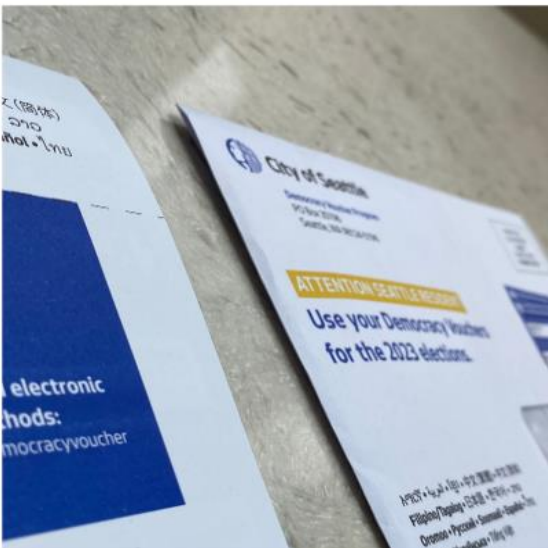




Seattle
Ethics & Elections
Commission



Democracy Voucher Program

2023 Biennial Report



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Introduction

This report summarizes the administration of the Democracy Voucher Program (DVP) in the 2023 election cycle. For additional insight into program implementation and administration, please see the prior reports.

Seattle’s Democracy Voucher Program is the first public campaign financing of its kind. Residents receive four \$25 Democracy Vouchers they can use to support candidates running for local office. Candidates then collect vouchers to help fund their campaign.

In 2023, all City Council District candidates had the option of using the Democracy Voucher Program.

Program Background

In November 2015, Seattle voters approved a citizen-led initiative known as "Honest Elections Seattle" (I-122).

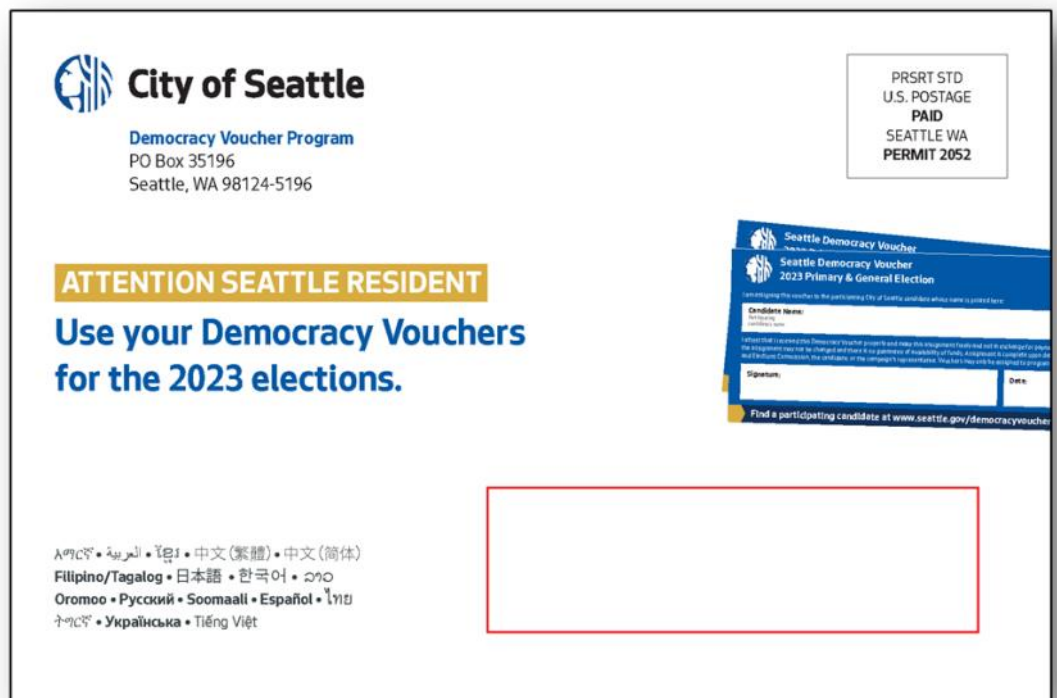
Among the many campaign finance reforms included in I-122, one was the creation of a public campaign finance program known as the “Democracy Voucher Program.” I-122 charged the Seattle Ethics and Elections Commission, an independent body within city government, with administering these reforms. The Democracy Voucher Program is funded by a 10-year property tax levy of \$3 million per year.

The program aims to increase civic engagement in two key ways.

First, the program creates a funding source to enable more Seattle residents to run for local office.

Second, the program intends to increase the number of Seattle residents who donate in local elections.

