-off locations such as the Neighborhood Service Bureaus and Centers, or providing them directly to campaign representatives who were authorized to gather and deliver signed vouchers directly to SEEC.

In 2017, the DVP was available to candidates for City Council or City Attorney. Participating candidates were required to adhere to campaign spending and contribution limits and must be certified by SEEC to be qualified to redeem vouchers. Public funds redeemed by candidates through the DVP are held to all existing campaign spending laws and could be used only for allowable campaign expenses.

## CANDIDATE PARTICIPATION AND REQUIREMENTS

Candidates could choose whether or not to participate in the DVP. In addition to the standard requirements to declare a candidacy for public office in Seattle, candidates who wished to participate in the DVP were required to sign a Candidate Pledge.<sup>5</sup> Signers agreed to comply with requirements for the DVP which include:

- Not accepting contributions from any individual or entity in excess of a total of \$250, plus \$100 in vouchers, during the election cycle.
- Abiding by the campaign spending limits.<sup>6</sup>
- Participating in at least three public debates or similar events each for the primary and general elections.
- Not soliciting money for or on behalf of any political action committee, political party, or any organization that will make an independent expenditure for or against any City of Seattle candidate within the 2017 election cycle.
- Agreeing that their candidacy must be certified by the SEEC to redeem Democracy Vouchers.

Additionally, before a candidate can redeem Democracy Vouchers in the form of public campaign funding, it must first meet the requirements for qualification.

### Requirements for Qualification

To be certified by SEEC to redeem vouchers, candidates were required to collect qualifying contributions. For the at-large City Council races in 2017, 400 contributions of at least \$10 each were required from Seattle residents age 18 or older. For City Attorney, 150 contributions were required. Furthermore, to provide verification that each contribution was from an eligible Seattle resident, campaigns needed to also collect corresponding signatures for each qualifying contribution. To facilitate gathering these signatures along with contributions, SEEC provided each participating campaign with a Qualifying Contribution Petition. SEEC then used the signatures to verify that each contribution corresponded to the names and addresses on the petition.<sup>7</sup> Once the sufficient number of contributions and signatures had been verified, SEEC would certify the candidacy and added the candidate's name to a list of those qualified to receive and redeem Democracy Vouchers.

### Release from campaign spending and/or individual contribution limits

Initiative 122 includes provisions that allow candidates participating in the DVP who are at or nearing their spending limit to apply to be released from certain program requirements if their opponent's spending exceeds the campaign spending limit. SEEC may also release a participating candidate if an

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<sup>5</sup> Available for [download](#) on the DVP website.

<sup>6</sup> For City Council At-large positions, the limit is \$150,000 for a primary campaign and \$300,000 for the primary and general combined. For City Attorney, these limits are cut in half (\$75,000 and \$150,000). A candidate may be released from the spending limit by appealing to the Seattle Ethics and Elections Commission. If released, the candidate will only receive Democracy Voucher dollars up to the spending limit but will then be able to collect monetary donations beyond that. (SEEC, 2018)

<sup>7</sup> This process of verification involved checking against the signatures in the King County Elections voter registration database.

independent expenditure plus the opponent's spending exceeds the campaign spending limit.<sup>8</sup> Candidates released from spending limits in the 2017 election could not redeem vouchers beyond the spending limit for either the primary election or general election.<sup>9</sup>

## OUTREACH AND EDUCATION

SEEC staff conducted outreach and education activities throughout much of the 2017 election cycle to raise awareness about this new program among all Seattle residents. Additionally, they placed special emphasis on reaching out to communities within Seattle that are typically under-represented in local politics, including, but not limited to, communities of color and immigrant populations. In addition, non-governmental groups such as community-based organizations and advocacy groups also conducted work to educate Seattle residents about the DVP and encourage participation. Finally, the campaigns themselves were on the front lines of informing residents about the new program while soliciting voucher contributions. These activities are briefly summarized below.

### SEEC Marketing and Outreach Activities

DVP staff employed a variety of methods to inform Seattle residents about the program and encourage resident participation. They also conducted outreach to communities and neighborhoods throughout Seattle, and considered specific groups, such as communities of color, age, and abilities.

**Communication.** SEEC staff established resident communication channels using a variety of methods, from establishing a Democracy Voucher Hotline, program website, and utilizing social media (Facebook and Twitter) to disseminate information quickly to residents and media outlets. Communication to communities of color and immigrant populations included translating key materials into 15 languages, and conducting four focus groups in English, Somali, Spanish, and Somali to get feedback on best ways to message and design the vouchers and mailer, as well as to establish a baseline knowledge and awareness of the program.<sup>10</sup>

**Outreach Activities.** DVP staff engaged in multiple forms of outreach and pursued paid, earned, shared, and owned media opportunities to promote the program beginning in December 2016.

- **Tabling Events and Presentations:** SEEC staff gave 47 presentations and held 57 tabling events between July 2016 and November 2017 to provide information about the DVP and how it works. These were held throughout the city at community-based organizations and clubs, neighborhood community centers, faith-based places (e.g. churches and mosques), Seattle parks, City Hall, senior housing, resource fairs, and community events. Presentations included language interpretation in Chinese (Cantonese and Mandarin), Khmer, Vietnamese, Somali, Amharic, Oromo, Spanish, American Sign Language, Russian, Tigrinya, Tagalog, and Korean. Exhibit 1 presents the number of events that occurred by month before and during the 2017 election cycle.

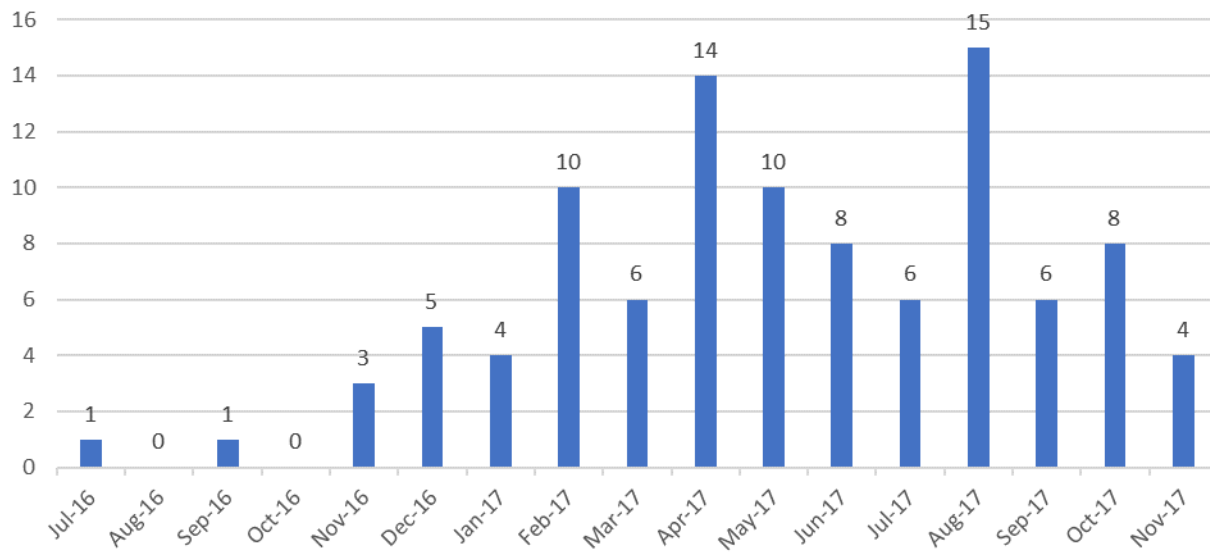
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<sup>8</sup> Seattle Municipal Code (SMC) 2.04.630 (f) - Candidates to Qualify By Showing Grass Roots Support and Agreeing to New Campaign and Contribution Limits; Redemption of Democracy Vouchers; New Limits on Use of Funds.

<sup>9</sup> See Barnett, Wayne. "Memo Re: Released from Campaign Spending and/or Individual Contribution Limits." 2 June 2017.

<sup>10</sup> To learn more about these efforts, see the [SEEC's Democracy Voucher Program Biennial Report 2017](#).

### Exhibit 1. DVP Staff Outreach Events (Presentations and Tabling Events) July 2016 – November 2017



Source: SEEC, 2018; BERK, 2018.

- **Flyers and Posters:** SEEC staff also distributed and displayed posters throughout the city. Two posters, “Have You Seen Me?” and the Candidate Forum poster were distributed. About 600 “Have You Seen Me?” posters were distributed between summer and fall 2017. About 100 were distributed throughout the city at businesses and other key locations in June 2017. About 500 more of these posters were distributed in September and October 2017. In October, about 85 Candidate Forum posters were distributed at businesses, libraries, bus stations, etc., throughout South Seattle neighborhoods, including North Beacon Hill, Columbia City, Othello, Rainier Beach, Mt. Baker, Hillman City, and Lakewood. Posters were also displayed in Amharic, Somali, Tigrinya, Vietnamese, and Spanish. The forum was held on October 15, 2017.<sup>11</sup>

### Community Liaison Outreach

SEEC partnered with DON Community Liaisons to implement outreach with communities of color to educate and inform them of the DVP. Community Liaisons attended an orientation in early August 2017. Each liaison involved wrote an outreach plan with ideas and strategies they thought would work well for the communities they would provide outreach to. These included the Somali, Hispanic/Latino, African American, Chinese, and Vietnamese communities. Community Liaison outreach activities included presentation and tabling events, door-to-door outreach, and posted articles on blogs and social media. These activities occurred between late August and October 2017.

### Community-Based Organization Outreach

Community-based organizations were also involved in outreach to raise awareness and encourage residents to use Democracy Vouchers. BERK heard from several community organizations about their involvement with the DVP through a focus group discussion and phone interviews with volunteers and staff from Skyline Retirement Facility, Chinese Information and Services Center (CISC), the Win-Win Network,

<sup>11</sup> Source: SEEC log of outreach activity provided to BERK in March 2018.

and the Tenants Union. From these conversations, involvement with the DVP depended on the interest, purpose, and goals of the community organization. For example, some efforts were volunteer-led, such as outreach and engagement among seniors at the Skyline Retirement Facility in First Hill, who were interested in politics and civic engagement. Other community-based organizations saw DVP aligning with the work and purpose of their organization's focus, such as with the Win-Win Network, whose mission is to advance social and economic equity through political power building, and the Chinese Information and Services Center (CISC), whose mission is to serve new immigrants in the Chinatown International District.

- **Communication and Outreach.** Community organizations used a variety of outreach strategies to inform community members of DVP. This included emails, hosting presentations and talks with politicians, candidates, or with DVP staff in the community, writing newsletters and articles about DVP in languages other than English, ballot and voucher parties, social media and digital campaigns and messaging, door-to-door canvassing, text message campaigns, and earned media.

## Customer Service Centers and Bureau

Seattle has seven customer service centers, or Neighborhood Service Centers (CSC) are located throughout the city, including Ballard, Central District, Lake City, Southeast Seattle, Southwest, University District, and Downtown. They act as “little city halls” provide information about Seattle services and programs.<sup>12</sup> The Customer Service Bureau (CSB) is located in Downtown. The CSCs and CSB were also drop-off locations to return and submit Democracy Vouchers. City staff who were at the CSCs and CSB were very engaged and eager to learn about the DVP. They often interacted with the public and answered questions about the vouchers.

## VOUCHER USE AND VERIFICATION

Exhibit 2 shows the primary steps in the process between a resident returning their voucher to SEEC and voucher funds being redeemed by qualified candidates who have not yet reached their spending limit. SEEC began by logging each received voucher in a database for tracking the voucher's review status. Vouchers were then sent to King County Elections for signature verification, with prioritization given to vouchers submitted to eligible candidates. After vouchers were verified, SEEC staff issued checks to qualified candidates who have not yet reached their spending limit.

The durations in this chart reflect BERK's analysis of data in SEEC's voucher data tracking system for vouchers that were verified. The typical delay between a resident choosing to contribute to a qualified candidate using a voucher and the candidate redeeming that voucher as public funding is over a month. However, there was a great deal of variability in this duration, as discussed below.

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<sup>12</sup> For more information, visit website: <https://www.seattle.gov/customer-service-centers>

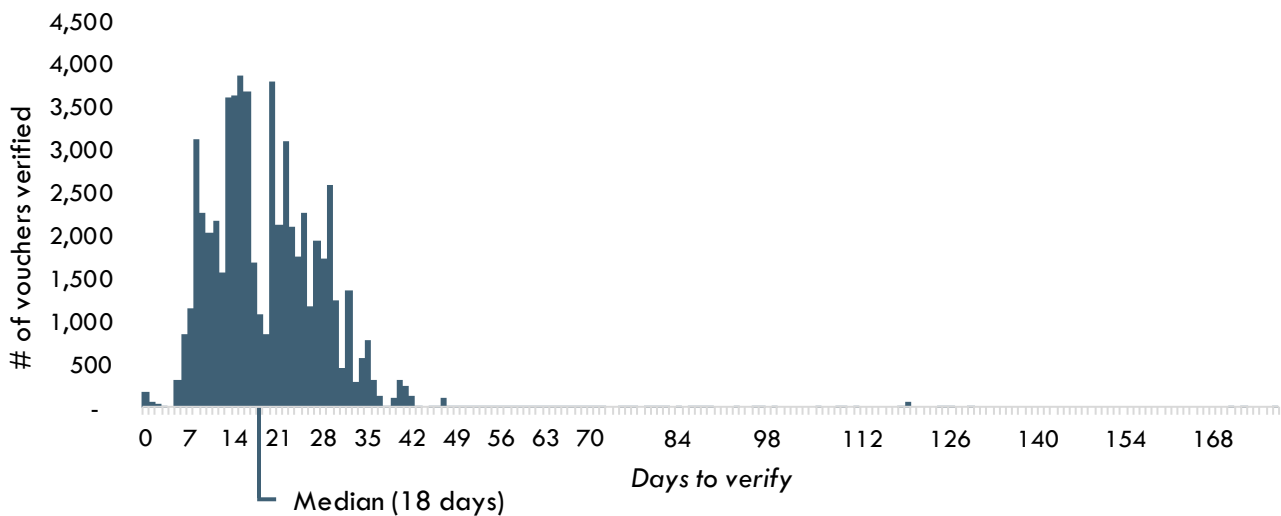
**Exhibit 2. Steps in the Process of Verifying and Redeeming Voucher Funds**



Source: SEEC, 2018; BERK, 2018.

Exhibit 3 shows the variation in number of days between a voucher being received by SEEC and completion of the verification process. Over half of all vouchers were verified within 13 to 25 days. The median verification time was 18 days. Some vouchers took as long as 175 days to verify. Vouchers that took longer than 40 days to verify likely had rejected signatures on the first round of verification.

**Exhibit 3. Days Between Voucher Receipt and Verification**

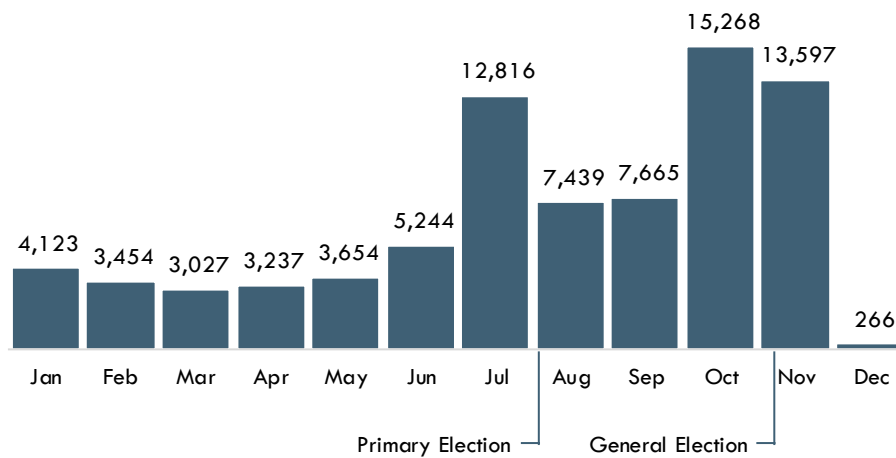


Source: SEEC, 2018; BERK, 2018.

