

# Memo

To: Seattle Ethics and Elections Commission

From: René LeBeau

Date: February 5, 2020

Re: Community-Based Organization Contracting

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## Overview

In November 2018, the Seattle Ethics and Elections Commission (SEEC) budgeted \$150,000 of the Democracy Voucher Program (DVP) budget towards contracting opportunities with community-based organizations (CBOs) to conduct targeted outreach in Seattle's more difficult-to-reach communities.

Community organizations were asked to submit proposals to:

- 1) Increase enrollment for eligible residents who are lawful permanent residents, U.S. Citizens who are not registered to vote, and U.S. Nationals.
- 2) Increase the number of Seattle residents who are first-time campaign contributors.
- 3) Remove barriers to the program by distributing translated program materials.

Funding was awarded to 10 local organizations and the final invoiced amount was \$145,276.

In general, 8% of residents who received vouchers used them, doubling the 2017 use rate. However, when residents engage in the program by either applying to receive vouchers or requesting vouchers in another language, they participate at even higher rates.

- Since 2016, 311 residents have applied for vouchers. Of the 124 added this year, 30% used their vouchers.
- Of the 238 participants who requested vouchers in a language other than English, 23% used their vouchers.

## Accomplishments

CBO outreach strategies ranged from small group interactions to text messages in multiple languages. They accomplished the following:

- Interacted with 23,756 residents.
- Attended 276 outreach events.
- Provided language services in 18 unique languages.
- Distributed 12,368 pieces of informational material, 76% of which was in a language other than English.
- Sent 2,000 text messages to community members.

## **Feedback from Contractors**

A common thread of concern in the communities served by the CBOs was trust, both in the program itself and government in general. Residents were often unsure if this unique program was legitimate and expressed a general distrust in government. The following are some strategies contractors recommended to deal with the issue.

## **Increase Funding and Duration of Contract**

Throughout the contracting period, CBOs expressed concern over explaining this complex program to their communities. Barriers to participation include lack of civics understanding, limited English proficiency, varying rates of literacy, and different socio-political experiences from their home country and/or in their current residence.

- Build trust by creating more opportunity for outreach by CBOs and trusted community members.
- Make DVP part of a larger civics-education outreach effort funded and coordinated by appropriate city departments.
- Make DVP contracts year-round, allowing CBOs to work at a pace that is appropriate for their community, and education about DVP becomes part of existing educational programming.
- Provide outreach materials in multi-media channels to address access and literacy issues.

## **Connect Candidates and Communities**

The CBOs would like more interaction between candidates and their communities, especially for candidates who are receiving public dollars for their campaigns. Several asked if an equity requirement could be part of the program requirements. The CBOs found the most effective outreach taught residents just how these elected positions might influence things residents care about.

Additionally, they emphasized the need for in-language materials in printed and audio forms.

- Make Candidate Introductions available in multiple media formats. Structure the submission form with some questions so residents can better know the candidates.
- Include resident demographic information in the Candidate Toolkit and inform candidates who the DVP contracting partners are if they want tips on how to connect.
- Help the organizations understand how they can reach out to candidates without violating the contract.

## **Clarify Legal Permanent Resident Eligibility**

Legal permanent residents are often uncertain about whether they are eligible to apply for vouchers. For those who are seeking citizenship, there is also concern that applying might put that effort in jeopardy.

- Create marketing materials specifically addressing eligibility requirements.
- Seek out and publish statements of endorsement from recognized immigrant and refugee leaders and organizations.