Program Objectives



Message from the Executive Director

Welcome to the 2023 Democracy Voucher Program biennial report. As Executive Director of the Seattle Ethics and Elections Commission, it is my pleasure to provide transparency and accountability for this unique, voter-approved, taxpayer-funded program.

While this report provides a nuts-and-bolts overview of how this program is administered, please check out the 2023 Accomplishments before digging in.



Wayne Barnett
Executive Director

2023 Accomplishments



INCREASED CANDIDATE PARTICIPATION

- All 14 General Election candidates used the Democracy Voucher Program to help fund their campaigns.
- Currently, 10 of 11 City officials participated in the Program.



OUTREACH

- Contracted with 15 community-based organizations, with a majority of funding to those serving lawful-permanent resident communities.
- Through direct interactions, digital outreach, and materials distribution, organizations reached 64,045 residents.



IMPROVED ACCESS TO REPLACEMENT VOUCHERS

- In response to public concerns regarding paid voucher collection, the Commission established regulations stating that no person can be compensated for collection.
- The Commission also made permanent a campaign's ability to collect vouchers by posting a fillable form on a campaign website.

How the Program Works

During City of Seattle elections, the SEEC issues four \$25 Democracy Vouchers to Seattle residents.

Residents may assign their vouchers to any candidate participating in the program. Residents may give their vouchers to a single candidate or to multiple candidates.

Residents may return their vouchers by:

- Using the prepaid envelope addressed to the SEEC
- Giving their vouchers directly to a campaign
- Accessing the Democracy Voucher Online Portal to assign their vouchers

Once a voucher is received by the SEEC, there are several methods for verifying the voucher.

- King County Elections verifies the signatures on paper vouchers from registered voters.
- Trulioo, a third-party verification system, verifies Online Portal users when they create an account.
- The SEEC verifies signatures from residents who apply for vouchers.

For candidates who have completed the qualifying process, the SEEC releases the sum of the verified vouchers to the candidate's campaign.

Eligibility

Participant eligibility requirements align with the federal requirements establishing who may contribute to political campaigns. To receive vouchers, an individual must be:

- At least 18 years or older,
- A U.S. citizen, U.S. national, or lawful permanent resident, and
- A Seattle resident.

2023 Program Updates

In response to COVID-19 restrictions, in 2021 the SEEC granted campaigns the ability to host a Campaign Replacement Form on their website, enabling easier access for residents to assign their vouchers directly to a candidate. The online replacement form is now a permanent part of the program.

Additionally, in response to public concerns and to protect the integrity of the program, the SEEC barred paying others to collect Campaign Replacement Form.

Distribution of Vouchers

Issuing Vouchers

On February 21, 2023, the SEEC mailed 461,369 Democracy Voucher packets to Seattle residents, with subsequent mailings to newly registered voters each month for an additional 40,963 mailings.

An additional 19,000 residents were emailed a notice that their vouchers were accessible online.

Campaign Replacement Forms

Campaigns, along with their registered representatives, were allowed to collect vouchers using the Campaign Replacement Form either in person or on their campaign website.

A total of 36,215 vouchers were assigned using this form, representing 9,772 residents.

Replacement Vouchers

Residents who misplaced their vouchers were able to get replacements from the SEEC.

Replacements were issued if residents contacted the SEEC by phone, email, or on the SEEC website. Each request was validated through the system and either mailed or emailed via an invitation code allowing residents to access their Online Portal.

The SEEC replaced vouchers for 1,362 residents, and 729 of those residents returned their vouchers for processing.

Online Portal

This was the third election in which the program's Online Portal was available to residents. The web-based portal allows residents to validate their identity and assign their vouchers online.