Exhibit 4 shows total vouchers returned to SEEC by month. Voucher activity was highest in the periods leading up to the primary election in early August and general election in early November. These were periods during the election cycle where campaigns were receiving the greatest amount of media attention and, presumably, more Seattle residents were paying attention to the local election contests.

#### Exhibit 4. Total Vouchers Returned to SEEC by Month<sup>13</sup>

79,923 Vouchers Returned



Source: SEEC, 2018; BERK, 2018.

The duration between SEEC receiving a voucher and verification varied significantly based on the date the voucher was received.

Exhibit 5 shows SEEC’s voucher processing activity by week during the periods leading up to the primary and general election when the volume of returned vouchers was highest. During the weeks leading up to the primary election, the median duration to verify vouchers increased to between 23 and 29 days. The weeks leading up to the general election showed much shorter durations, only 6 to 13 days.

<sup>13</sup> For returned date analysis, this report uses a vouchers signature date to represent when the user actively returned their voucher. Where a signature date is missing from the voucher or incorrect due to being reported after the received date, the return date is adjusted from the received date to account for the median duration of 5 days between the sign date and received date.

**Exhibit 5. Election Periods and Voucher Verification Time Duration**

PERIOD		VOUCHERS PROCESSED			MEDIAN DURATION
Campaign Points	Dates	Received	Verified	Redeemed	Received to Verified
<b>Primary Election Period</b>	<b>Jan. 1 to Jul. 31</b>	<b>35,555</b>	<b>20,251</b>	<b>13,652</b>	<b>25 days</b>
4 weeks before primary	July 4 to 10	1,268	1,186	35	23 days
3 weeks before primary	July 11 to 17	2,505	1,007	2,566	22 days
2 weeks before primary	July 18 to 24	4,554	924	107	29 days
1 week before primary	July 25 to 31	4,085	1,386	1,617	29 days
<b>General Election Period</b>	<b>Aug. 1 to Dec. 31</b>	<b>44,235</b>	<b>41,404</b>	<b>31,967</b>	<b>8 days</b>
4 weeks before general	October 10 to 16	2,263	995	0	6 days
3 weeks before general	October 17 to 23	3,773	3,119	2,875	6 days
2 weeks before general	October 24 to 30	6,067	1,093	380	9 days
1 weeks before general	Oct. 31 to Nov. 6	5,731	3,650	1,407	13 days

Source: SEEC, 2018; BERK, 2018.

SEEC staff indicated that the reason vouchers took so much longer to verify during the primary campaign was capacity. The same three staff persons responsible for processing the received vouchers were those who were also managing all other aspects of the DVP. And given that this was the DVP’s first election season, there were still many issues to resolve. As the primary election approached, SEEC hired additional temporary staff to assist with voucher processing and expedite the verification process.

## How Effective was the DVP at Achieving its Goals?

This section reviews the outcomes of the 2017 election cycle to evaluate how effective the DVP was at achieving its goals.

### GOAL 1. ACHIEVE HIGH RATES OF CANDIDATE PARTICIPATION

#### 1a. What percentage of candidates pledged to participate in the DVP?

##### *Participation among City Attorney candidates*

The race for City Attorney in 2017 attracted only two candidates, one of whom was an incumbent. The incumbent, Pete Holmes, chose to participate in the DVP while the challenger, Scott Lindsay, did not.



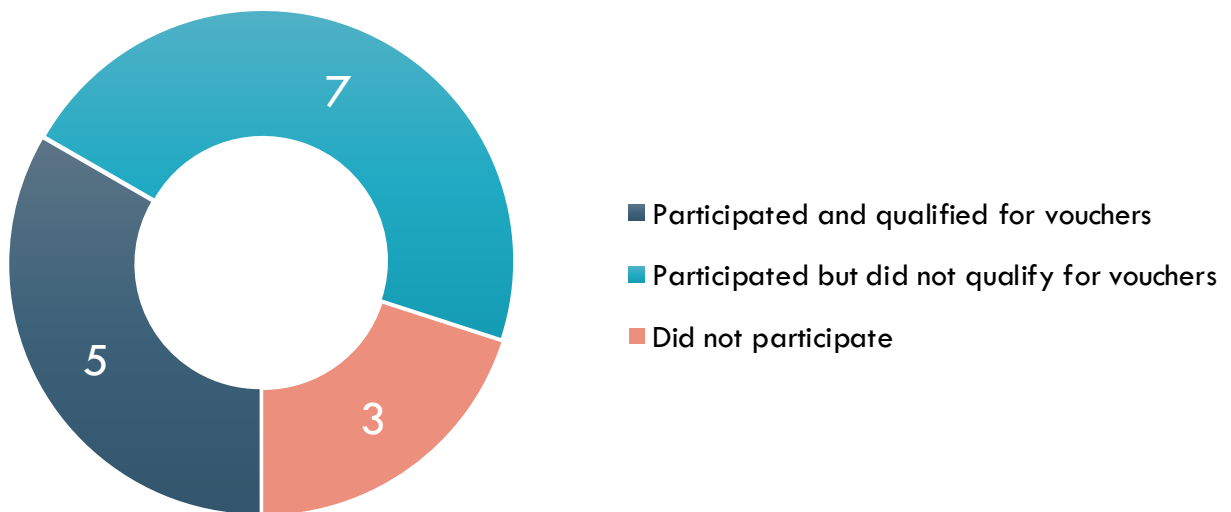
### Participation among City Council candidates

In 2017 there were two at-large City Council positions up for election. City Council Position 9 had an incumbent while Position 8 the other did not. Combined, these City Council races attracted 22 candidates, seven of whom withdrew before the Primary. Among the 15 candidates who competed in the primary election, all but three pledged to participate in the Democracy Voucher Program. That is an 80% participation rate.<sup>14</sup> Among those candidates that advanced to the general election, all four participated in the DVP.

#### 1 b. How many candidates qualified to redeem voucher funding?

Not all candidates who pledged to participate in the DVP eventually qualified to redeem vouchers. As shown in Exhibit 6, only five of the 12 City Council candidates who pledged to participate in the DVP gathered the 400 contributions and signatures necessary for certification by SEEC. So, while Seattle residents returned Democracy Vouchers with the names of all 12 of these participating candidates, only five of these candidates saw any of those vouchers redeemed as campaign funding from SEEC.

**Exhibit 6. Participation in the Democracy Voucher Program by 2017 City Council Candidates**



Source: SEEC 2018; BERK 2018.

Exhibit 7 lists each of the City Council candidates who qualified to redeem vouchers. Only two of the candidates, Jon Grant and Teresa Mosqueda, qualified to redeem vouchers significantly before the primary election. This reflects the significant resources each campaign devoted to gathering qualifying contributions in order to qualify early and have funding early in the competitive primary. The three other campaigns did not qualify to redeem vouchers until just before or after the August 1 primary election. In some cases, the process of gathering the requisite signatures and contributions took six months or more after signing the Candidate Pledge.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Among the seven candidates who withdrew before the Primary, four were participating in the Democracy Voucher Program.

<sup>15</sup> As an incumbent, González was very likely to get through the crowded primary. Therefore, the campaign may have focused less resources on gathering qualifying contributions early in the election cycle.

## Exhibit 7. City Council Candidates Who Qualified to Redeem Democracy Vouchers

CANDIDATE	OFFICE	CANDIDATE PLEDGE SIGNED	DATE QUALIFIED	FIRST REDEEMED VOUCHER PAYMENT	DAYS BETWEEN PLEDGE AND QUALIFICATION
Jon Grant	Position 8	11/30/16	2/10/17	2/15/2017	72
Teresa Mosqueda*	Position 8	1/6/17	3/2/17	3/2/2017	55
Hisam Goueli	Position 8	1/30/17	7/28/2017	7/28/2017	186
M. Lorena González*	Position 9	1/9/17	9/20/17	9/20/2017	254
Pat Murakami	Position 9	5/12/17	8/11/17	8/11/2017	91

\* Indicates candidate was elected.

Source: SEEC 2018, BERK 2018.

### 1c. What challenges did candidates experience in their efforts to qualify to redeem voucher funding?

Representatives from all the City Council campaigns communicated that gathering the 400 qualifying contributions and associated signatures took a significant amount of time and resources. Each campaign devised its own system for soliciting and gathering qualifying contributions and associated signatures. Some of these systems proved to be more efficient than others. For instance, campaigns that solicited qualifying contributions from residents in person at community meetings or during door-to-door canvassing could simply use the Qualifying Contributions Petition form provided by SEEC and collect all of the required verification information at the same time. These campaigns could also solicit and gather Democracy Vouchers at this point of contact so that the vouchers would be verified and ready to redeem once the campaign was certified by SEEC to receive public funding. Campaigns that were most successful using this approach designated significant volunteer or paid canvasser resources to gathering qualifying contributions very early in the election cycle.

Campaigns that relied on email or social media to engage voters and solicit online donations had a more difficulty collecting the necessary information to verify the qualifying contributions. These campaigns needed to track down the same donors in person to obtain signatures and other verifying information, a process which took a considerable amount of time and campaign resources. Mid-way through the election cycle, campaigns received clarification from SEEC that digital images of signatures were admissible for verification. This eased the process somewhat, but still required that donors were able to print the Qualifying Contributions Petition.

This issue is addressed in Recommendation 1.2: Streamline the verification process for qualifying contributions.

### 1d. What challenges did candidates experience in their efforts to leverage the DVP to run a successful campaign?

Representatives from campaigns that relied mostly or exclusively on vouchers for funding described challenges in making financial decisions, due to a lack of clear and predictable information about how much voucher funding they could expect to receive in the coming weeks. With cash contributions, a candidate can immediately put the funds to use. With vouchers, there was a significant and unpredictable

delay between a voucher being submitted to SEEC and public funds being distributed to the campaign, as shown in

Exhibit 2 and Exhibit 3, above. More importantly, campaigns didn't have any way to know how many vouchers assigned to their candidate had been received by SEEC, since many residents sent their vouchers directly to SEEC, not through the campaign. SEEC did not have any real-time information available to candidates for tracking this kind of information. This lack of readily available information made it difficult for candidates to determine whether to order a new mailer or take on some other major campaign expense at key points in the campaign.

This issue is addressed in Recommendation 1.3: Provide online dashboard for tracking voucher returns and verification.

## GOAL 2: DEMOCRACY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

### 2a. Were there more candidates in 2017 compared to previous election cycles?

In BERK's survey of candidates and campaign staff, nearly half of the 12 respondents indicated that they would not have run for elected office if the DVP did not exist. Others indicated that the program influenced their decision to run. This indicates that the DVP may be having an impact on the number of candidates that run for local office, at least in the case of City Council positions.

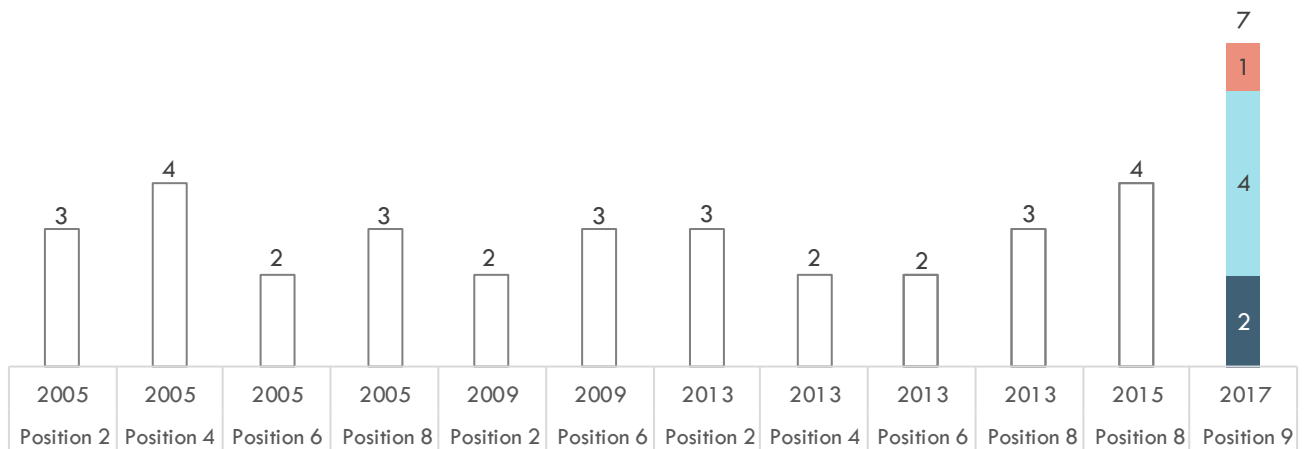
#### *Number of City Attorney candidates*

The race for City Attorney in 2017 attracted only two candidates, one of whom was an incumbent. City Attorney races in Seattle typically do not attract a lot of candidates. The previous three election cycles (2005, 2009, and 2013) all featured only two candidates or one candidate running unopposed. It appears that the DVP in 2017 did not impact this trend in any way.

#### *Number of City Council candidates*

The 2017 election cycle featured more City Council candidates than has been typical in previous cycles. Exhibit 8 compares the 2017 City Council Position 9 race to the 11 at-large City Council races that also featured incumbents since 2005. Typically, races with incumbents are less competitive and attract less candidates when compared to open seats. On average, the previous elections cycles attracted less than three candidates, compared to the seven candidates who ran in 2017. The large number of candidates in 2017 is particularly notable given that the incumbent in this race won her previous election two years earlier by a wide margin and was generally represented in the media as in a very strong position to keep her council seat. Six of the seven candidates, including the incumbent, chose to participate in the DVP, while only the two general election candidates qualified to redeem vouchers.

**Exhibit 8. Number of Candidates Running for At-Large City Council Seats with Incumbent, 2005-2017**

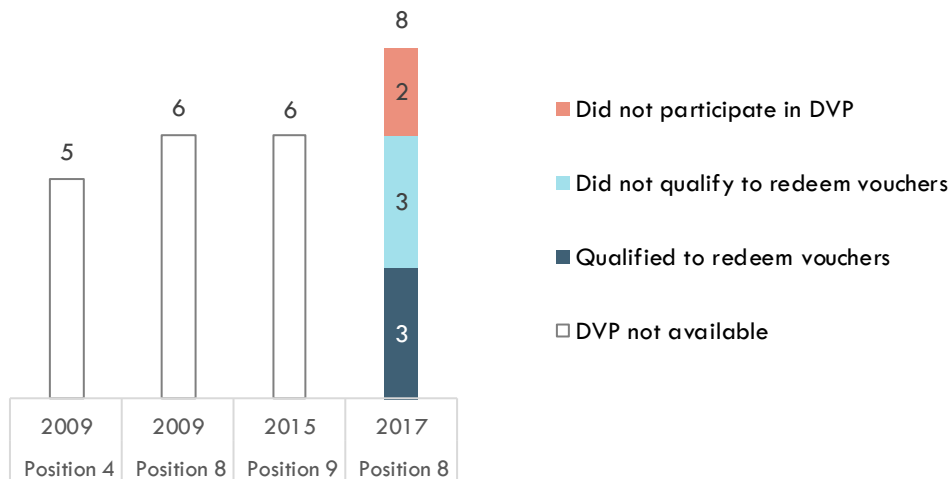


□ DVP not available ■ Qualified to redeem vouchers ■ Did not qualify to redeem vouchers ■ Did not participate in DVP

Source: SEEC 2018; BERK 2018.

Exhibit 9 compare the 2017 City Council Position 8 race to three open at-large city council races that occurred during the past eight years. Open seats are typically more competitive. During the 2009 and 2015 election cycles each race attracted either five or six candidates. In 2017, eight candidates ran for the open seat. Six of the eight candidates chose to participate in the DVP, and three qualified to redeem vouchers.

**Exhibit 9. Number of Candidates Running for Open At-Large City Council Seats, 2009-2017**



Source: SEEC 2018; BERK 2018.

2b. Was there more candidate diversity in 2017 compared to previous election cycles?

*Diversity of candidates in the City Attorney race*

The City Attorney race attracted two white male candidates. The DVP appears to have had no impact on the diversity of candidates in this race.

