

Memo

To: Seattle Ethics and Elections Commission

From: Wayne Barnett, Executive Director

Date: March 9, 2018

Re: King County Elections policies and inactive voter Democracy Voucher Program access

Executive Summary

Following questions raised by the Commission at its January meeting, staff reached out to King County Elections (KCE) for details on (1) when registered voters are placed on inactive status, and (2) how the County verifies signatures.

Voter status

KCE told staff that they change a voter's status from active to inactive when they learn from USPS or a KCE mailing that the voter has moved out of county. If an inactive voter does not contact KCE or provide updated information through the duration of two federal general elections, the voter's status will change from inactive to cancelled.

Staff continues to recommend that the Commission ask the City Council to amend the law to provide for mailing only to voters on the active list.

Signature verification

Signatures for Democracy Voucher qualifying contributions are verified by KCE staff, who follow the signature verification standards required by state statute and are trained annually by the Washington State Patrol.

Discussion

1. Voter status information

A voter's **registration status** falls into one of the following categories:

- Active: The individual is fully qualified to vote.

- Provisionally Active: The individual is registered and issued a ballot but must provide ID before their ballot is counted.
- Pending: The individual's record is missing information or has an issue requiring resolution.
- Inactive: The United States Postal Service (USPS) has provided the County with information that an individual no longer lives at the address at which they are registered to vote.
- Cancelled: The individual is no longer registered.

A voter's registration status changes from **active to inactive** when:

- USPS provides an out-of-county change-of-address for the voter.
- KCE sends the individual mail that is returned as undeliverable without an in-county address update.

In both of the above situations, KCE sends a Confirmation Notice (see *Figure A*, page 4) to all known addresses in an attempt to receive updated information before changing status to inactive.

KCE changes a voter's registration status from **inactive to active** when the voter:

- Attempts to vote or requests a ballot
- Contacts KCE with updated information
- Responds to the Confirmation Notice with in-county address information

If an inactive voter does not contact KCE or provide updated information through the duration of two federal general elections, the voter's status will change from inactive to cancelled.

At any given time, approximately 8-11% of the voter file is in inactive status.

Inactive voters in the Democracy Voucher Program

The Democracy Voucher Program (DVP) is committed to ensuring access to all eligible Seattle participants and guarding against potential misuse of vouchers. In 2017, democracy vouchers were mailed to over 55,000 inactive voters, at an average cost of \$0.63, for a total cost of more than \$34,000. Of those 55,000 inactive voters to whom the program mailed vouchers, 29 returned vouchers.

The following are options available to the program:

Option 1: Status quo -- mail democracy vouchers to inactive voters

Repeat the same procedure from 2017: receive the list of both active and inactive voters from KCE, upload the list to the DVP database, and mail democracy vouchers to active voters, inactive voters, and opt-in participants.

Option 2: Mail democracy vouchers only to active voters and opt-in participants

Request a list of only active voters from KCE, upload the list to the DVP database, and mail democracy vouchers only to active voters and residents who opt in to the program.

Option 3: Send DVP confirmation mailing to inactive voters

Receive the list of inactive voters from KCE but do not upload to the DVP database. DVP staff will send a mailing to all inactive voters. (According to our vendor, the estimated cost of this mailing would be approximately \$21,000.) If an inactive voter does not respond to the mailing, no further action is taken. If the inactive voter responds and is eligible to participate, DVP staff will upload the voter to the DVP database and send them democracy vouchers.

Of the available options, **Option 2** as the option that is the most defensible use of public dollars. A mailing to 55,000 people with an expected return of under one in a thousand is difficult to justify. If the Commission disagrees, staff recommends mailing Option 3, sending a confirmation mailing to inactive voters before mailing them the entire voucher packet.

2. Petition/qualifying contribution signature verification process

KCE staff are trained annually in signature verification by the Washington State Patrol. When checking petitions or qualifying contribution signatures for the Democracy Voucher Program, KCE staff follow the signature verification standards required by state statute:

WAC 434-379-020 – Signature verification standard.

A signature on a petition sheet must be matched to the signature on file in the voter registration records. The following characteristics must be utilized to evaluate signatures to determine whether they are by the same writer:

- (1) Agreement in style and general appearance, including basic construction, skill, alignment, fluency, and a general uniformity and consistency between signatures;
- (2) Agreement in the proportions of individual letters, height to width, and heights of the upper to lower case letters;
- (3) Irregular spacing, slants, or sizes of letters that are duplicated in both signatures;
- (4) After considering the general traits, agreement of the most distinctive, unusual traits of the signatures.

A single distinctive trait is insufficient to conclude that the signatures are by the same writer. There must be a combination or cluster of shared characteristics. Likewise, there must be a cluster of differences to conclude that the signatures are by different writers.

KCE uses the same technology to process qualifying signatures that it uses for initiative petitions, checking for duplicate submissions and providing SEEC with a tally of the results. Over 3,800 contributor signatures were submitted on 2,450 separate documents, taking on average 4.8 business days to review.

Figure A

Confirmation Notice, King County Election

1 Residential Address Address line 1 Address line 2 Address line 3 City, State Zip Is this where you live? <input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No If not, what's your new residential address? _____	2 Mailing Address Address line 1 Address line 2 Address line 3 City, State Zip Is this where you get mail? <input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No If not, where do you get mail? _____
3 Sign the declaration I declare that the facts on this voter registration form are true. I am a citizen of the United States, I will have lived at this address in Washington for at least thirty days immediately before the next election at which I vote, I will be at least 18 years old when I vote, I am not disqualified from voting due to a court order, and I am not under Department of Corrections supervision for a Washington felony conviction. X signature of voter First Name Last Name _____ date _____  Issue date  County voter ID	
Make sure you get your ballot! Your vote is important! Immediate action required.	
We received a notice from the post office that your address has changed. To receive a ballot, update your address: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• online www.myvote.wa.gov; or• complete and mail back this postage-paid card. Your voter registration will be cancelled if you: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• moved outside Washington State; or• don't update your address and don't vote in the next two federal general elections.	