

Memo

To: Seattle Ethics and Elections Commission

From: René LeBeau

Date: September 5, 2018

Re: Funding organizations to conduct targeted outreach

Overview

In the 2018 independent program evaluation performed by BERK Consulting, recommendation 3.5 encourages a more effective approach to reaching under-represented communities...

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

“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.”

Program staff recognize that civic engagement, as either a community-focused candidate or as a voucher user, is the purpose of this program. Additionally, program staff capacity and expertise at conducting effective outreach to Seattle’s diverse communities is not possible while also administering the program and responding to general resident inquiries and requests for engagement.

Request

Staff request the commission’s approval to move forward with offering small contract opportunities to CBOs to effectively engage more of our residents.

If approved, staff will work with the Advisory Committee to make recommendations to the commission regarding how to best structure the program and review applications.

Additional References

The City of Seattle's Office of Immigrant and Refugee Affairs recently published the results of its 2016 Seattle Votes survey. The City worked with more than 100 partner organizations to gather responses from 5,566 immigrant and refugee residents on civic engagement. A key recommendation was made to expand partnerships with community-based organization.

Recommendation for API, East African and Latino/a communities:

Expand partnerships to promote civic engagement. The role of government in promoting voter registration has increased over the past three decades. With the passage of the National Voter Registration Act of 1993, government agencies are required to offer voter registration opportunities when individuals apply for or renew their driver's licenses or apply for public assistance. More recently, the Seattle Foundation and King County Elections partnered to provide about \$700,000 in grants to community-based organizations to promote voter participation in underrepresented communities. Though this effort should be lauded, more support is needed to overcome linguistic barriers and a distrust of government. For its part, the City of Seattle should co-host ballot parties with immigrant and refugee serving organizations and proactively register people to vote who naturalized with support from city-funded programs.

Though the use of direct mail seems promising, the City could pilot other innovative approaches, such as creating a deputy registrar system to identify and train a cohort of individuals. These volunteers, who would be officially recognized by the City, would carry out voter registration drives, inform voters about upcoming elections, and even help with referrals to other City and school district services. This should be part of a long-term relationship building process, and not just a one-time contact. Finally, the City could organize an annual civic engagement summit, in part to communicate past accomplishments and highlight future needs.