*Diversity of candidates in the City Council races*

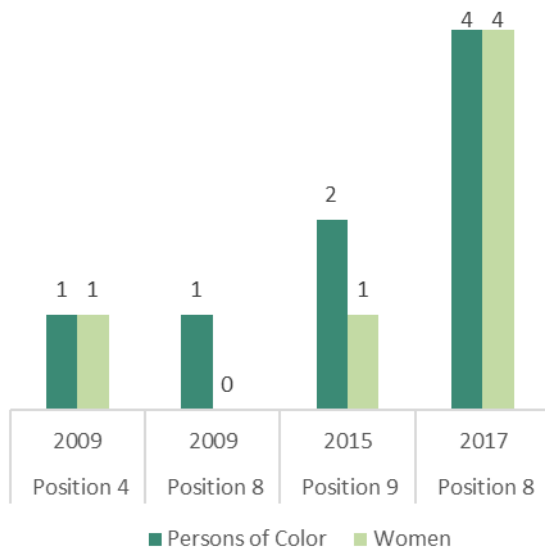
Among the candidates in the two City Council races in 2017, there were five persons of color and six women. Only one third of the 15 total candidates were white men, and the winners of each election contest were Latina women. Exhibit 10 and Exhibit 11 compare the 2017 election to previous election cycles. The most dramatic difference is in the Position 8 race for an open at-large council seat.

**Exhibit 10. Persons of Color and Women Running for At-Large City Council Seats with Incumbent, 2005-2017**



Source: SEEC 2018; BERK 2018.

**Exhibit 11. Persons of Color and Women Running for Open At-Large City Council Seats, 2009-2017**



Source: SEEC 2018; BERK 2018.

**2c. How did the DVP impact campaign fundraising and independent expenditures compared to previous election cycles?**

This section explores how candidates funded their campaigns in 2017 and compares to previous election cycles. This is followed by an analysis of independent expenditures.

*Campaign fundraising by City Attorney candidates*

According to the 2017 Elections Report<sup>16</sup>, Pete Holmes received 2,888 individual and group contributions, including those from voucher users, with an average contribution size of \$76.45. Scott Lindsay received only 590 contributions with an average contribution size of \$259.12. While Lindsay raised about twice as much as Holmes in cash contributions, Holmes raised significantly more funds overall due to participation in the voucher program. In total, Holmes raised \$221,421 in contributions, with \$146,850 coming from vouchers. Lindsay raised \$153,762 in cash contributions.

*Campaign fundraising by City Council candidates*

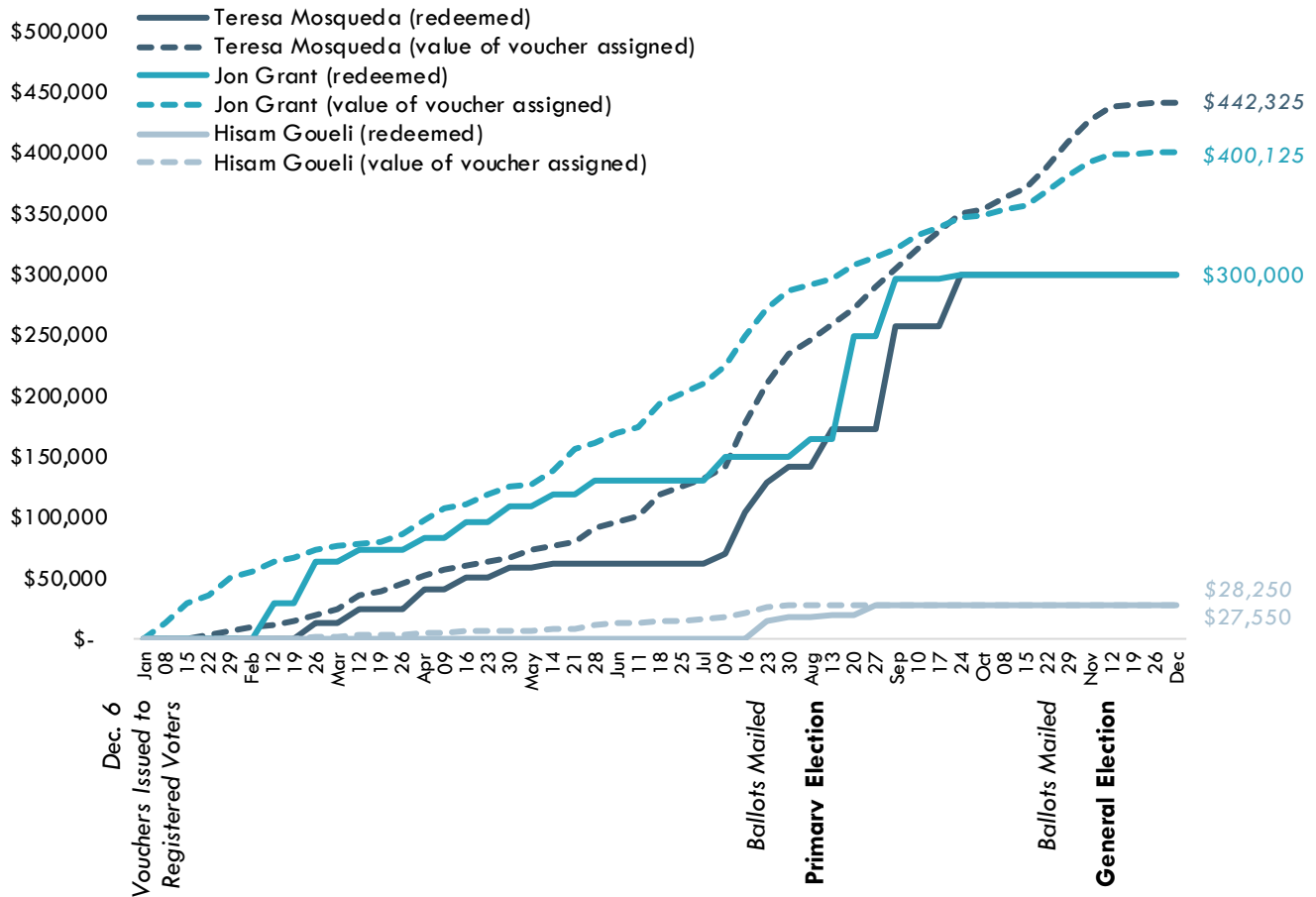
Some campaigns reported that the availability of Democracy Vouchers completely changed the way they approached campaign fundraising. For instance, candidates and campaign managers reported spending less time pursuing wealthy contributors and more time collecting vouchers. This was in part due to the \$250 individual contribution limit to campaigns participating in the DVP and in part due to the double payoff of directly engaging Seattle residents about the campaign and their ability to support it at no personal cost with Democracy Vouchers.

In total, SEEC issued \$993,675 in checks to the five City Council candidates who qualified to redeem vouchers. Exhibit 12 and Exhibit 13 present a timeline of the 2017 election cycle with the total of

<sup>16</sup> SEEC. (2017). 2017 Elections Report. Retrieved from <http://www2.seattle.gov/ethics/elpub/2017Report.pdf>

Democracy Voucher funding redeemed by qualified City Council candidates. The exhibits also show the total value of vouchers returned to SEEC assigned to each candidate. Three campaigns were limited in the amount of voucher funding they could receive by campaign spending limits.<sup>17</sup> Only two campaign received significant funding from vouchers before ballots were mailed for the primary election.

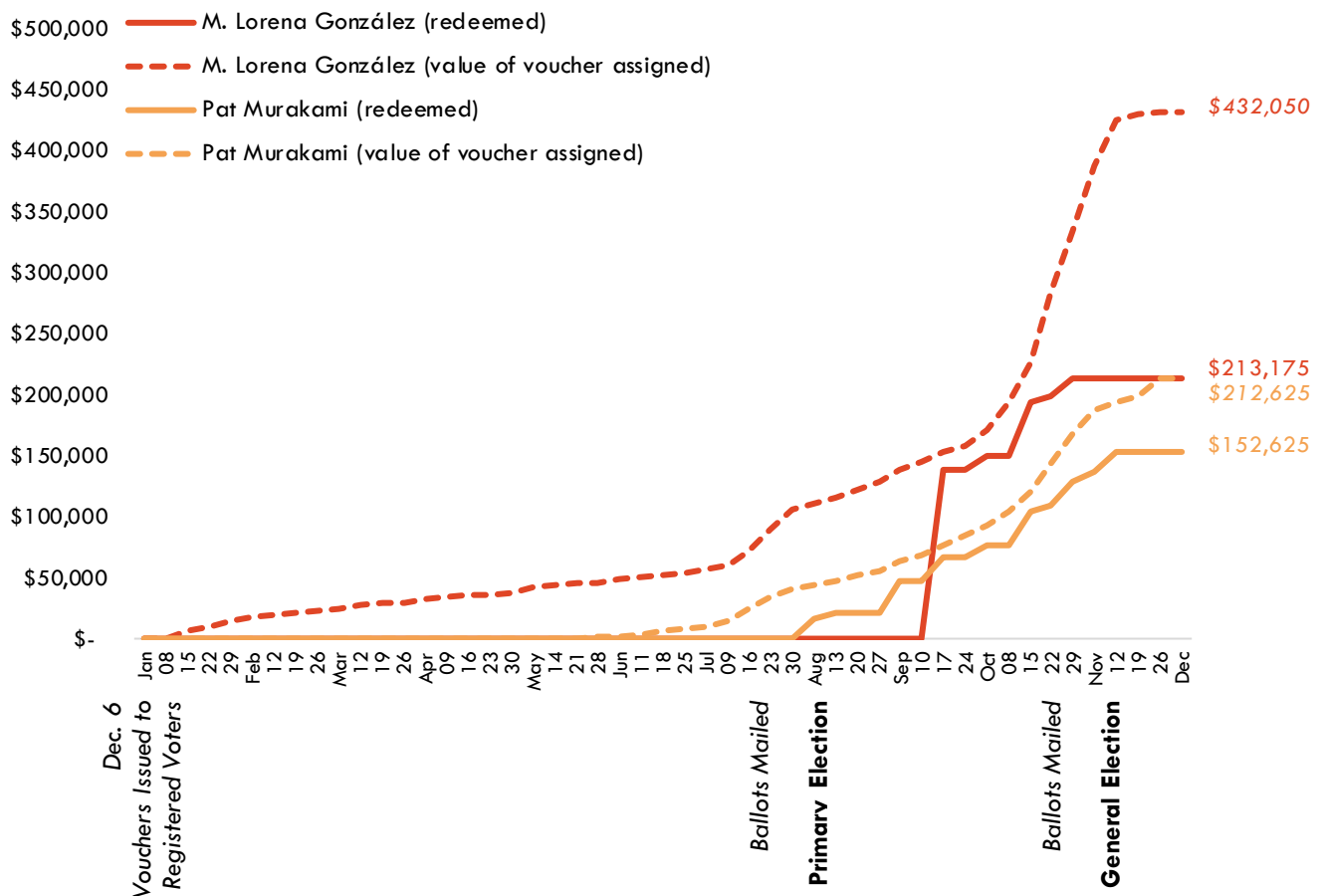
**Exhibit 12. Voucher Funding Redeemed by Candidates for City Council Position 8**



Source: SEEC, 2018; BERK, 2018.

<sup>17</sup> Unless released from campaign spending limits, City Council candidates were limited to receiving a total of \$300,000 in contributions from vouchers or cash. Campaigns that were released from spending limits were limited to receiving up to \$300,000 in vouchers funding *plus* cash contributions.

### Exhibit 13. Voucher Funding Redeemed by Candidates for City Council Position 9



Source: SEEC, 2018; BERK, 2018.

### Campaign spending limits and independent expenditures

Participants in the DVP pledged to limit campaign spending. However, as discussed above, candidates could apply for a release from limits if an opponent’s spending, including independent expenditures, exceeds the spending limit. The writers of the Honest Elections Initiative had hoped that this “trigger” provision would provide some incentive for all candidates, including non-DVP participants, to constrain their spending—as well as independent expenditure spending on their behalf—below the limit to avoid giving their opponent the opportunity to be released from spending or contribution limits.<sup>18</sup>

There is some evidence that this incentive had a role in the City Attorney race. An interviewee who was involved in the Lindsay campaign indicated their strategy was to stay below the DVP spending limit to avoid allowing the opponent, Pete Holmes, from being released from his spending limits. However, an uncoordinated independent expenditure against Pete Holmes pushed Scott Lindsay slightly over the \$150,000 spending limit and enabled Pete Holmes to successfully request the SEEC to be released from spending limits. In the end, Pete Holmes collected \$221,421 in contributions compared to Lindsay’s \$153,762. This raises the question of whether it is fair for a single, small independent expenditure to

<sup>18</sup> See Durning, A. (2015, April 20). [Seattle Candidates, Meet Democracy Vouchers: How Seattle’s New Public Campaign Funding System Helps You Run for Office](#). Sightline Institute.

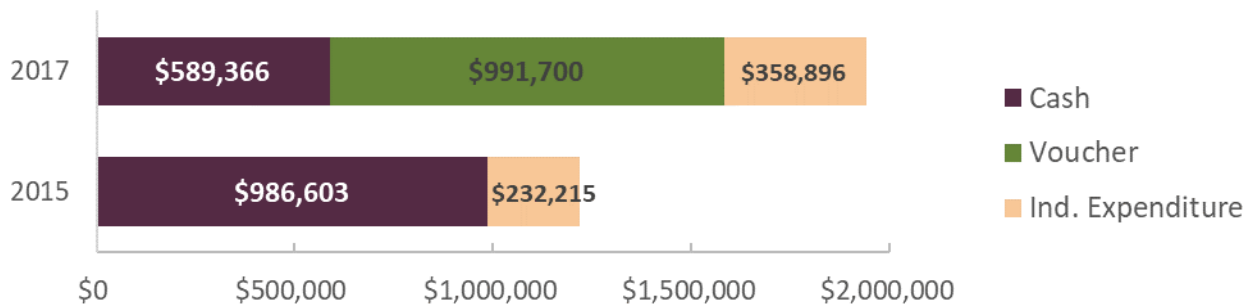


influence an election in this way. If so it may open up the potential for supporters of a candidate create a small independent expenditure *against* their preferred candidate with the sole purpose of pushing the opponent over his or her combined contribution and independent expenditure spending limit.

It is possible the organization that made the independent expenditure against Holmes had no idea that they would be triggering a release from campaign spending limits. It is also likely that organizations will make more informed decisions about whether and when to make independent expenditures on their preferred candidate’s behalf once they become more familiar with the DVP. However, the outcome of the race for City Council Position 8 in 2017 indicates that there may be scenarios in which independent expenditures become and even larger element in competitive local elections, including candidates participating in the DVP.

Exhibit 14 compares total contributions and independent expenditures in the two at-large City Council races in 2017 to the races for the same positions in 2015. It shows a significant decrease in the total amount of cash contributions in 2017 compared to 2015, despite a very competitive race for Position 8 which featured DVP candidates released from spending limits during both the primary and general election periods. However, when including contributions from vouchers, candidates in 2017 raised about 60% more in total funds than those in 2015. Additionally, independent expenditures increased by about 55% compared to 2015.

**Exhibit 14. Total Contributions and Independent Expenditures in At-Large City Council Races**

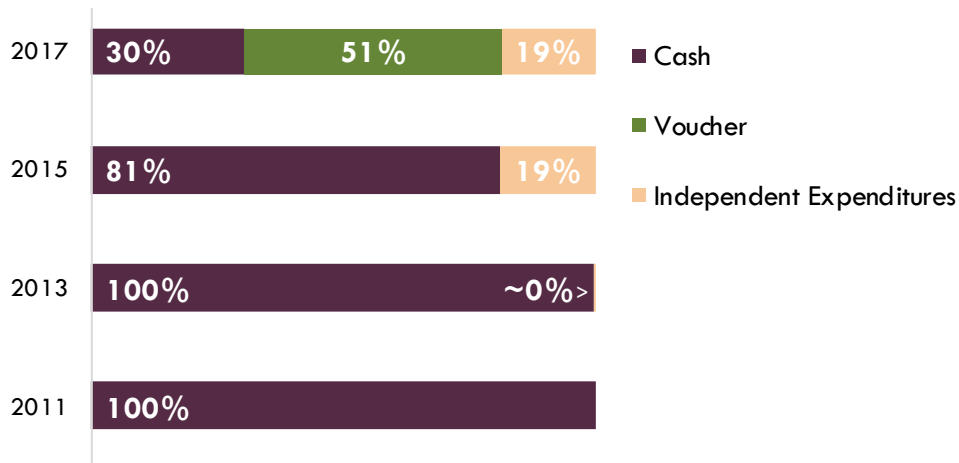


Source: SEEC 2018; BERK 2018.

