



King County

**King County
Citizens' Elections Oversight Committee**

**Annual Report
on King County Elections
For the Year 2014**

January 2015

King County Citizens' Elections Oversight Committee

Member	Representing
Ellen Hansen, Chair	Registered Voters, King County
Marilyn Knight, Vice Chair	League of Women Voters of Seattle
Paul Berry	Washington State Democratic Party
Chuck Gerringer	Independent research and policy institute
Bruce Huang	Chinese-speaking community
Sven Kalve	Municipal League of King County
Sheryl Moss	Office of Secretary of State
Frank Radford	Registered voter
James Rigby*	Washington State Republican Party
Linh Thai	Vietnamese-speaking community
Monica Tracey	King County Republican Party
Carolyn Weikel	Washington State Assoc. of County Auditors
Emily Willoughby	King County Democratic Party

**served through November 10, 2014*

Citizens' Elections Oversight Committee Annual Report for the Year 2014

Introduction

Ordinance 15453, which was passed by the Metropolitan King County Council on May 6, 2006, reestablished the Citizens' Elections Oversight Committee (CEOC). The ordinance also established its mission: "...to help King County restore and maintain public confidence in elections." The ordinance further directs the CEOC to make recommendations to the Council to:

- "Improve performance of the King County elections division" and
- "Help ensure that accountability and performance of the elections division is provided in a transparent manner that is meaningful to the residents of King County."

This report is submitted pursuant to Ordinance 15453, Section 5.B.5, which requires annual reports to the Council. The report focuses on the most important activities of the CEOC and of King County Elections. The committee would be happy to provide more detail to Councilmembers if desired.

Overview

During 2014, the King County Department of Elections successfully administered and certified two special elections (February and April), a primary election, and a general election with complete ballot reconciliation. Elections publishes reports, including the results for each election, on its website at:

<http://www.kingcounty.gov/elections/referenceresources/publications.aspx>

In addition, the Director of Elections presents reports on current operations to CEOC members at the committee's monthly meetings.

Continued use of Lean management strategies, cross training, and improved technology applications enabled Elections to further reduce staffing and processing time. King County Elections followed the national trend of low turnout in the primary (30% of registered voters returned ballots) and general (55%) elections in 2014. Forecast turnouts for these elections were 38% and 62%. By further comparison, for the 2010 mid-term elections (the first following the implementation of vote-by-mail), turnout for the primary election was 39% and the general election was 74%.

King County has become a model for the efficient and accurate administration of elections. The CEOC will continue to strive for a strong collaborative relationship with the Director of Elections and her staff, as well as the Executive and Council, to help maintain this status. This report describes: (1) the activities of the CEOC, and (2) issues on which the CEOC was a resource to the department or the director.

CEOC Activities

1. **Election observations.** The CEOC observed every special election as well as the primary and general elections. CEOC observations were discussed in post election debriefs with the Director of Elections so that CEOC observations and any suggestions for improvements could be considered by the Director. The CEOC considers observing elections one of its primary duties.
 - a. **Logic and accuracy tests.** Logic and accuracy (L&A) tests of accessible voting units and of mail ballot scanning and tabulation equipment are required to be certified by the Secretary of State for primary and general elections under state law. Following some feedback from the CEOC on weaknesses in the test administration process during the 2014 primary election, Elections staff vastly improved their processes for the general election. Elections staff distributed and followed a written set of steps in the test and provided tables and chairs for observers, which made the test and CEOC observation much more meaningful. Staff were able to address a small data error (a one-vote discrepancy between the anticipated results report provided to the Secretary of State's office in advance, and the actual votes tabulated in the test) with well-organized and appropriate processes which instilled confidence in CEOC observers.
 - b. **Ballot drop boxes.** As in prior years, the CEOC observed ballot drop box closings which, by law, must take place promptly at 8:00 p.m. The CEOC made suggestions on drop box locations to make them easier for voters to access, noted issues around traffic flow, and provided assistance to voters. CEOC also requested that Elections consistently provide CEOC badges to members observing at drop boxes, to ensure that drop box voters are aware of the CEOC as a resource.
2. **Regular trainings.** The CEOC requested and received information sessions on ballot adjudication (February) and public records (April). Ongoing training helps CEOC members maintain a higher level of awareness of elections procedures and will ensure that new members appointed to the committee gain an understanding of elections administration.
3. **CEOC role.** In 2014, the CEOC sought to review and clarify for stakeholders its role as an oversight committee as prescribed in King County Code. CEOC responsibilities include and require getting appropriate and timely information from Elections on critical business decisions. Examples of such decisions made in 2014 include the procurement process for a major software application (the replacement of the elections management system) and departmental re-organization. The CEOC discussed with Councilmembers the need for Elections to engage the CEOC early on such decisions. Timely engagement would enable the CEOC to provide meaningful feedback on these major initiatives.
4. **Communication and outreach.** CEOC members served as points of contact for voter concerns, either by addressing such concerns directly with voters by

providing information about Elections operations and policies, or by alerting Councilmembers when necessary and referring such concerns to Elections for resolution. These types of concerns included the glue issues with ballot envelopes in the primary election, and ballot misprinting and mail delivery problems affecting small numbers of voters in the general election.

CEOC Served as a Resource

- 5. CEOC as Liaison.** CEOC members serve as liaisons between members of the public, King County Elections and the County Council. Members are frequently approached by friends, neighbors, colleagues, community groups and others with elections questions. CEOC members are visible at many ballot drop box closings and voters frequently ask them who they are. With their CEOC badge in hand, members explain that they are part of a group appointed by the Council to observe the election process. Invariably this receives a positive response. Through these interactions and conversations members of the public gain a better understanding of elections administration, rules and laws, which benefits everyone. CEOC intends to ask members to share these experiences and document in minutes.

- 6. Community Outreach.** CEOC members Linh Thai (Vietnamese language community representative) and Bruce Huang (Chinese language community representative) met with staff from the office of Councilmember Rod Dembowski to help come up with creative ways to expand the number of languages in which elections outreach and materials are offered in King County without significant additional cost.

Conclusion

CEOC members are proud of the role they played during 2014 helping to ensure fair, accessible, and accountable elections in King County. Members look forward to working with Elections staff, the Executive, and the Council to continue to improve elections during 2015.