

CITY OF SEATTLE
**IMMIGRANT
VOTING**
TASK FORCE REPORT

Executive Summary

The Immigrant Voting Rights Task Force (“the Task Force”) is pleased to present this report of recommendations to the Office of the Mayor of Seattle. The mayor’s office convened the Task Force over a year ago to identify, analyze, and address the issues that affect civic and political participation by immigrant communities. Even though Seattle’s foreign-born population has grown each year and is currently around 18 percent of the City of Seattle’s (City) population, including over 57,000 naturalized citizens,¹ members of immigrant communities do not participate in civic life at the same rates as other Seattleites.

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The Task Force has identified many obstacles that keep immigrant communities from participating in Seattle’s civic and political life. They identified five general areas of concern and developed a series of practical recommendations that the mayor’s office can embrace to help address these barriers, which taken together can be implemented through a coordinated citywide Seattle Votes campaign with clear benchmarks and metrics associated with each of the following recommendations over the next three years. All of these recommendations assume compliance with federal, state, county and city laws, including but not limited to public gifts of funds.



Photo, Eino Sierpe, 2013

The City of Seattle Task Force Report 2015

FINDINGS

1] Members of immigrant communities do not receive sufficient information about elections and voting.

There is not enough civics education targeting immigrant communities, and there is a tremendous need for targeted outreach regarding elections and policy issues that affect immigrant communities. Not enough information about civics, elections, and voting is translated into languages other than English.

2] The technology gap between immigrant communities and the rest of the City limits access to important information about elections and voting.

The information technology used by local governments is outdated and uses platforms that are not commonly used by immigrant communities. The technology gap prevents immigrant communities from accessing important information about elections, which negatively impacts their voting rates and civic participation.

3] More ballot drop boxes should be located in neighborhoods with high concentrations of immigrants.

The location of ballot drop boxes makes it difficult for members of immigrant communities to vote.

4] Immigrant communities face legal obstacles to civic and political participation.

The failure of comprehensive immigration reform and other electoral structural obstacles such as multi-member electoral districts prevent immigrants from full participation in civic and political activities.

5] Significant resources are needed to assist eligible immigrants who want to naturalize. The existing resources are not coordinated to enable as many people as possible to receive assistance.

There are not enough resources to help Seattle residents who want to become citizens complete the complex process and existing resources have not been effectively coordinated.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Improve civic engagement of immigrant communities.

- Improve and expand data collection relating to electoral participation and language needs of immigrant communities.
- Develop and implement the Seattle Votes campaign, a comprehensive civic engagement strategy that includes funding for focused voter registration, civic education, multilingual training and information, and voter registration of young voters in coordination with the Seattle School District.

Address the language needs of new American voters.

- The City should partner with community-based organizations and King County Elections to provide information and assistance in non-English languages to immigrant voters, including languages not mandated by Section 203 of the federal Voting Rights Act.
- The City should develop translation standards for voting information produced for limited English proficient (LEP) voters, and adopt the translation industry's best practices for simplicity and reading level comprehension.
- The City should ensure that non-English voting information is available on its website. The non-English information should be both easy to find, and all of the links to non-English information should be optimized for access over multiple platforms (e.g., mobile phones).
- The City should establish a multilingual voter hotline to provide assistance to limited English proficient (LEP) voters.

Ensure that neighborhoods with high concentrations of immigrants have readily accessible ballot drop boxes.

- The City should ask King County Elections to place permanent ballot drop boxes in neighborhoods with large concentrations of immigrant voters.
- The City should encourage King County Elections to use permanent drop boxes rather than mobile election vans.

Advocate on behalf of immigrant communities.

- Local policy makers should actively support legislation on the local, state, and federal level designed to increase immigrant civic and political participation.
- The City should conduct outreach to immigrant ex-felons in order to educate them on the process of restoring their voting rights.
- The City should encourage the state legislature, and particularly Seattle's delegation to Olympia, to pass the Washington Voting Rights Act.
- The City should encourage Washington State's delegation to Congress to support comprehensive immigration reform legislation with a pathway to citizenship.

Develop and fund comprehensive civic education for new Americans.

- The City should increase funding for the New Citizen Program, and expand eligibility for program services up to 200% of the poverty level.