2014 Annual Report

King County Elections

Accessible | Accurate | Accountable

Our mission

With integrity and a commitment to innovation, we provide all citizens the opportunity to participate in and protect the democratic process.

Adopted October 20, 2013

King County Elections attracts elections administrators, officials and media from across the country and all over the world to tour our facility and learn from our staff. Voters and visitors alike are always welcome to come see our elections in action.

On Cover:
Students and parents check out KCE's ballot sorting machines

Temporary staff open and inspect ballots

Above:
Elections Director Sherril Huff talks to Opening staff

From the director

In November of 2009, King County Elections conducted our first general election entirely by mail, completing it with 100% ballot accountability and supporting our commitment to continual improvement. Five years and 22 elections later I can report with pride that the work of many devoted staff has sustained our King County Elections' record of consecutively accounting for every single ballot returned to our office. A running total of 7,541,921 ballots have been counted with zero discrepancies. Our record is both a measure of our commitment to voters as well as to ourselves in striving to be outstanding election administrators.

To ensure we continue to be both forward thinking and acting, we completed, published and launched a five-year strategic plan (available on our website). Our plan aligns the work of the Elections Department with the overarching goals of King County and defines strategies being used to achieve them. Our entire staff, along with a variety of stakeholders, have helped develop our plan. Our progress in advancing each goal is accounted for in our annual reports.

In the second half of 2014 following extensive study, I initiated a reorganization plan for the Elections Department with the goals of achieving greater agility, aligning us with evolving business practices and re-committing to Lean principles. We established new bodies of work, consolidated some divisions, and altered reporting assignments. These changes involved about 40% of the department's staff.

We are all settling into the changes. Several people have taken on new responsibilities within a training environment. There is an energy and excitement for those experiencing new opportunities in our organization as well as anticipation of future opportunities for others.

In the last ten years our office as a whole, as well as many individuals on staff, have been recognized for a variety of accomplishments benefiting election administration. During the November general election we hosted a requested visit from Paddy McGuire, former Deputy Director of the Department of Defense Federal Voting Assistance Program (FVAP), who came to learn how we achieved the lowest rejection rate (1.4%) in the nation of overseas and military ballots. (The average national rejection rate was 5.6%).

Our thanks to Paddy McGuire for his recognition of our work to assist voters and his thoughtful comments when he said: "I believe this exceptional number is testament to the extraordinary lengths that you and your staff go to ensure every eligible military and overseas voter has their vote counted, including contacting the voter and providing the opportunity to correct a problem. It is a mix of laws, practices, training and attitudes that makes King County Elections different."

Achieving standards of excellence is only part of our promise to King County voters. We continue to look to the future, take steps to sustain and protect high performance standards, and engage discussion relevant to preparing for change at many levels. We also collaborate with our colleagues to find technology solutions for work that continues to grow in complexity. At King County Elections, our mission statement is the driving force behind all that we do and how we do it. It is also our pledge to our voters:

"With integrity and a commitment to innovation, we provide all citizens the opportunity to participate in and protect the democratic process."