One explanation for the increase in independent expenditures is the fact that the DVP made the race for Position 8 in 2017 so competitive. Two candidates participating in the DVP were able to raise significant amounts of funds through Democracy Vouchers during both the primary and general election periods. This put pressure on supporters of a third candidate, who was not participating in the DVP, to spend over \$133,000 in independent expenditures during the primary. Then, during the competitive general election contest, independent expenditures once again triggered a release from spending and contribution limits, with over \$222,000 backing one of the two candidates.

While independent expenditures for at-large city council races were up in 2017 compared to 2015, they did not increase as a percentage of the total campaign spending in those races, as shown in Exhibit 15. Independent expenditures made up 19% of total contributions and expenditures in both 2015 and 2017. In 2013 and 2011 independent expenditures played a very small role in at-large city council races. However, the at-large races those years all featured incumbents who, in most cases, didn’t face well-funded competitors.

**Exhibit 15. Contribution/Expenditure Types as a Percentage of Total Spending in At-Large City Council Races**



Source: SEEC 2018; BERK 2018.

This issue is addressed in Recommendation 2.2: Consider clarifications and refinements to guidelines regarding release from spending limits.

### GOAL 3: HEAVY UTILIZATION OF VOUCHERS BY THOSE WHO HAVE NOT PREVIOUSLY DONATED TO SEATTLE POLITICAL CAMPAIGNS

#### 3a. How many voucher users had never previously contributed to a political campaign?

In total, 20,772 Seattle residents used their Democracy Vouchers in 2017. 88% of these voucher users had never contributed to a local election campaign in Seattle between 2011 and 2015, or 18,284 people in total.<sup>19</sup>

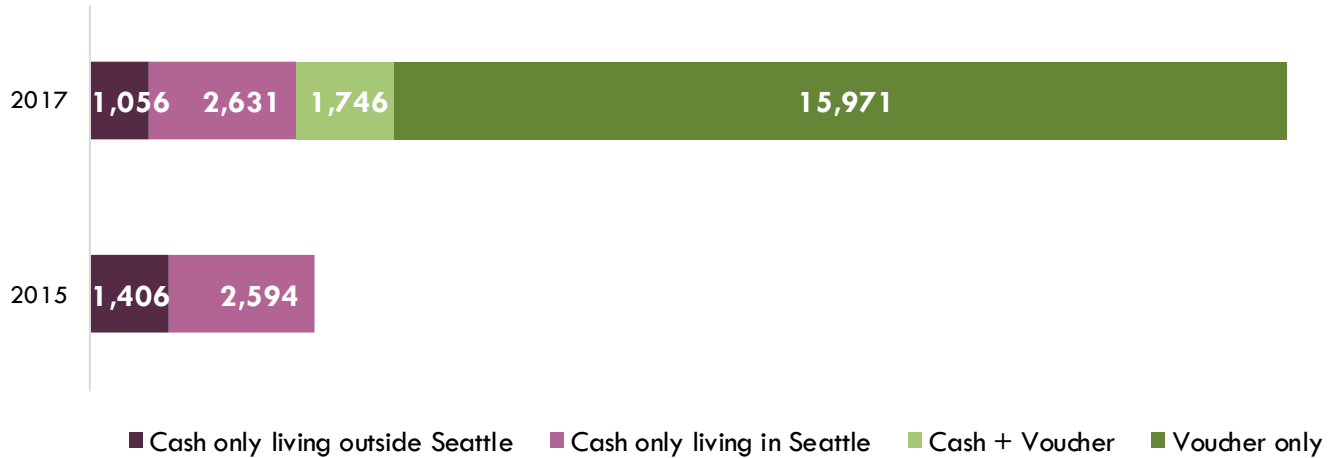
3.4% of Seattle’s adult population used their vouchers in 2017. For comparison, only 1.3% made cash contributions to a City Council candidate in 2015<sup>20</sup>. However, 2015 featured nine City Council races compared to only two in 2017. A more direct comparison can be made by analyzing the number of contributors to at-large City Council candidates in 2015 and 2017. As noted above, each year featured two at-large races, one with an incumbent on the ballot and one without. Exhibit 16 shows that over five times as many Seattle residents contributed in these races in 2017 compared to 2015. This includes nearly 18,000 voucher users, 1,746 of whom also made cash contributions. Donors who gave cash and vouchers could have given cash towards a campaign in order for them to qualify to participate in the DVP, they then could have used their vouchers as well.

An additional 3,744 people only made cash contributions in 2017, with over 1,000 cash donors living outside of Seattle. In 2015, only 2,594 people living in Seattle (0.43% of Seattle’s adult population) contributed to candidates in these races, with over 1,406 cash contributors living outside of Seattle.

<sup>19</sup> These numbers are based on BERK’s analysis of SEEC data on voucher users and campaign contributors between the years of 2011 and 2015.

<sup>20</sup> BERK’s analysis identified 7,869 unique individuals living in Seattle who donated to campaigns during the 2015 election cycle. Adult population estimates calculated using OFM’s total population estimate for 2015 multiplied by the percentage of residents in Seattle that are 18 years or older based on the 2015 American Community Survey 1-year estimate.

**Exhibit 16. Unique contributors to at-large city council races in 2015 and 2017**



Source: SEEC 2018; Every Voice 2017; BERK 2018.

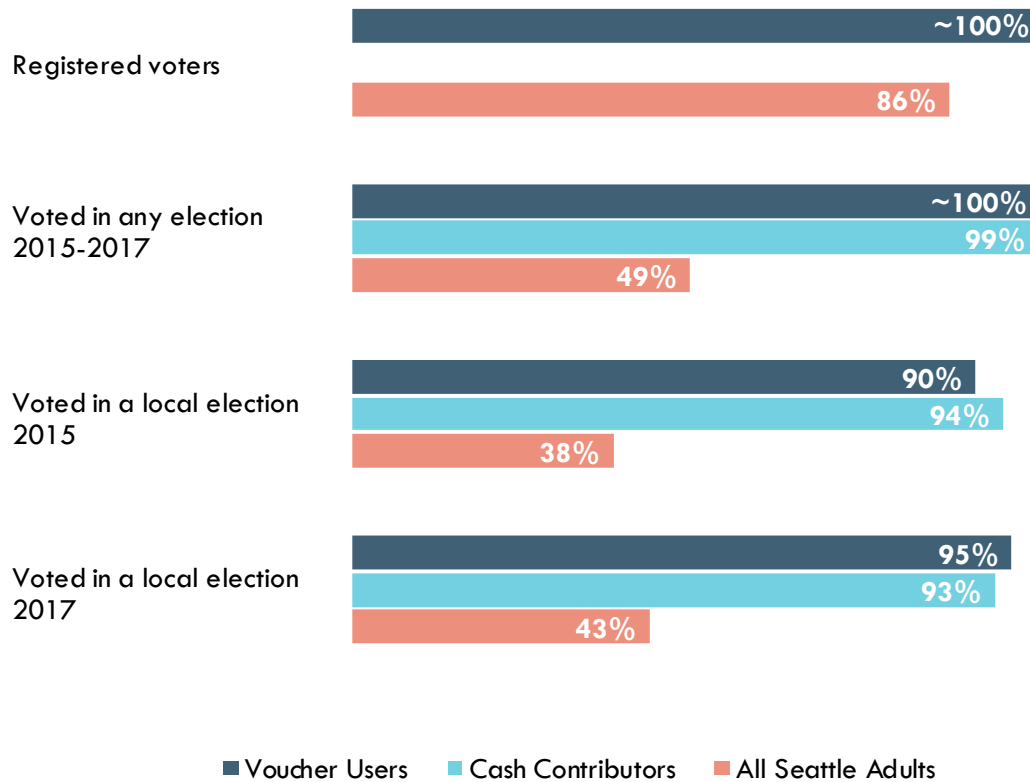
**3b. What are the characteristics of voucher users? Are they more representative of the Seattle population than cash contributors?**

*Voting and political activity*

As may be expected, voucher users are significantly more likely to be politically engaged than the average Seattle resident. As shown in

Exhibit 17, voucher users are more likely to vote in local elections. 95% voted in the 2017 general election compared to just 43% of adult Seattle residents and 93% of cash contributors. Among voucher users who were registered to vote in time for the 2015 local election, 90% did so.

**Exhibit 17. Comparison of Voucher User Voting Activity to 2015 Cash Contributors and All Seattle Adults<sup>21</sup>**



Source: SEEC, 2018; WA Secretary of State, 2018; BERK, 2018.

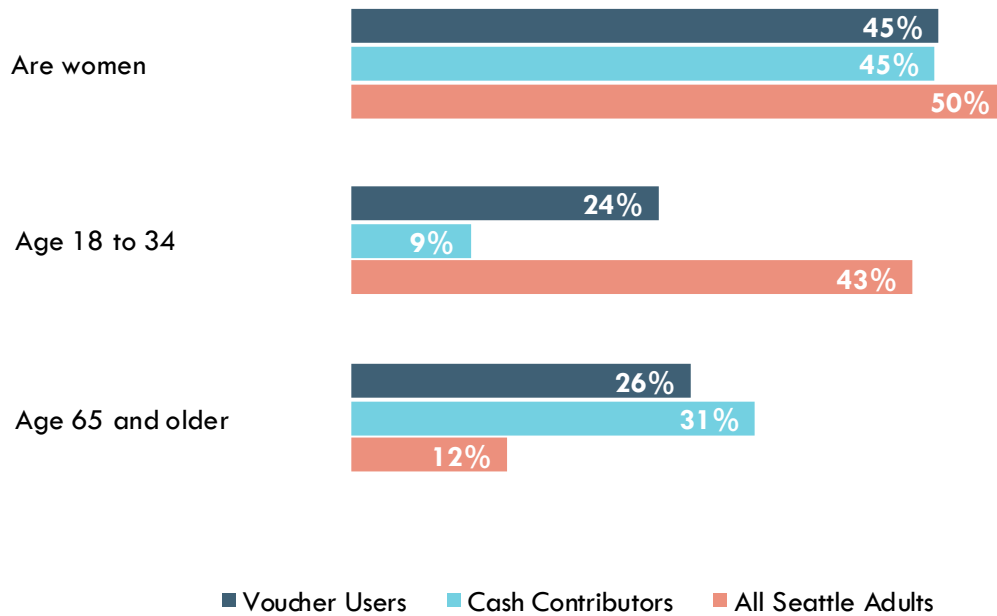
*Demographic characteristics*

Exhibit 18 compares voucher users’ demographic characteristics to 2015 campaign contributor and Seattle’s adult population. Like campaign contributors, voucher users are less likely to be women, less likely to be young (age 18-34) and more likely to be older (age 65+) than the general population. However, there are some significant differences. Most notably, younger adults made up a much larger share of all voucher users (24%), compared to cash contributors (9%). Conversely, the share of voucher users age 65+ is lower (26% compared to 31%). Nonetheless, the rate of voucher use among younger adults is considerably lower than for older residents, as is typical in voter turnout.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Registration information is a Jan. 5, 2018 extract of the WA Secretary of State of Seattle (SOS) voter registration database. All registrations include what the SOS considers Active and Inactive. Population is based on Washington State Office of Financial Management’s (OFM) 2017 estimate of total population and the percentage of residents who are adults from the 2016 American Community Survey 1-year estimate. The 2015 and 2017 voting history considers local Seattle elections.

<sup>22</sup> See (Heerwig & McCabe, 2018) for an analysis of participation rates by age group.

**Exhibit 18. Comparison of Voucher Users Demographic Characteristics to 2015 Cash Contributors and All Seattle Adults**



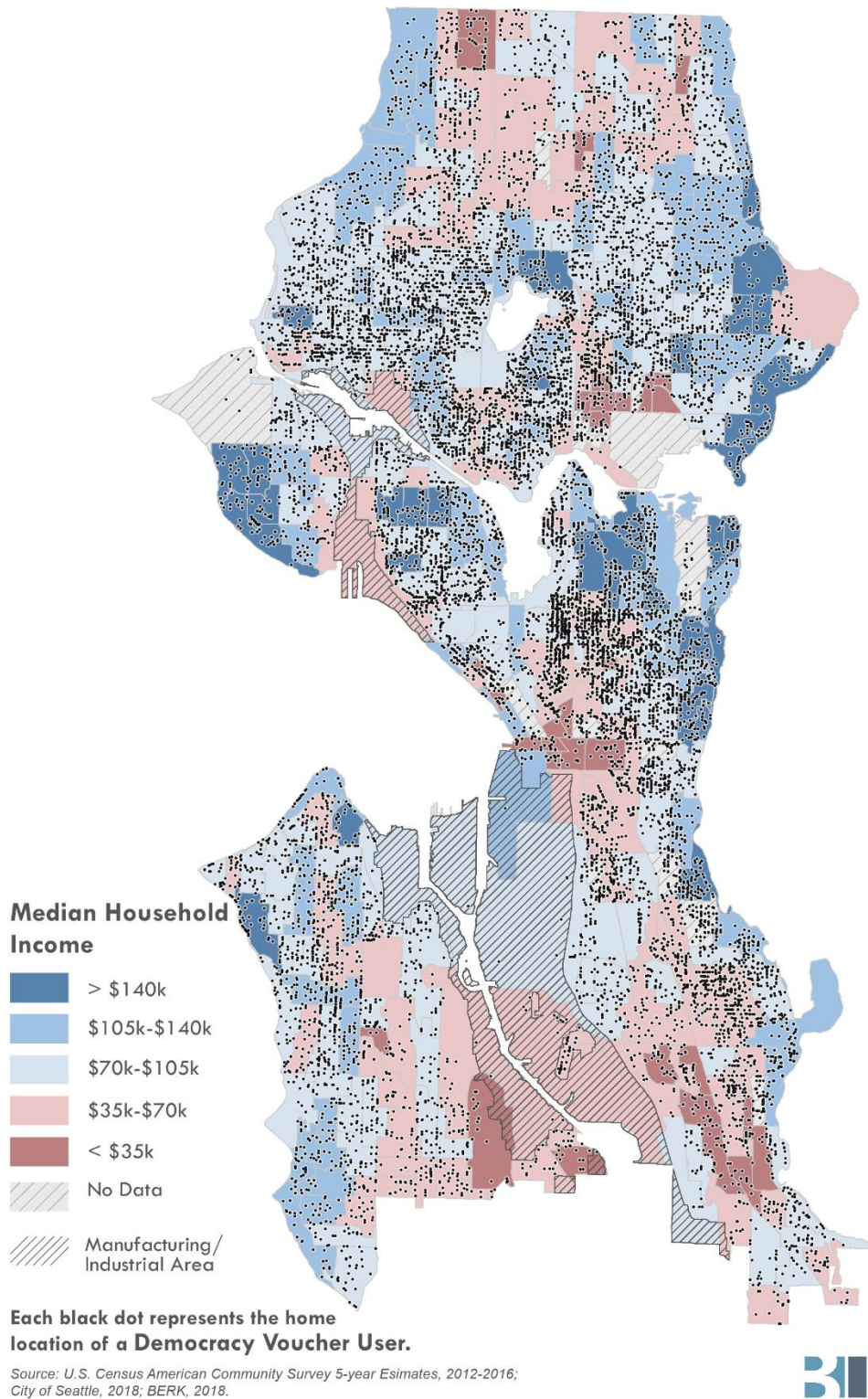
Source: SEEC, 2018; WA Secretary of State, 2018; BERK, 2018.