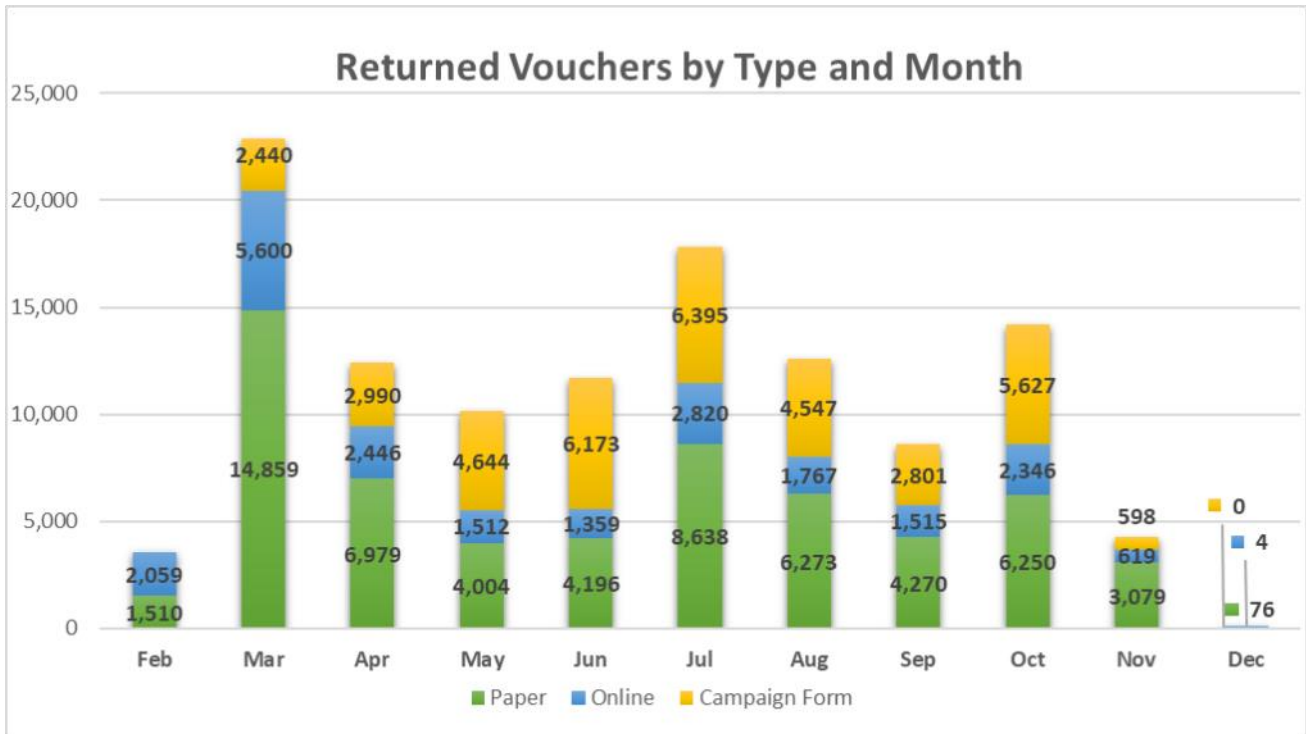
In 2023, 9,753 users assigned 22,047 vouchers through the program's portal.

Inactive Voters

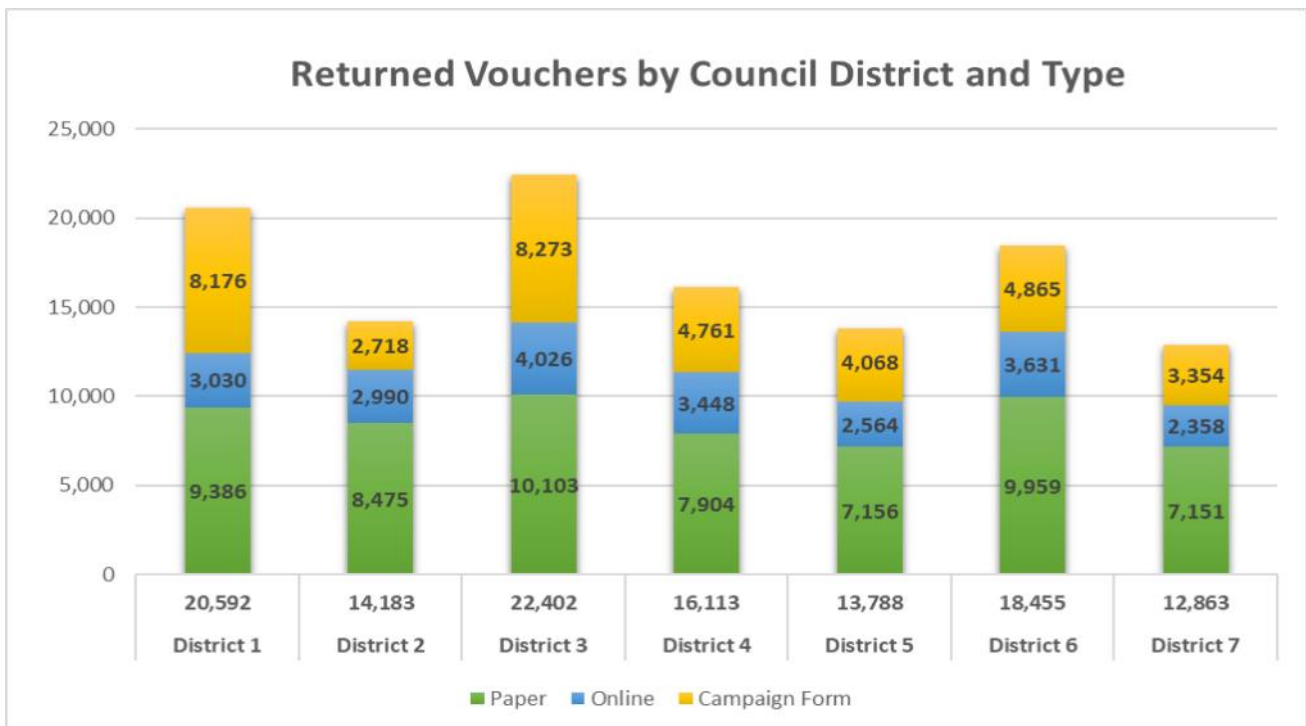
Inactive registered voters are sent a postcard notifying them of an issue with their voter registration and encouraging them to contact King County Elections. In 2023, 56,475 postcards were sent.