Sincerely,

Sherril Huff

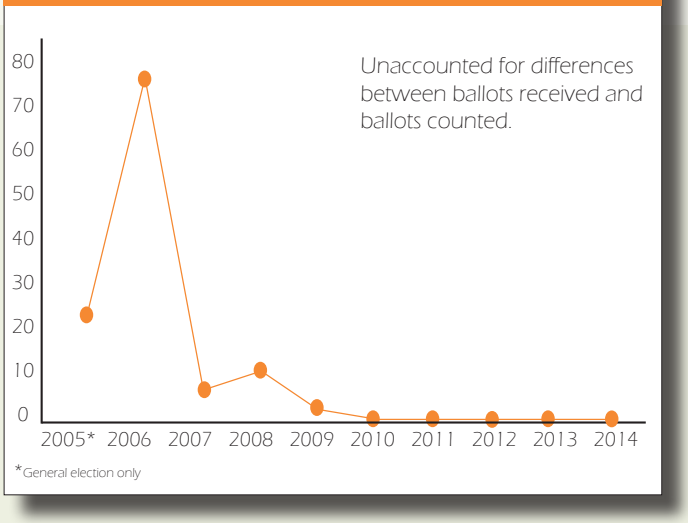
Sherril Huff, Director of Elections

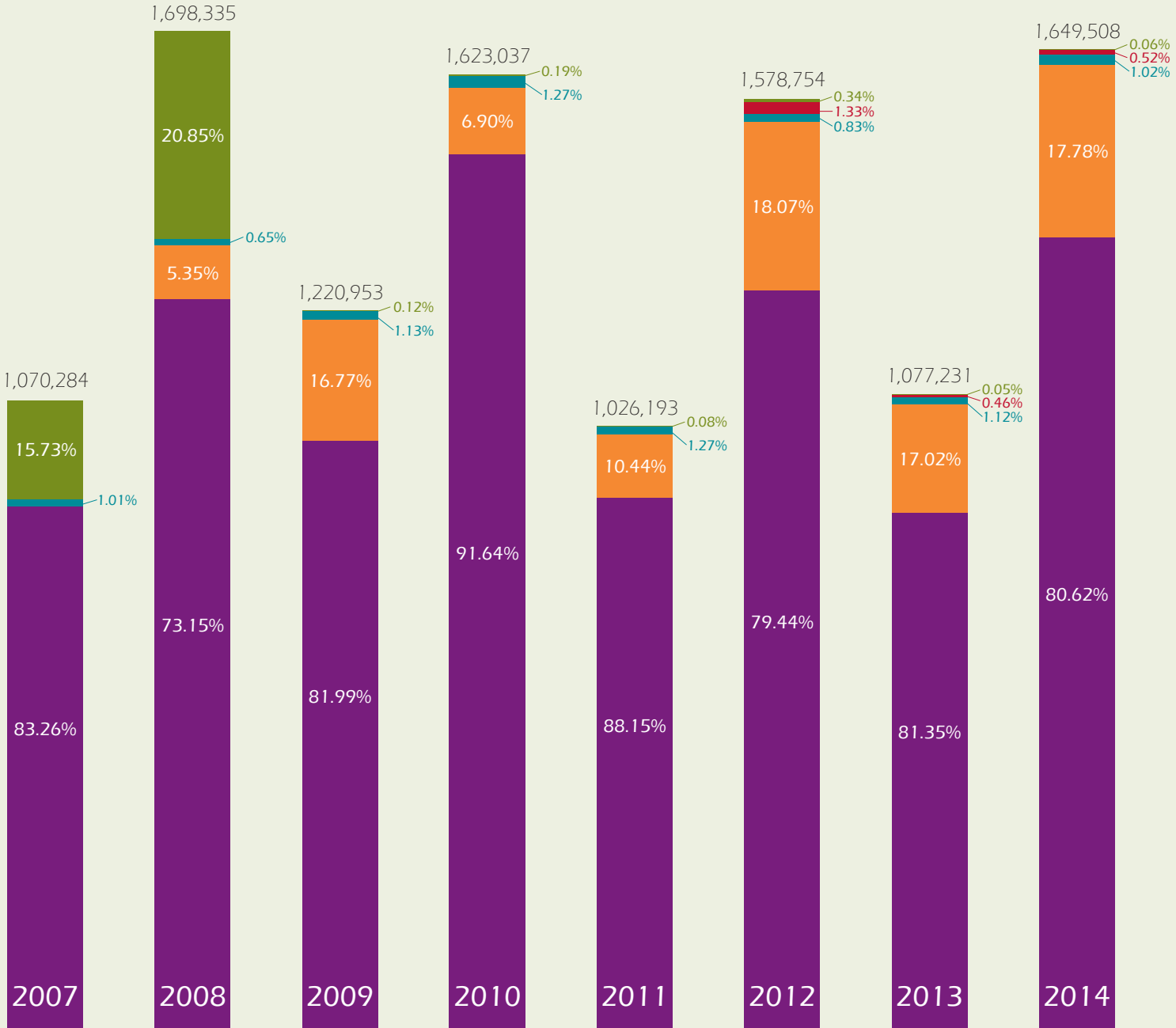
Annual voter participation

(Total ballots returned in all elections)