**3c. What are the neighborhood characteristics of voucher users? Are they more representative of the Seattle population than cash contributors?**

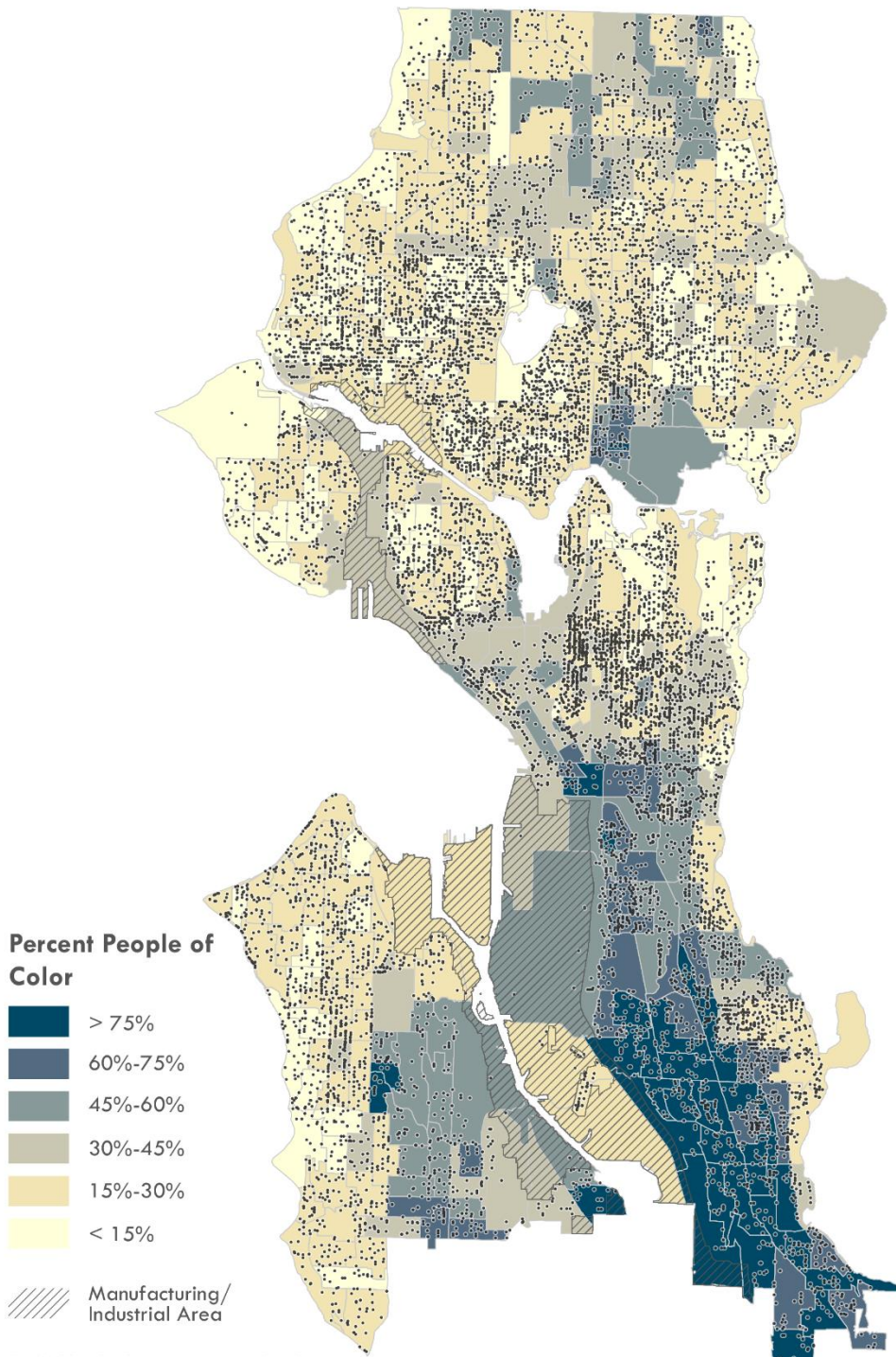
Verifiable information about the income and race of individual voucher users is not available.<sup>23</sup> However, it is possible to identify the income and demographic characteristics of neighborhoods in which voucher users live. Exhibit 19 shows the home locations of all voucher users as dots overlaid on neighborhoods shaded by income level. Exhibit 20 is the same map with neighborhoods shaded by percent of population that are persons of color. Both maps show that voucher users live in neighborhoods across the entire city, but with greater density in some neighborhood types than others.

<sup>23</sup> The only demographic data that exists for voucher users is age and gender. Other characteristics may be inferred using voter profiling tools such as Catalist. However, the accuracy of such proprietary models is impossible to verify and therefore BERK opted not to use this kind of information in this study. Another study by Heerwig and McCabe (2018) does utilize Catalist data to analyze voucher users based on assumed demographic characteristics.

### Exhibit 19. Home Locations of Voucher Users and Median Household Income



**Exhibit 20. Home Locations of Voucher Users and Percent Persons of Color**

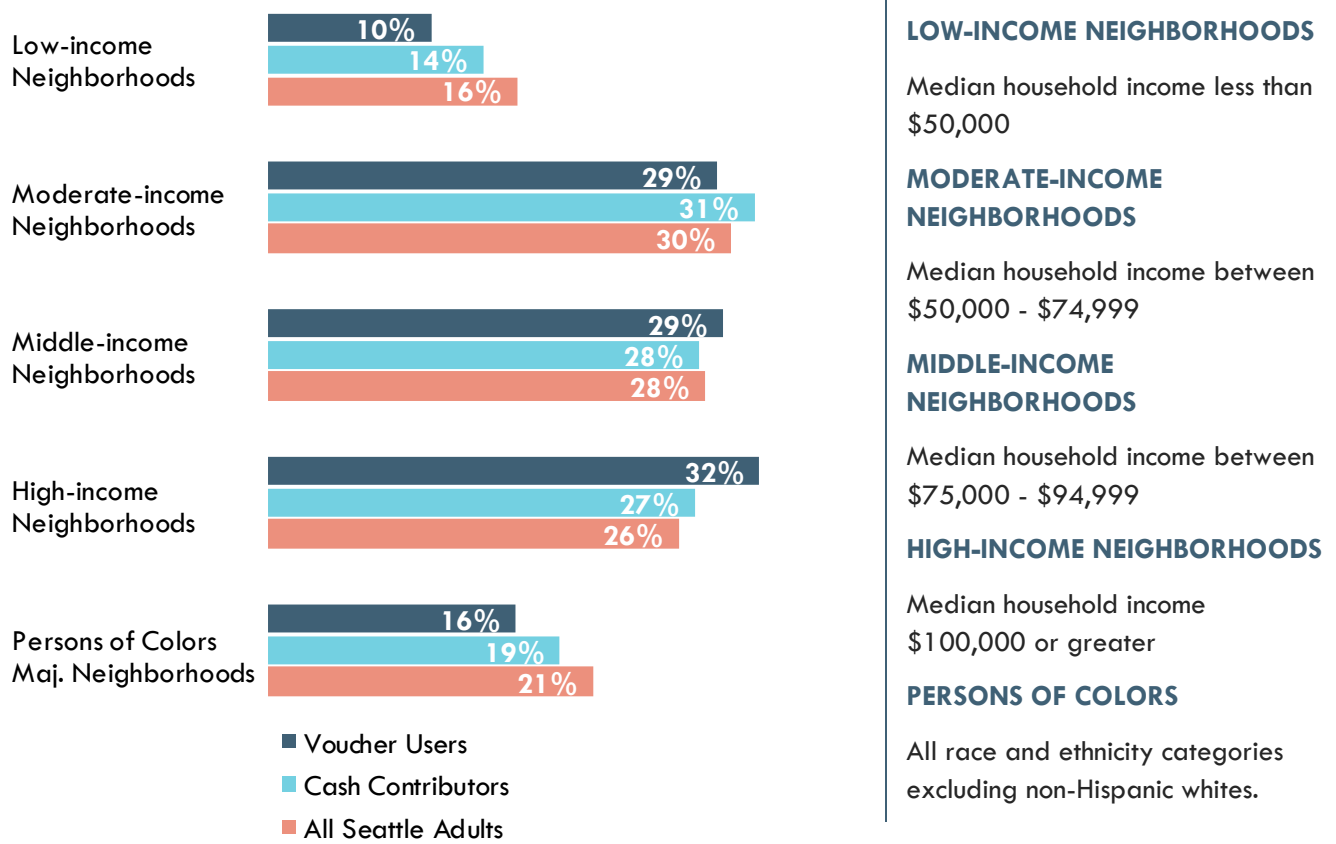


Source: U.S. Census American Community Survey 5-year Estimates, 2012-2016; City of Seattle, 2018; BERK, 2018.



Exhibit 21 presents a comparison of the neighborhood characteristics of voucher users to those of 2015 cash contributors<sup>24</sup> and the Seattle adult population. It shows that voucher users are less likely to live in low-income neighborhoods and more likely to live in high-income neighborhoods than cash contributors. It also shows that voucher users are less likely to live in neighborhoods where the majority of residents are persons of color. This is a counter-intuitive finding given the program’s goal of increasing the diversity of residents who can have influence as contributors to local elections. It is possible that the rapid pace of population growth in certain Seattle neighborhoods may have impacted the geographic pattern of engagement in local campaigns between 2015 and 2017.

**Exhibit 21. Neighborhood Characteristics of Voucher Users Compared to Adult Seattle Residents and 2015 Cash Contributors**



Source: SEEC, 2018; Washington Secretary of State, 2018; BERK, 2018.

### 3d. Were voucher users successful in using their vouchers to fund qualified campaigns?

The Seattle Democracy Program is a brand-new program and one of the first-of-its-kind in the nation.

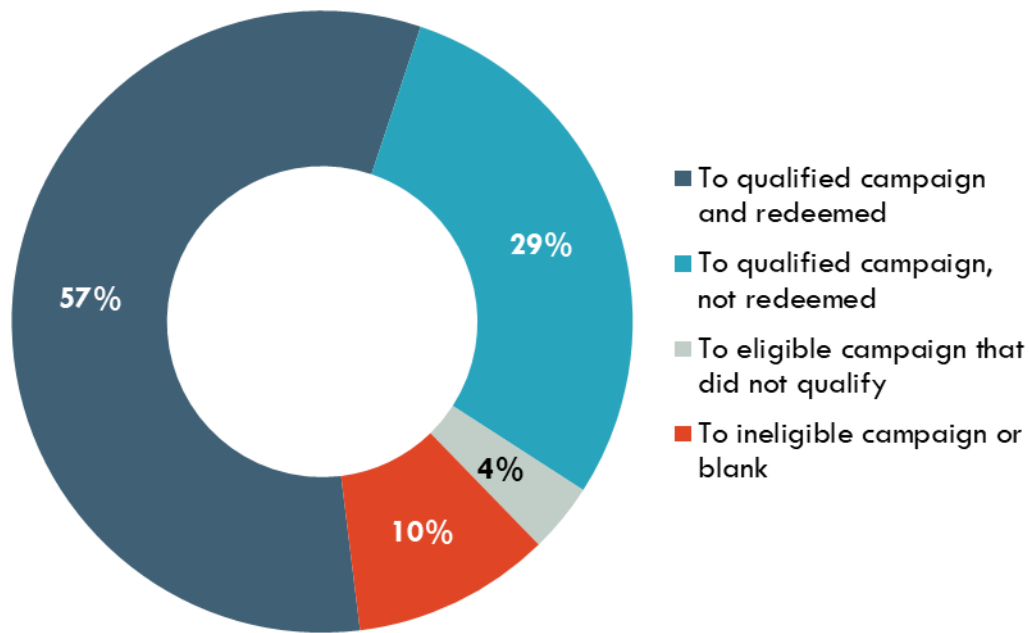
<sup>24</sup> The data in this chart represents all unique cash contributors to the two at large city council positions in 2015. BERK also analyzed the neighborhood characteristics of only those cash contributors for all positions in 2015. The distribution of cash contributors in 2015 could be influenced by the fact that there were seven city council district races that year, compared to zero in 2017. The shares in each neighborhood category shifted very slightly and did not impact the overall findings discussed above. Heerwig and McCabe (2018) conducted a similar analysis using data about 2017 cash contributors instead of 2015. They found that voucher users were more likely to be from low-income neighborhoods and less likely to be from high-income neighborhoods than 2017 cash contributors. This difference in finding may be due to a change in the geographic pattern of campaign contributors between 2015 and 2017, most notably the fact that 2017 contributors included the mayoral campaign.



Seattle residents had to learn for the first time what the program is all about, how to use their vouchers, and what kinds of candidates were qualified to receive voucher funding. Unlike an election ballot, which lists all of the candidates for a given race, Democracy Vouchers were not provided to residents with a list of eligible candidates. Instead, residents needed to do additional research, such as checking the SEEC website to determine which candidates could accept vouchers and which could not. As a result, there was opportunity for confusion on the part of residents and incorrect usage of vouchers.

BERK's analysis of voucher data indicates that most voucher users were successful in assigning vouchers to qualified candidates. Exhibit 22 shows how each of the nearly 80,000 returned vouchers were assigned and whether those vouchers were redeemed by candidates. 87% of all vouchers returned to SEEC were assigned to candidates that were qualified to receive voucher funding. An additional 4% of vouchers were assigned to candidates that were participating in the DVP, but did not eventually qualify to redeem voucher funds. 10% of all vouchers returned were not assigned to a candidate participating in the DVP. These could have been blank or assigned to a candidate that was ineligible to receive vouchers, such as a mayoral candidate.

**Exhibit 22. Voucher Assignment and Redemption Status**



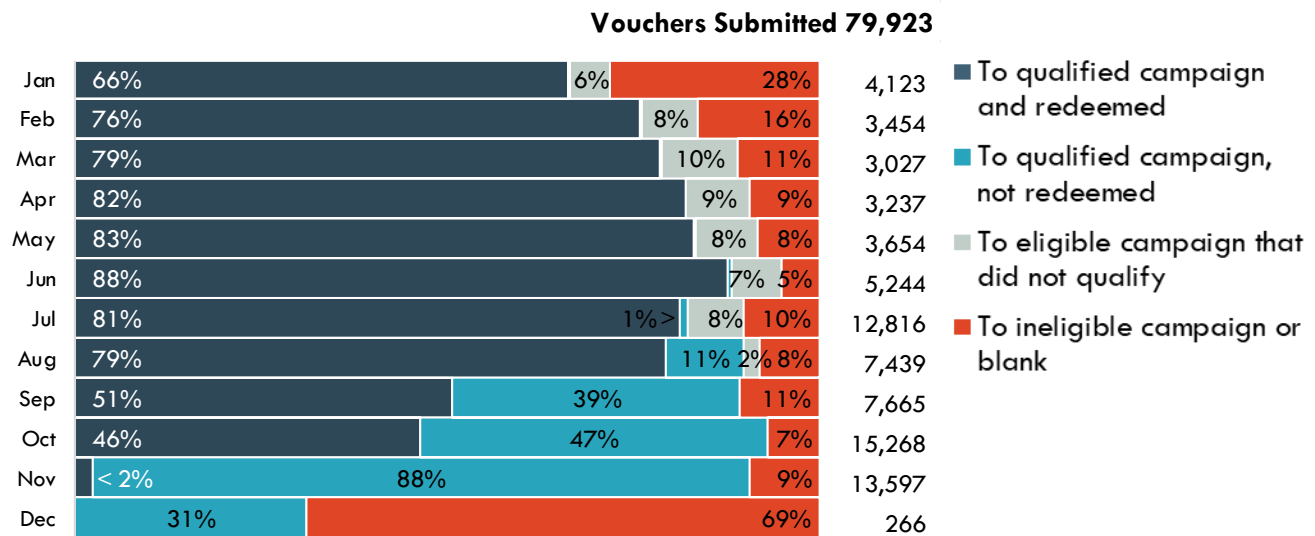
Source: SEEC, 2018; BERK, 2018.

A large portion of correctly assigned vouchers were not able to be redeemed by qualified candidates. This is because many candidates who qualified for vouchers hit their campaign spending limit and could not accept additional voucher funding, despite the surplus vouchers returned on their behalf. Exhibit 23 shows the same breakdown of voucher assignment and redemption status by month. Three important points can be taken from this exhibit:

- In January 2017, 28% of vouchers were not assigned to a qualified campaign. This percentage dropped throughout the winter and spring and then remained fairly steady until November. This indicates that ongoing outreach and education efforts may have had some impact on residents' understanding of how to use the program correctly.

