



King County

**King County
Citizens' Elections Oversight Committee**

**Annual Report
on King County Elections
For the Year 2013**

January 31, 2014

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 Republic 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

**Nominated by the Washington State Association of County Auditors*

Citizens' Elections Oversight Committee

Annual Report for the Year 2013

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 2013, the King County Department of Elections completed another year of successful elections administration, using lean management, cross training, and technology applications developed in-house to increase accuracy and decrease staffing and processing time. A significant amount of planning, training and process improvements went into making 2013 a successful election year.

King County has become a model for the efficient and accurate administration of elections. The CEOC is pleased to have been a partner with the Council, the Executive and the Director of Elections to help achieve this status. This report describes: (1) the activities of the CEOC, (2) issues on which the CEOC was a resource to the department or the director, and (3) highlights of election administration activities for 2013.

CEOC Activities

- 1. Election observations.** The CEOC actively 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.
- 2. 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 location and lighting to make them easier for voters to access.

3. **Site visit to ballot printing facility.** In July, CEOC members toured the ballot printing vendor's facility in Everett, where they observed the security and ballot accountability processes in place to ensure quality control so that each voter is sent the correct ballot. Special attention was paid to the security measures employed by the vendor.
4. **Election law legislation.** The Elections Department informed the CEOC of legislation the Department opposed and why, and kept CEOC members up to date on the status of legislation proposed for passage, bills opposed, and session outcomes.
5. **Regular trainings.** The CEOC requested and received refresher courses on different aspects of election administration, including maintaining voter registration records, voters' pamphlet production, and online ballots. This training will continue in 2014. 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.
6. **CEOC Membership.** The CEOC worked with the County Council to fill several vacancies and ensure that King County's diverse communities are well represented.

CEOC Served as a Resource

7. **Ballot Drop Boxes.** CEOC members watched the closing of many drop boxes through the year and made recommendations about drop box location and lighting to ensure that drop boxes are easily accessible to voters. The Elections Department's media campaign, outreach, and Public Service Announcements helped educate the public about not waiting until the last minute to vote. This made closing ballot drop boxes much easier and more orderly.
8. **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 support Elections staff in the development of Equity and Social Justice goals identified in the business plan, budget and annual report.

Elections Administration

9. **Quality control.** The Department tracks the number of ballots sent out, the number returned, and then how many are counted or not counted based on guidance from the Secretary of State and the canvassing board. For more than

four years now the Elections department has accounted for every ballot sent out, returned, counted and not counted and the reasons why (such as ballots postmarked after election day). During 2013, thanks to a new outreach program to encourage voters whose signatures had been previously identified as changing to submit an updated signature, Elections was able to decrease the signature challenge rate from 8.23% in 2012 to 5.74%. Elections staff continue to work to increase accuracy and ensure that all ballots are counted quickly and efficiently.

- 10. Increased efficiency.** Elections staff used lean management, cross-training, an envelope redesign, and technology innovations to decrease costs and increase efficiency. During 2013, the “Hands Free Application” saved 145.52 hours of envelope review processing time; and a new envelope security sleeve, which replaced the inner envelope, reduced a total of 1,005 processing hours;
- 11. Elections outreach.** Elections staff prepared a series of Public Service Announcements with local celebrities to explain the voting process and encourage voters to return their ballots on time. CEOC members acted as partners by reaching out to the organizations they represent.
- 12. General Election.** Elections processed 562,338 ballots returned for the November election.
- 13. Balanced budget.** The Director continues to find efficiencies that meet the budget target while providing for the proper administration of elections. During 2013, lean management events, staff cross-training, and technological efficiencies contributed to significant savings.
- 14. Strategic Plan.** As part of Elections’ strategic planning process, two CEOC members provided input through interviews with the Elections Director.

Conclusion

CEOC members are proud of the role they played during 2013 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 2014.