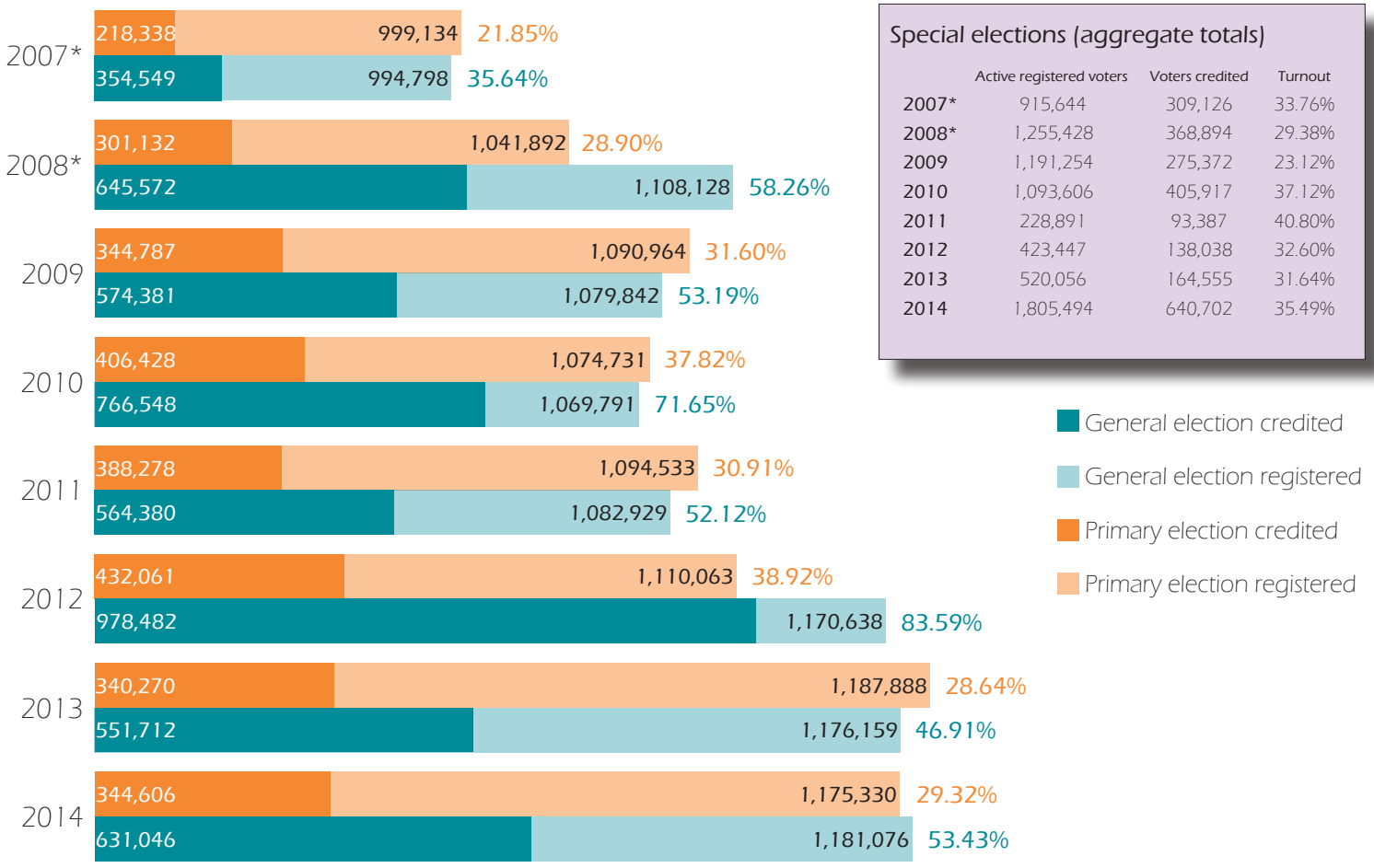
- Accessible voting centers (includes provisionals) or polling locations
- Alternate formats (email, fax, etc.)
- Ballot drop box location
- Mail
- Returned too late