- Vouchers assigned to eligible candidates that did not qualify to redeem vouchers funding dropped off to near zero after the primary election. This makes sense since all the candidates in the general election were qualified to redeem vouchers, with the exception of Scott Lindsay who was not participating in the DVP.
- The percentage of vouchers assigned to qualified campaigns that were not redeemed increased significantly following the primary election. By November, nearly all of the vouchers returned fell into this category. This indicates many Seattle residents did not understand that their preferred candidate had already reached the limit for vouchers funding.

**Exhibit 23. Voucher Submissions by Campaign Status by Month, 2017<sup>25</sup>**

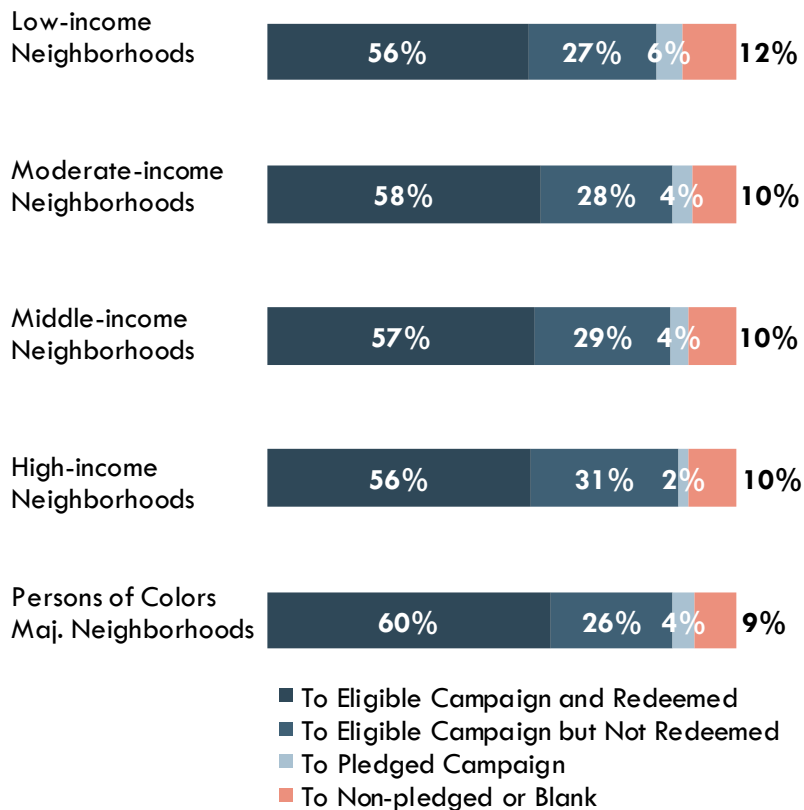


Source: SEEC, 2018; BERK, 2018.

Exhibit 24 breaks down the same data by the voucher users' neighborhood characteristics. It shows very little variation by neighborhood type. Voucher users living in low-income neighborhoods were about as likely to assign their voucher to an ineligible candidate as were voucher users living in high-income neighborhoods.

<sup>25</sup> Voucher submissions are categorized using two fields in the voucher database, campaign status and voucher status. If a voucher did not have information, it was categorized to ineligible campaign or blank, which also includes void ballots.

## Exhibit 24. Voucher Submissions by Campaign Status by Neighborhood Characteristic <sup>26</sup>



Source: SEEC, 2018; U.S. Census American Community Survey 5-year estimates, 2012-2016; BERK, 2018.

### 3e. How did residents learn about the DVP?

The most common ways that Representative Survey respondents learned about the DVP was from the vouchers they received in the mail (42%), from a news or media story (34%), and/or from friends and family (32%). Survey respondents were invited to select one or more communication channels. Exhibit 25 breaks down survey results for all respondents, and by race/ethnicity (white and persons of color<sup>27</sup>) to see if there are significant differences between groups.

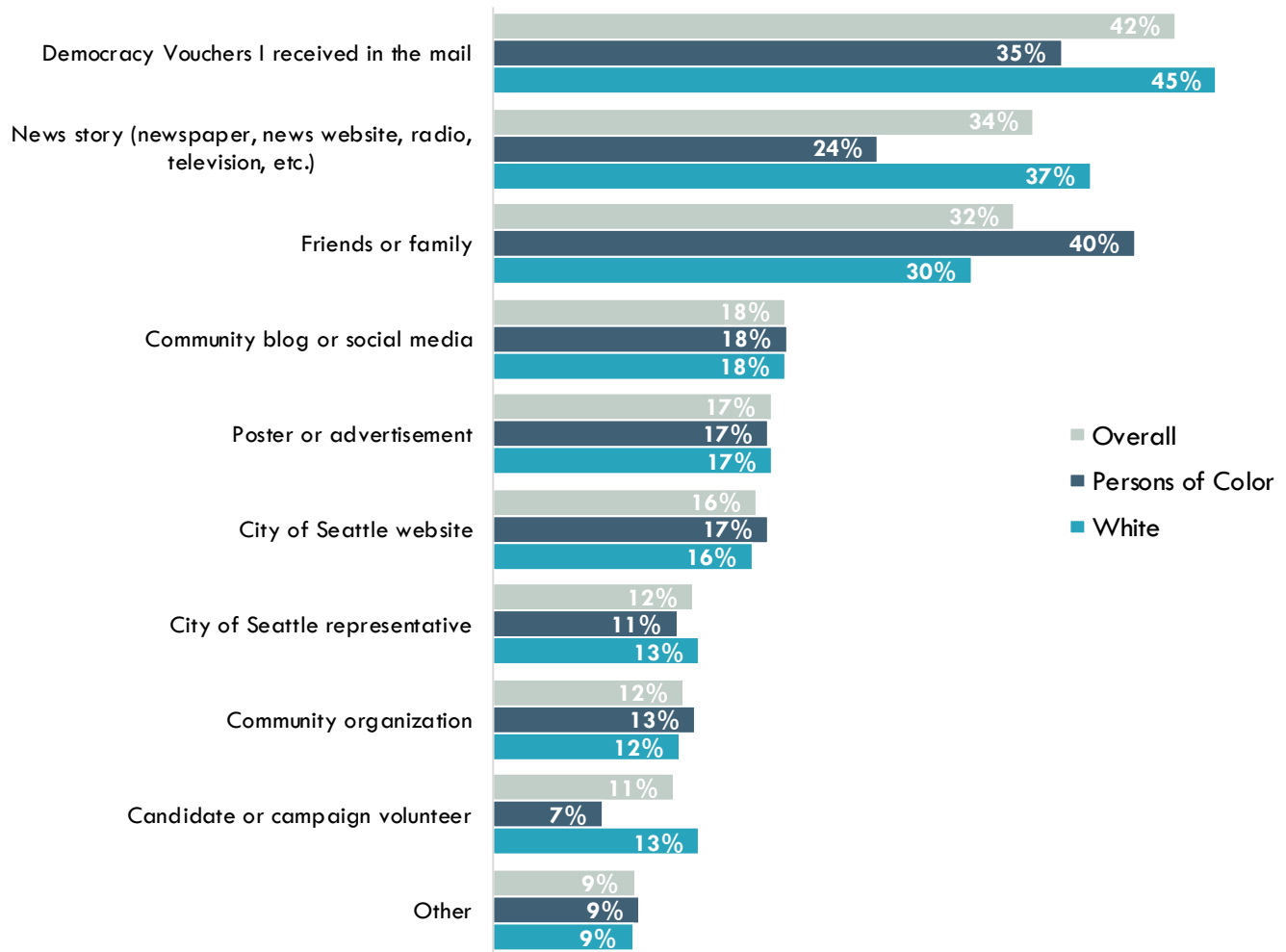
- **Nearly half of Seattle residents learned about the DVP when they received their vouchers in the mail.** However, whites were significantly more likely to learn about the program this way (45%) than were persons of color (35%).
- **There were some differences in how residents learned about the DVP based on their racial/ethnic identification.** Respondents who identify as white were more likely to learn about the program through a news story (37%) than were persons of color (24%). This may reflect higher engagement in local news media by white residents or the lack of coverage of the DVP in Seattle's ethnic media. Survey respondents who identify as persons of color were more likely to learn about the DVP through friends and family (40%), compared to white respondents (30%). Persons of color

<sup>26</sup> "Redeemable" by database is voucher status of received, accepted, or hold.

<sup>27</sup> Persons of color is used here to describe any person who is not white and not Hispanic/Latino.

were also more likely to learn about the DVP from campaign outreach: 13% of survey respondents who identify as persons of color reported learning about the DVP from campaigns, compared to only 7% of white survey respondents.

**Exhibit 25. How Residents Learned About the DVP (Representative Survey)**



Source: BERK, 2018.

### 3f. What encouraged voucher users to participate in the DVP?

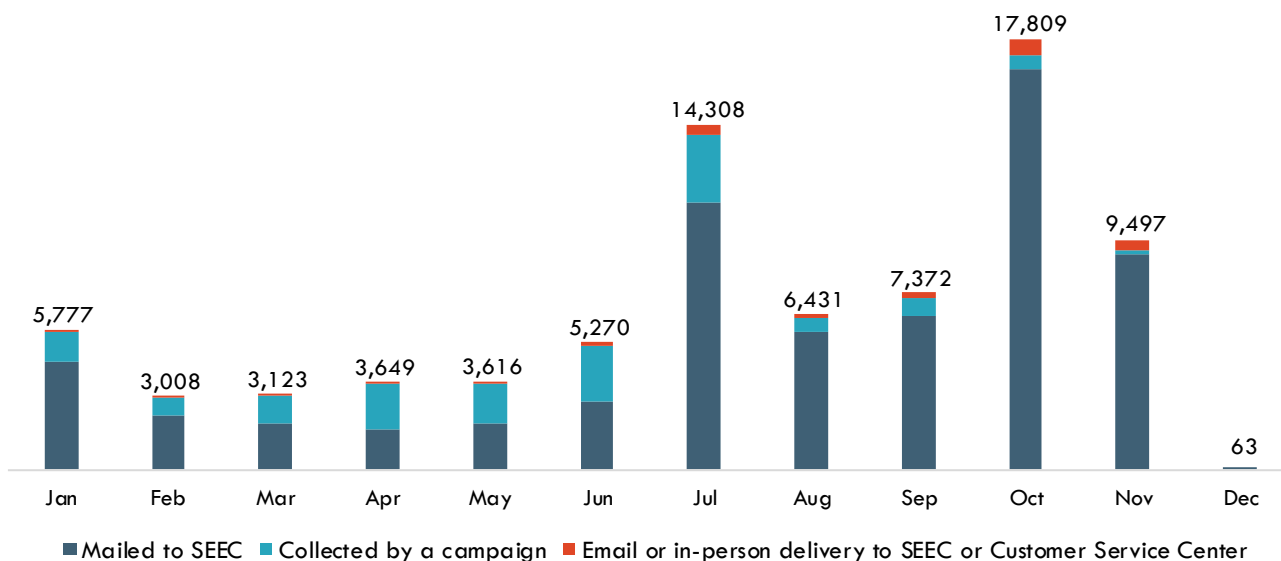
The analysis of voucher users indicates that they are much more likely to vote in local elections than the general public. However, only a small fraction of all Seattle voters used their vouchers. Examining voucher return methods provide additional clues about what other factors may promote engagement. Exhibit 26 shows voucher returns by month.

- **Most vouchers were returned through the mail.** Overall, 80% of vouchers were mailed directly to SEEC.
- **Nearly 1 out of 5 vouchers was returned via a campaign.** 17% of vouchers were collected by a campaign. According to campaigns interviewed for this study, the most common methods of voucher collection was door-to-door canvassing (by both paid canvassers and volunteers) or house parties and campaign fundraising events featuring the candidate. Campaigners engaging residents typically had stacks of blank Voucher Replacement Form, which enabled residents to return their voucher even

if the original was lost or trashed.

- Campaigns were most active before the primary.** Campaigns collected the largest share of voucher submissions during the period from April to June 2017, ranging from 44 to 56% received in this period. In July, the month before the primary, the count of vouchers collected by campaigns increased, however the rate of returns by mail were much higher and the share of campaign collections decreased to 20% and diminished significantly thereafter. By August, two campaigns were reaching the limit for how much they could redeem from vouchers and therefore were likely reducing their efforts to encourage voucher contributions significantly.

**Exhibit 26. How did residents return their vouchers to SEEC? (2017)**



Source: SEEC, 2018; BERK, 2018.

Community Liaisons and community organizations that conducted direct outreach to engage communities of color identified the following factors as ones that most reliably encouraged participation.

- The community had a candidate they were excited about,** and they saw the vouchers as a way to donate to somebody they already supported.
- Translated materials and postage-paid envelopes** also supported voucher use among communities of color and immigrant populations. The paid envelopes reduced barriers to finding and paying for stamps to return the vouchers.
- Education to inform people about the DVP.** Many residents who learned about the program and understood its purpose and goals felt more encouraged to use their vouchers. As this program is new, and there are not many other models of it in the country, raising awareness and education are important to encouraging use.
- Demonstrating how to use a voucher.** Community Liaisons and community organizations thought it was helpful when they demonstrated to people how to fill out the information requested on the vouchers. These demonstrations also helped people remember what the vouchers looked like, in case they misplaced them.

## Effective Communication Messages

The Win-Win Network found that messaging around “every person has a voice” polled the best during their own testing and experiments in encouraging awareness and use of Democracy Vouchers in Southeast Seattle. In our focus groups, Community Liaisons and community organizations and volunteers expressed that the following messages were helpful in raising awareness and encouraging residents to use vouchers:

- Messages were tailored for a specific audience and were relevant to issues or things they care about.
- DVP is a way to support your candidate and generates a sense of pride in using it. This is a new program to give “power to the people,” or “every person has a voice.”
- DVP helps people from under-served communities run for office.
- It’s a resource that all residents, including permanent residents (green card holders), have access to.
- That the money is already collected from taxpayers, “let’s not waste this money.”

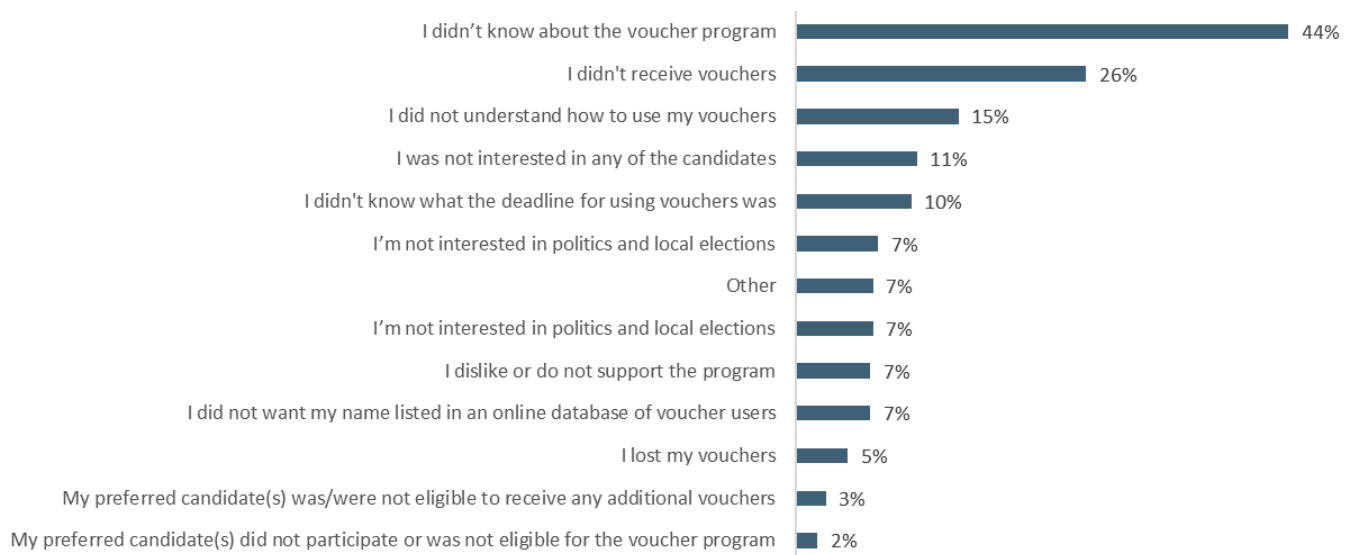
The Win-Win Network also sequenced their communication messages in the months leading up to the election. For example, they phased the messaging starting in winter 2017 through the summer and fall of 2017.