Democracy Voucher Returns

Voucher return rates peaked in March, after the initial mailing, with another spike in July, just before the August primary. The SEEC office processed 118,396 vouchers from 30,649 residents throughout the year.



The chart shows the council district of the resident and type of voucher that was returned.



2023 Democracy Voucher Use with Population 18 Years and Over

Democracy Voucher Program



Census Tracts w/ Democracy Voucher Percent Use (%)

Total population 18 years and over (Census Tract)

- 1 - 1500 people
- 1501 - 3000
- 3001 - 4500
- 4501 - 6000
- 6001 - 7500

Council Districts with ID

1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7

Please visit the Democracy Voucher Program website

Sources: Census Tract: US Census 2020. Population Data: American Community Survey 2020. Democracy Voucher, City of Seattle 2023.

Population data is classified using a manual classification method.

Democracy Voucher Percent Use (%) divides the total number of Seattle residents who submitted at least one Democracy Voucher for the 2023 election per census tract by the total number of people ages 18 and over per census tract reported by the US Census - American Community Survey in 2020.

For more information on the Democracy Voucher Program, visit <https://www.seattle.gov/democracyvoucher>

For more information on Seattle demographics, visit: <http://www.seattle.gov/opcd/population-and-demographics>



Candidates

Participation

Candidates signed a pledge agreeing to program rules, which included:

1. Accept no more than \$300 from an individual, not including the value of a person's Democracy Vouchers.
2. Keep overall campaign spending under \$93,750 for the primary and not more than \$187,500 for the entire election year.
3. Participate in at least three public debates ahead of each election.

Of the 45 candidates who filed for office, 42 participated in the Democracy Voucher Program.

All 14 general election candidates were in the program.

Qualifying

To receive funds, candidates collected 150 contributions (minimum \$10) and signatures from Seattle residents. Both contributions and signatures are audited by the SEEC before funds are released.


In 2023, 31 of the 42 candidates completed the qualifying process.

Campaign Disbursements

Of the 118,396 returned vouchers, 96,116 were redeemed, resulting in \$2,402,900 distributed to campaigns.

Candidate Introductions

All candidates are invited to submit a 200-word statement and photograph. The candidate introductions are available in 18 languages on the program website as a way for residents to learn more about the candidates. In 2023, 32 candidates provided introductions.



Candidate Qualifying Form

The candidate listed below intends to qualify for the City of Seattle's Democracy Voucher Program. The program allows qualified candidates to receive public funds to help finance their campaign.

Complete only one section.

_____ is running for _____
Name of Candidate City of Seattle office

Statement of Support

Complete this section to show your support for the candidate.

I, _____, support the candidate
Supporter Name (please print)
named above to qualify for the Democracy Voucher Program.

Residential Address: _____

City, State: _____ Zip Code: _____

Email: _____ Phone: _____

Signature: _____

--- OR ---

Contribution and Statement of Support

Complete this section to make a qualifying contribution to the candidate.

I, _____ have contributed \$ _____
Contributor Name (please print) Min. \$10
of **my own funds** to the candidate named above so they may qualify for the Democracy Voucher Program.

Note: Qualifying contributions must be from Seattle residents who are at least 18 years of age and are either a U.S. citizen, U.S. national, or lawful permanent resident ("green card holder"). Contributions must be at least \$10.

Residential Address: _____

City, State: _____ Zip Code: _____

Email: _____ Phone: _____

Employer: _____ Occupation: _____

Employer City & State: _____

Signature: _____

Warning: No contribution shall be made and no expenditure shall be incurred, directly or indirectly, in a fictitious name, anonymously, or by one person through an agent, relative, or other person in such a manner as to conceal the identity of the source of the contribution or in any other manner so as to effect concealment. (SMC 2.04.290.A.)
Concealing the source of a contribution is a violation of City law and may be punished by a fine of up to \$5,000. (SMC 2.04.500). NOTE: Political contributions are not tax-deductible.