### 3g. What were the barriers to participation in the DVP?

Survey respondents who did not participate in the DVP were asked to indicate the reasons (1 or more) why they didn’t use their vouchers. Results are shown in Exhibit 27. The most common response was lack of knowledge about the program (44%), followed by not receiving the vouchers (26%). The rest of the answer choices received much lower response rates.

#### Exhibit 27. Reasons Residents did not Use their Vouchers

Why did you not use your vouchers in 2017? Check all that apply. (N=406)



Source: BERK, 2018.

Many Community Liaisons and community groups focused on informing and educating communities of color about the DVP and how it worked. They also highlighted several issues that can impact the success of outreach and engagement efforts in these communities.

- **Cultural differences in perspectives about politics and familiarity with a democratic system.** Particularly for communities of color and immigrants, liaisons highlighted it is important to understand their cultural relationship with politics and governance, and understand the political systems in their country of birth. For example, the experiences of many immigrant communities with more repressive political regimes have led to a reluctance to engage in politics here in Seattle. These cultural differences in views on politics and government, as well as their familiarity with a democratic system can stand as a challenge to engaging and encouraging members of these communities to participate in the DVP.
- **Other challenges and issues within a community.** There may be other more pressing challenges that a community is facing that may be barriers to participation in the DVP. Issues could be displacement, economic insecurity, or distrust in politics and authority that may be influenced by perceptions and comparisons to politics and governance in a group's country of origin, or in other parts of the U.S.
- **Confusion about which candidates and offices could accept vouchers.** There was a lot of interest in the mayor's race, but vouchers could not be used for the mayor's race in 2017.
- **Confusion about eligibility.** Particularly among immigrant communities, such as the Hispanic/Latino community, there was confusion about whether they were eligible to participate in the DVP, given that many were not registered or eligible to vote.
- **A general lack of interest and trust in the political system.** Some people are not interested in politics, or believe that their voice, vote, and voucher won't make a difference. If a person is not registered to vote, or is suspicious about the political system, outreach about the DVP may be of low importance to them.
- **People do not have time** to learn about candidates, issues, and the offices on the ballot.

## GOAL 4: HIGH PUBLIC SATISFACTION WITH THE PROGRAM

### 4a. What is the level of awareness of the DVP among the Seattle population?

- **Most Seattle residents are aware of the DVP.** While only 3.4% of adult Seattle residents used their vouchers in 2017, results from the Representative Survey indicate that the level of awareness of the program was much higher, as shown in Exhibit 28. Only 15% of survey respondents indicated that they were very familiar with the DVP. However, an additional 50% of survey respondents answered, "Somewhat familiar" or "I've heard of it, but don't know what it is". The remaining 37% indicated they had never heard of the program. Given that the survey was conducted in March 2018, several months after the conclusion of the 2017 election, this level of general awareness of at least the existence of the program is notable and indicative that outreach and education efforts had some success.

**Exhibit 28. Awareness of the DVP: Representative Survey**

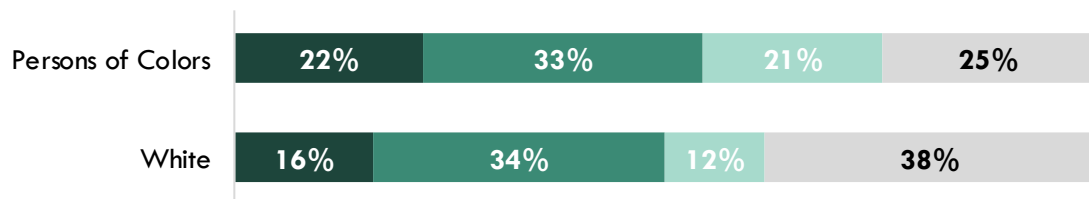
Before receiving this survey, how familiar were you with Seattle’s Democracy Voucher Program?



Source: BERK, 2018.

- **Awareness is higher among persons of color.** Exhibit 29 compares awareness of the DVP by white residents to awareness by persons of color. Only 25% of persons of color answered “I’ve never heard of it”, compared to 38% of white respondents. This may reflect the impacts of targeted outreach to communities of color by SEEC, DON Community Liaisons and community-based organizations.

**Exhibit 29. Program Awareness by Race/Ethnicity Category: Representative Survey**

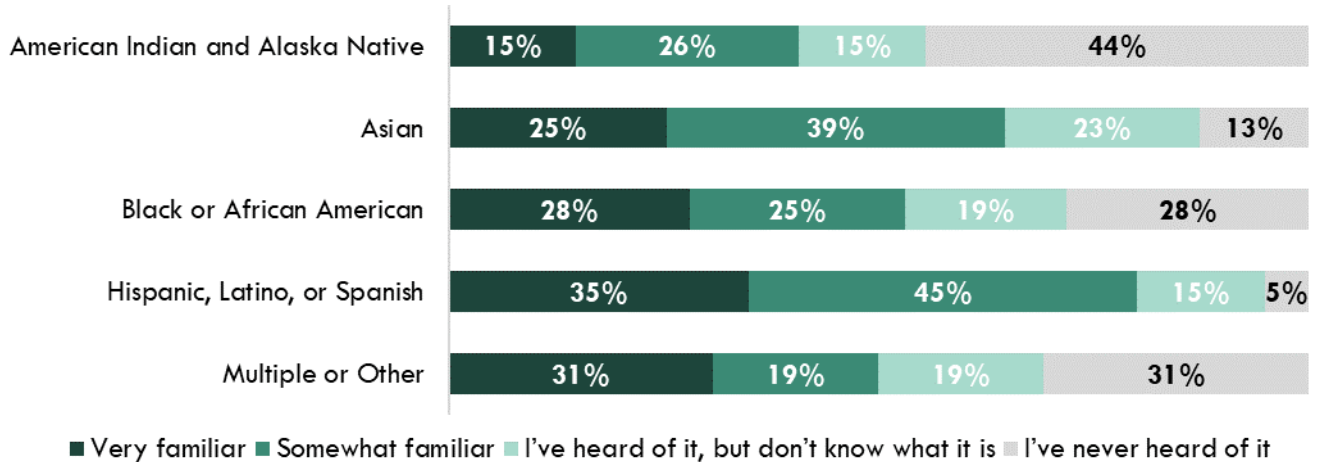


■ Very familiar ■ Somewhat familiar ■ I've heard of it, but don't know what it is ■ I've never heard of it

- **Awareness varies significantly by race and ethnicity.** Exhibit 30 breaks down communities of color by race and ethnicity. Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish community members were most likely to be aware of the DVP, with only 5% reporting that they’ve never heard of the program. 44% of American Indian and Alaska Natives reported never having heard of the program, as did 28% of Black or African Americans.



**Exhibit 30. Program Awareness by Race/Ethnicity<sup>28</sup>**



Source: BERK, 2018.

*4b. Do residents feel the DVP is achieving its goals? and 4c. How do these perspectives vary by level of awareness and engagement with the DVP?*

All survey respondents were asked to select their level of agreement with a statement about the DVP achieving its goals. As would be expected, responses to this question varied based on the respondents' familiarity and experience with the DVP. In general, those who were more familiar with the DVP were more likely to agree that it met its goals in 2017.

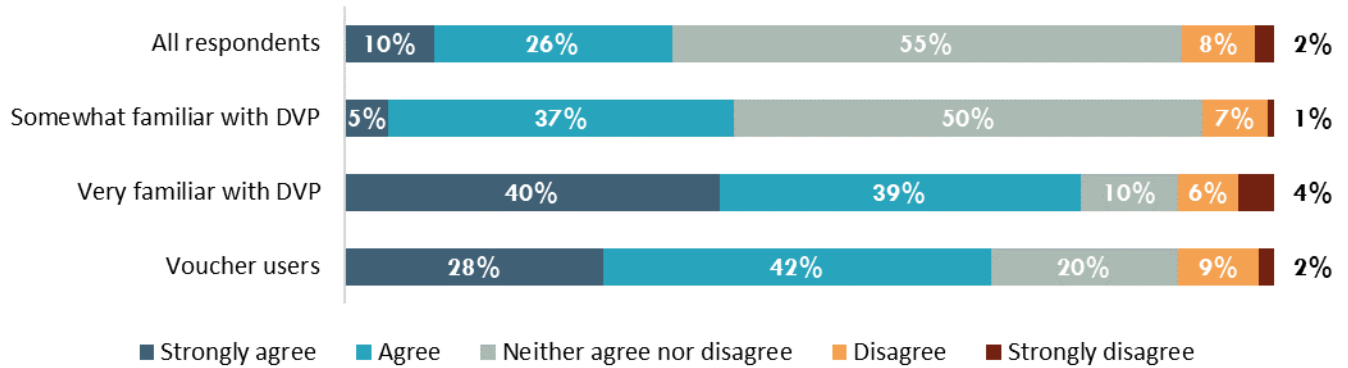
Exhibit 31 breaks down the responses of survey takers for the Representative Survey, Community Liaison Outreach Survey, and DVP Followers Survey. A significantly greater percentage of respondents in the DVP Followers Survey chose "Somewhat Disagree" or "Strongly Disagree". However, this percentage dropped among those who participated in the program.

<sup>28</sup> To ensure there is a sufficient sample size for each racial/ethnic group to present meaningful results, this chart shows combined responses from the Representative Survey and the Community Liaison Outreach Survey. In aggregate, respondents to the Community Liaison Outreach Survey were slightly more likely to have heard of the DVP than Representative Survey respondents.

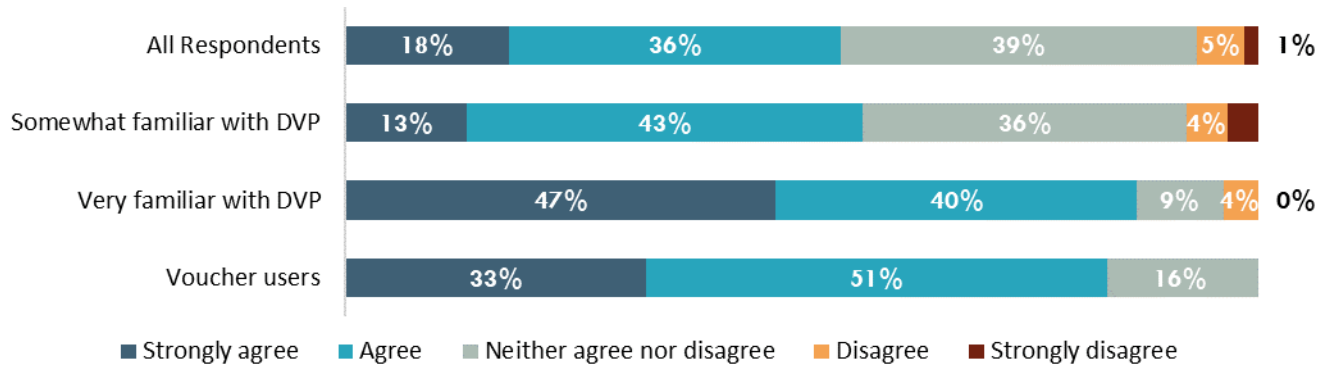
### Exhibit 31. Survey Respondents' Level of Agreement That the DVP Met its Goals

Survey question: The goals of the Democracy Voucher Program are to increase the number of campaign contributors in Seattle and increase the number of candidates who run for office. Participating City Council and City Attorney candidates were also required to adhere to campaign spending and contribution limits. In 2017, do you believe the program met its goals?

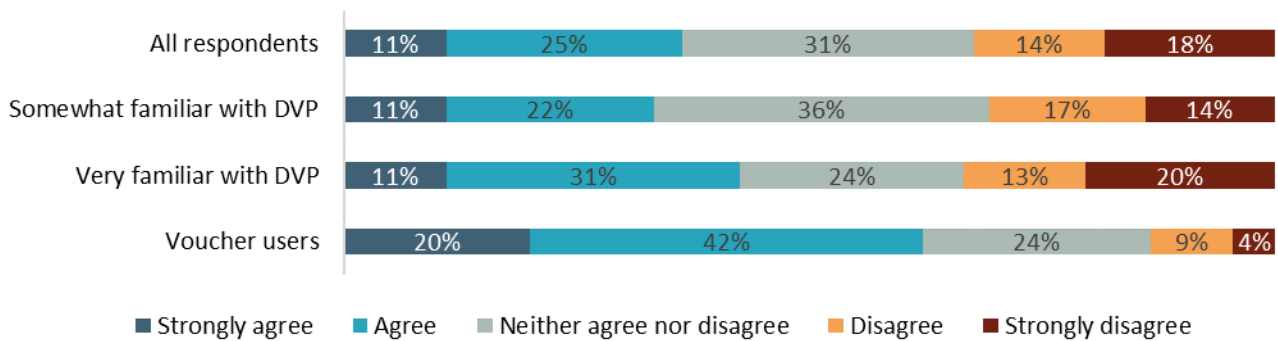
#### Representative Survey



#### Community Liaison Outreach Survey



#### DVP Followers Survey



Source: BERK, 2018.

## Recommendations

Based on the findings of this evaluation, BERK offers several recommendations for program changes that could improve the effectiveness of the DVP at achieving its goals. Some of these recommendations are related to regulatory actions that require City Council approval. The Honest Elections Seattle initiative identifies five program elements that should be considered by SEEC for modification based on a review of program outcomes after each election cycle. These include: voucher mailing date, value and count of vouchers issued to each eligible resident, number of qualifying contributions, campaign spending limits, and individual contribution limit per contributor.<sup>29</sup>

### GOAL 1: ACHIEVE HIGH RATES OF CANDIDATE PARTICIPATION

#### Recommendation 1.1: Make no change to the number of qualifying contributions

While frustrations with the qualifying process was a frequent theme in campaign surveys and interviews, very few people expressed the view that the number of qualifying contributions is too high.

#### Recommendation 1.2: Streamline the verification process for qualifying contributions

While a high percentage of candidates participated in the DVP in 2017, most candidates did not receive any public funding, or qualified to receive public funding too late in the election cycle to make a difference. This outcome raises questions about how many candidates, and which kinds of candidates, will choose to run for office and participate in the DVP during future election cycles. The biggest barrier to participation for many candidates was collecting contributions along with verifying information.

Campaign representatives communicated strong desire for a more efficient and automated process for verifying qualifying contributions so that they can take advantage of online fundraising tools and reduce or eliminate time spent tracking down signatures. BERK agrees that SEEC should continue to work towards significantly streamlining the verification process – particularly when it comes to qualifying contributions.

As more and more people become accustomed to performing all monetary transactions by credit card or online payment system, campaigns need an option for soliciting qualifying contributions online that allows for the collection of all verifying information electronically at the time of payment. Banks and credit card companies already have systems in place for electronic verification of identity. SEEC should pursue ways to leverage these existing systems of electronic verification to streamline the process of both gathering and verifying qualifying contributions.

#### Recommendation 1.3: Provide online dashboard for tracking voucher returns and verification

Candidates would be able to more effectively utilize voucher funding if they had better information about the number of vouchers for their campaign that have been returned to SEEC. Knowing how many vouchers were in the process of verification could give them better information for making financial decisions. We recommend SEEC consider developing an online dashboard that could be available to the general public or just campaigns. For each candidate, the dashboard could show real-time data for the following kinds of statistics:

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<sup>29</sup> Seattle Municipal Code (SMC) 2.04.630 (b) - Candidates to Qualify By Showing Grass Roots Support and Agreeing to New Campaign and Contribution Limits; Redemption of Democracy Vouchers; New Limits on Use of Funds.