DVP Contribution Limits

City Council Positions 1 - 7: \$300 (not including \$100 in vouchers)

Communications and Outreach

Media

In 2023, the DVP partnered with 20 ethnic and local media outlets to help spread public awareness of the program. DVP staff worked with media to execute the following campaigns:

Launch Campaign

- ‘Democracy Vouchers coming soon.’
- ‘Looking for your Democracy Vouchers?’

Mid-year Campaign

- ‘Final list of candidates now available’
- ‘Candidate Introductions’
- ‘Looking for your Democracy Vouchers? Request Replacements.’

Types of media used to spread program awareness included press releases, newsletter highlights, online, print, and PSA advertisements.



Outreach

In 2023, staff conducted DVP outreach at in-person and virtual events. Staff attended 21 outreach events. Outreach events included outdoor street fairs, festivals, cultural events, and resource festivals.



Community Liaisons

Community liaisons supported DVP staff with increasing awareness of the program and lawful permanent resident enrollment. Community liaisons attended several summer events and distributed informational program materials. They also worked with community groups and individuals to walk them through the DVP application process.

2023 Democracy Voucher Outreach Fund

The Democracy Voucher Program budgeted \$225,000 to award to 501 (c) (3) community-based organizations to conduct outreach in underserved communities. Of the overall budget, \$150,000 was dedicated to organizations focused on lawful permanent resident enrollment and education.

Organizations conducted outreach based on the following objectives:

- Promote civic engagement in underserved communities by educating residents about the Democracy Voucher Program
- Provide program education and enrollment with a high degree of cultural competency
- Remove barriers to the program by providing in-language program education and distributing translated program materials.

Outreach Impacts

Direct Outreach

- 189 outreach events
- 13,345 interactions

Digital Outreach

- 72 digital activities
- 39,434 people reached

Materials Distributed

- 22,175 materials distributed
- 13,625 in-language

Community-based organizations reached 64,045 Seattle residents.

Organizations Funded

- Asian Counseling and Referral Service
- Refugee Women's Alliance
- Rhizome
- Somali Community Services of Seattle
- Somali Family Safety Task Force
- Somali Health Board
- The Arc of King County
- Villa Comunitaria
- Washington Bus Education Fund
- Coalition of Immigrants, Refugees, and Communities of Color
- Chinese Information and Service Center
- Eritrean Association in Greater Seattle
- Latino Community Fund
- Literacy Source
- Orquesta Northwest



Budget Summary Report

Democracy Voucher Program - Budget Summary

Year	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
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Implementation (see prior year reports for detail)

Total	\$685,836	\$36,000	\$17,200	\$459,497	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
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Program Administration

Voucher production and mailing		\$358,000	\$1,140	\$326,309	\$120,517	\$266,324	\$1,101	\$455,115
Outreach media and materials	\$5,000	\$85,000	\$53,099	\$39,333	\$8,680	\$18,509	\$347	\$26,523
Language Access	\$22,000	\$16,000	\$10,763	\$48,208	\$10,932	\$80,735	\$2,143	\$59,779
Outreach contracting and events		\$30,000		\$149,885		\$203,590	\$45,089	\$217,617
King County Elections		\$18,500		\$34,580		\$54,706		\$38,600
Administration and Program Evaluation *		\$114,700	\$48,487	\$113,997	\$138,301	\$118,722	\$116,850	\$119,560
Program staff	\$273,000	\$359,400	\$343,873	\$343,678	\$370,100	\$427,336	\$486,991	\$504,842
Temp staff		\$55,000		\$103,407		\$131,508		\$43,889
Total	\$300,000	\$1,036,600	\$457,362	\$1,159,397	\$648,530	\$1,301,430	\$652,521	\$1,465,925

Beginning 2021, academic researchers took over evaluation of the program. seattle.gov/democracyvoucher/program-data/external-reports. See prior year biennial reports for paid program eval cost.

Candidate Disbursements

Total		\$1,140,525		\$2,454,475		\$3,397,050		\$2,402,900
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Total Program Cost	\$985,836	\$2,213,125	\$474,562	\$4,073,369	\$648,530	\$4,698,480	\$652,521	\$3,868,825
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Funding

Levy	\$3,000,000	\$3,000,000	\$3,000,000	\$3,000,000	\$3,000,000	\$3,000,000	\$3,000,000	\$3,000,000
Returned voucher funds		\$34,958		\$22,854		\$21,057		\$51,147