- Vouchers received, verified, and redeemed
- Vouchers received and verified, not yet redeemed
- Vouchers received, not yet verified
- Total potential funding in the pipeline (value of vouchers received but not yet redeemed)

#### Recommendation 1.4: Continue to monitor candidate success in qualifying for the DVP

SEEC should continue to monitor how many candidates choose to participate in the DVP and how many qualify to redeem voucher funds to evaluate whether future changes to the number of qualifying contributions or process for verification may be warranted.

## GOAL 2: DEMOCRACY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

#### Recommendation 2.1: Make no change to campaign spending limits

The findings of this evaluation do not justify any change to campaign spending limits.

#### Recommendation 2.2: Consider clarifications and refinements to guidelines regarding release from spending limits

SEEC should consider issuing clearer guidelines to candidates regarding the circumstances under which releases from spending limits would be considered and what would transpire next for campaigns. Such guidelines should consider a variety of potential scenarios, particularly those involving coordinated or uncoordinated independent expenditures which could push one candidate over the spending limit. Such guidelines would increase transparency and enable campaigns to plan more effectively for varying possible scenarios. Additionally, SEEC should consider whether there are situations where incremental increases to spending limits may be a more appropriate response than removing the limits entirely.

#### Recommendation 2.3: Make no change to individual contribution limits

Opinions on this matter varied by campaign with some arguing for lower limits while other arguing for higher limits. However, none of our findings indicates that this limit needs immediate adjustment. Candidates who participated in the DVP won in all elections. In the City Attorney race, the candidate participating in the DVP raised more funds in total contributions than his competitor who did not participate.

#### Recommendation 2.4: Make no change to the value and count of vouchers issued to eligible residents

No one we spoke with felt changes are necessary. Nor did our analysis raise any red flags about the appropriateness of the current practice.

#### Recommendation 2.5: Continue to monitor campaign spending and outcomes

There have not been enough campaigns since the launch of the DVP to assess how it will impact fundraising activity in highly competitive elections in the future. However, the increase in independent expenditures compared to prior elections does raise concerns that the DVP may not always have the intended effect of reducing the role of big money in local elections. This finding indicates that SEEC

should continue to monitor independent expenditures closely and carefully consider the kinds of triggers which would release candidates from spending limits in future elections.

### GOAL 3: HEAVY UTILIZATION OF VOUCHERS BY THOSE WHO HAVE NOT PREVIOUSLY DONATED TO SEATTLE POLITICAL CAMPAIGNS

#### Recommendation 3.1: Postpone the voucher mailing date until at least March 1

The voucher mailing date came up frequently in discussion with candidates and campaign staff, community organizations and volunteers, and DON Community Liaisons who worked to educate Seattle residents about the DVP in 2017. The overwhelming opinion was that mailing vouchers to arrive on January 1 is far too early. Voters are not yet tuned in to the new election cycle and most candidates had not yet even announced their intention to run for office. It is also a difficult time of year to run effective marketing and outreach campaigns to raise awareness of the program, due to the holidays in late December. As a result, many vouchers were lost or tossed.

The findings of this evaluation suggest that the DVP will be more successful at achieving its goals of encouraging widespread voucher usage if the date of the voucher mailing is postponed until March 1 or later, after all candidates have had the opportunity to announce their candidacy and pledge their participation in the DVP. At this point the full list of candidates eligible to receive vouchers will be known and can be communicated more clearly and prominently to Seattle residents in the printed materials that arrive with the vouchers.

Among the campaigns that BERK engaged in this evaluation, the call for postponing the date of voucher mailing came from those that were able to qualify to receive voucher funds very early in the 2017 election cycle (Grant and Mosqueda) as well as those who took much longer to qualify for the program (Goueli, Gonzales, Murakami). The idea that an earlier mailing date is important for newer candidates who may need more time to gather vouchers did not resonate with these later three campaigns. Instead, some argued that mailing vouchers early actually increases the advantage of candidates with the resources and organizational infrastructure already in place to deploy canvassers and efficiently solicit vouchers door-to-door. So, an earlier voucher mailing date just gives those established candidates more time to build upon their head-start. On the other hand, outsider campaigns without the resources to hit the ground running could have the most to gain by postponing the voucher mailing date if the mailing were paired with focused marketing and outreach efforts.

#### Recommendation 3.2: Elevate awareness of voucher mailing day

SEEC can achieve the goals of the DVP more effectively by concentrating significantly more of its marketing and outreach efforts around the date of the voucher mailing. The purpose would be to communicate that the election season has officially begun and that (nearly) all Seattle residents have the opportunity to make a difference in choosing which candidates will have the resources to get their message out to the voters. These efforts should be paired with a campaign to gain local media coverage at par with the coverage of a primary election or opening day of a Mariners season<sup>30</sup>, giving an implied sense of urgency that the time for residents to use their vouchers is now. Consider including a sticker with

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<sup>30</sup> Consider the marketing analogy of “opening day” for the Mariners as an avenue to gain media attention. The voucher mailing date is “opening day” for the local election season where voters are introduced to the new line-up of candidates seeking their vouchers.

every mailing that says, “I used my Democracy Voucher”, much like the classic “I voted” stickers, and to share their decision to use vouchers over social media.

If successful, this strategy could be expected to result in more vouchers being returned during the period shortly after the mailing date and, potentially, a wider array of candidates receiving vouchers much earlier in the campaign cycle. Provided that these same candidates are able to qualify earlier in the campaign cycle (see Recommendation 3.1), the influx of vouchers could result in more public funding to kick-start a greater number of viable campaigns in advance of the primary election.

### Recommendation 3.3: Develop a system for instant electronic delivery of replacement vouchers to registered voters

Many residents lost their vouchers after they arrived in the mail on January 1, 2017. While SEEC provided a clear process for getting replacement vouchers issued, this process presented barriers to participation. Most importantly, the process includes a delay between a request for replacement vouchers and the issuing of replacement vouchers. In Washington State, the voter registration database is public information. Therefore, it should be possible to create a secure website where any resident could enter their name and address into an online form to request replacement vouchers. If a match to a person in the voter registration database is confirmed, and that person has not yet used their vouchers, the website could automatically cancel the already-issued vouchers and issue new replacement vouchers to the resident. These vouchers could then be printed, completed, signed, and returned to SEEC by the resident. The result would be a more efficient system for voucher replacement that requires less SEEC staff time and presents less barriers to participation for Seattle residents.

One benefit of this system would be to enable community-based organizations, DON Community Liaisons, and other intermediaries to more effectively engage and support residents who are new to the program. In 2017 these intermediaries could only educate residents and the program and let them know who to contact to request a replacement ballot. A system for instant electronic delivery could enable these intermediaries to support interested Seattle residents through the entire process of requesting and returning vouchers during one point of contact. Even in cases where the resident does not have access to a printer, this online system could provide the residents voter identification number to write in on a generic replacement voucher form, much like the one used by campaigns in the 2017 cycle.

### Recommendation 3.4: Continue working to establish secure online system for voucher returns

Initiative 122 states that “SEEC shall establish a secure online system for delivery of Democracy Vouchers (without prejudice to any eligible person's right to receive Democracy Vouchers in the mail at his or her option) no later than prior to the 2017 election cycle, unless SEEC determines this target date is not practicable; and in any event no later than the 2019 election cycle.” SEEC is working towards this goal with a great deal of caution, and BERK recommends this work continues with input from experts in the field of computer science and electronic voting. There will be significant benefits to providing a fully online interface to residents who wish to return their vouchers electronically. For instance, the interface could be presented much more like a ballot where the names of eligible candidates and their qualification status for receiving voucher funding could be more clearly and transparently presented. Residents who wish to use their vouchers could do so immediately with a few simple steps and not be required to keep track of paper certificates and return envelopes they may have received months before.

### Recommendation 3.5: Continue to work with intermediaries to engage communities of color

SEEC should continue to engage intermediaries, such as DON Community Liaisons, to help engage communities of color that are under-represented in local electoral politics. In these partnerships, SEEC provides funding, training, and materials while Community Liaisons develop customized outreach plans and conducted direct outreach in their home communities. In addition to working with Community Liaisons, SEEC should also continue to explore the role that community-based organizations (CBOs) can play in raising awareness and encouraging DVP participation, bearing in mind potential challenges. CBOs have varying levels of experience with and interest in the DVP. Furthermore, particularly among communities of color, CBOs may lack the organizational capacity, such as staffing and funding resources, to be most effective at conducting outreach on a new topic such as the DVP. Therefore, SEEC should explore what roles it can play in helping interested CBOs to address capacity barriers as well as different models for engaging communities of color and under-represented communities in coordination with CBOs.

#### *Provide more training to intermediaries conducting outreach in communities of color and under-represented communities*

Several intermediaries such as DON Community Liaisons and representatives of CBOs expressed concern that they did not have a clear understanding of the DVP and how to request and return vouchers. To be most effective, people conducting outreach need to feel confident explaining how residents can use their vouchers. SEEC should prioritize training for these intermediaries and community leaders early in the election cycle before vouchers are distributed to residents. There was consensus among the Community Liaison group that the orientation and their involvement was a late start to begin outreach work on the voucher program, considering that vouchers had been mailed out early in the year. This training should include hands-on demonstrations showing how to request a replacement voucher, how to find a listing of eligible candidates, how to complete and return vouchers, etc.

## GOAL 4: HIGH PUBLIC SATISFACTION WITH THE PROGRAM

### Recommendation 4.1: Create a communications plan for the next election cycle

Maintaining a high level of public support will require raising public awareness about the goals and achievements of the DVP. It will also require that the public perceives the administration of the DVP by SEEC to be fair, impartial, and effective. One important step SEEC can take to support these objectives is developing a communications plan.

This plan would provide the DVP with a strategy and roadmap to guide outreach, engagement, and media efforts as well as the most appropriate roles for SEEC staff and other intermediaries in delivering DVP communications. The process of putting the plan together helps sharpen the communications objectives and desired outcomes, which in turn assists in development of key messages and the selection of outreach audiences, approaches, platforms, and supporting materials.

Part of this plan could be a strategy for more effectively engaging with communities that are typically under-represented as participants in local elections and politics. Outreach and marketing materials seeking to engage communities of color, immigrants, and other under-represented groups should feature messaging that is relevant and sensitive to widely-held perspectives on governance and democracy within those communities. Engaging ethnic media to help disseminate stories about the DVP should also be considered.

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# Appendix: Data Sources

This appendix briefly summarizes the qualitative and quantitative data sources used in this study.

## QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

To inform the findings of this report, BERK engaged SEEC staff, the Democracy Voucher Program Advisory Committee, City of Seattle Department of Neighborhoods staff and Community Liaisons, members of community-based organizations who conducted outreach and engagement, candidates and campaign staff representing eight different campaigns (including both DVP participants and non-participants), and Seattle residents.

### Interviews and Focus Groups

#### *SEEC Staff*

While BERK conducted an independent evaluation of the DVP, SEEC staff helped to guide the study scope, shared program data for analysis, and provided important perspectives and context to inform BERK's assessment of preliminary findings.

#### *DVP Advisory Committee*

The DVP Advisory Committee provides input to SEEC staff on program implementation, communications, outreach, and program evaluation. BERK engaged nine current and former members of the Advisory Committee through focus groups and interviews to discuss issues of highest priority for inclusion in the evaluation study.

#### *Candidates and Campaign Staff*

An online survey was distributed to all candidates who participated in the 2017 election cycle as well as several campaign managers and treasurers. 12 people responded to the survey. BERK also conducted follow-up interviews with seven survey respondents, including candidates and campaign staff who worked for the two City Attorney campaigns and all five City Council campaigns that received public funding from Democracy Vouchers.

#### *Department of Neighborhoods Community Liaisons*

During the 2017 election cycle, SEEC worked in collaboration with the City of Seattle Department of Neighborhoods to engaged Community Liaisons as intermediaries to conduct direct outreach about the DVP in several communities that are typically under-represented in Seattle elections and politics. These communities included Hispanic/Latino, Chinese, Vietnamese, Asian/Pacific Islander, East African/Somali, Black/African American, and Native Americans.

BERK conducted two focus groups in February and April 2018 with the Community Liaisons who conducted direct outreach. The first focus group discussed the DVP objectives and the Liaisons' work to support the program through engagement activities. Questions focused on the outreach strategies employed, and observations on what approaches and messages that supported participation in the DVP, identifying barriers to participation, and suggestions for improvements and lessons learned. Eight liaisons

participated.

The second focus group was held as a debrief discussion with Community Liaisons who helped to distribute the abbreviated paper version of the online survey (discussed below). Community Liaisons were asked to share how they distributed the survey and overall impressions they heard from survey participants. Six liaisons attended the focus group, and one liaison submitted written feedback to the discussion questions.

### *Community-Based Organizations*

A focus group was held in March 2018 with representatives from community-based organizations that conducted direct outreach to encourage voucher use. Three organizations participated in this focus group, including a volunteer from the Skyline Retirement Community located in the First Hill neighborhood, a staff member at Chinese Information Services Center (CISC) in the Chinatown ID neighborhood, and the Win-Win Network, whose mission is to advance social and economic equity through political power building throughout Washington State.

### *City Customer Service Centers/Service Bureau*

Using a paper questionnaire, the project team asked for feedback from City of Seattle staff who worked at neighborhood Customer Service Centers (CSC) and the Customer Service Bureau (CSB) locations where residents could return vouchers in person. The CSCs/CSB return option accounted for a very small number of overall voucher returns – less than 2% -- but they were a very engaged staff who had several questions at our trainings, were eager to learn about the program, often interacted with the public and answered questions about vouchers. The questionnaire asked staff to comment on who the characteristics of who they heard from in the community, what questions or comments about the DVP came up frequently, and thoughts on the community’s general reaction to the DVP. BERK received completed paper questionnaires from 17 staff members.

### *Surveys of Seattle Residents*

BERK developed a survey to measure public awareness of the DVP and perspectives about the program. The survey was distributed to Seattle residents via three different distribution channels in order to elicit feedback from three different populations. Responses from each distribution channel were collected and analyzed separately unless

#### *Representative Survey*

To conduct a statistically valid survey of Seattle residents, BERK worked with [Precision Sample](#), a market research firm that maintains large panels of individuals who agree to take online surveys for small monetary incentives. Precision Sample maintains and verifies demographic and socioeconomic profiles for each of its panelists, including home locations. This enables them to solicit and collect a geographically targeted pool of survey responses from individuals who are representative of the Seattle population based on race/ethnicity, gender, and household income. BERK and Precision Sample used several quality control techniques such as tests for response consistency and verification of home location within the City of Seattle to remove unreliable survey responses.

#### **930 Total Survey Responses**

- **524** Representative Survey
- **115** DVP Follower Survey
- **291** Community Liaisons Outreach

524 Seattle residents completed the survey. Since the sample pool are internet users, the respondents are not necessarily representative of Seattle residents who do not use, or have access to, the Internet.

### *DVP Followers Survey*

SEEC distributed the DVP survey through its website and social media channels. An invitation to complete this survey was also emailed to DVP advisory committee members and community-based organizations that have previously been engaged in DVP outreach. The invitation was then retweeted and snowballed through various email and social media channels.

These survey takers were self-selected and much more likely to have had previous experiences with the DVP. Therefore, they are not considered representative of the general population. Many of these respondents may also have been motivated to complete the survey based on strong feelings about the DVP.

### *Community Liaison Outreach Survey*

SEEC engaged with the City of Seattle Department of Neighborhoods Community Liaisons to distribute an abbreviated paper version of the survey via direct outreach in several communities of color that are typically under-represented in Seattle elections and politics. While no interested survey-takers were turned away, Liaisons focused their outreach to the following communities: East African/Somali, Chinese, Vietnamese, Native American, Black/African American, and Hispanic/Latino communities in Seattle. Neighborhoods included West Seattle, North/Northeast Seattle (Wedgewood, View Ridge), South Seattle, New Holly, and the Central District.

## QUANTITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS

BERK analyzed data from the following sources:

- Voucher tracking and usage data obtained from SEEC.
- Historic campaign contributor and independent expenditure data from SEEC.<sup>31</sup>
- Washington State Voter Registration Database from Washington Secretary of State.
- U.S. Census 2012-2016 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates.

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<sup>31</sup> BERK also leveraged previous analysis of SEEC data by Win/Win Network to establish the identity and number of unique campaign contributors in 2015 and 2017.