Discrepancy rates





Active registered voters and turnout



Special elections (aggregate totals)

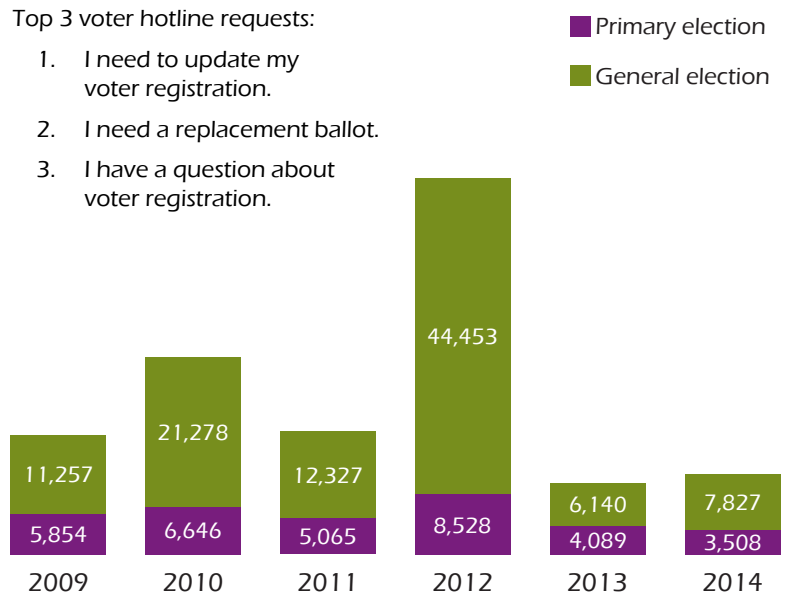
	Active registered voters	Voters credited	Turnout
2007*	915,644	309,126	33.76%
2008*	1,255,428	368,894	29.38%
2009	1,191,254	275,372	23.12%
2010	1,093,606	405,917	37.12%
2011	228,891	93,387	40.80%
2012	423,447	138,038	32.60%
2013	520,056	164,555	31.64%
2014	1,805,494	640,702	35.49%

*only represents mail ballot voters credited with voting

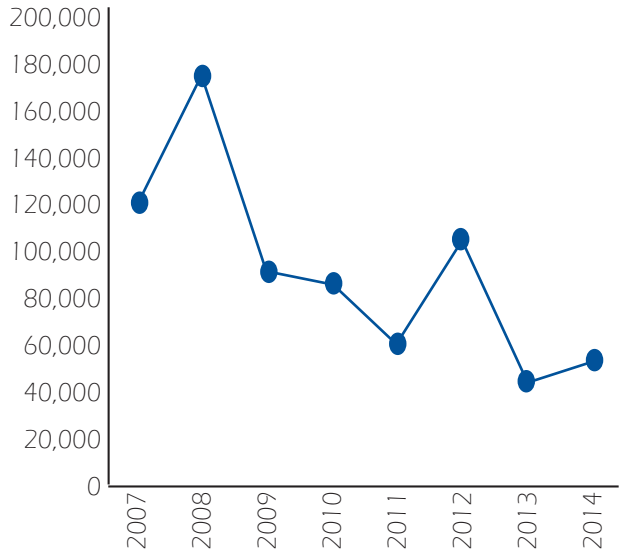
Voter hotline call statistics

Top 3 voter hotline requests:

1. I need to update my voter registration.
2. I need a replacement ballot.
3. I have a question about voter registration.



Temporary staff hours



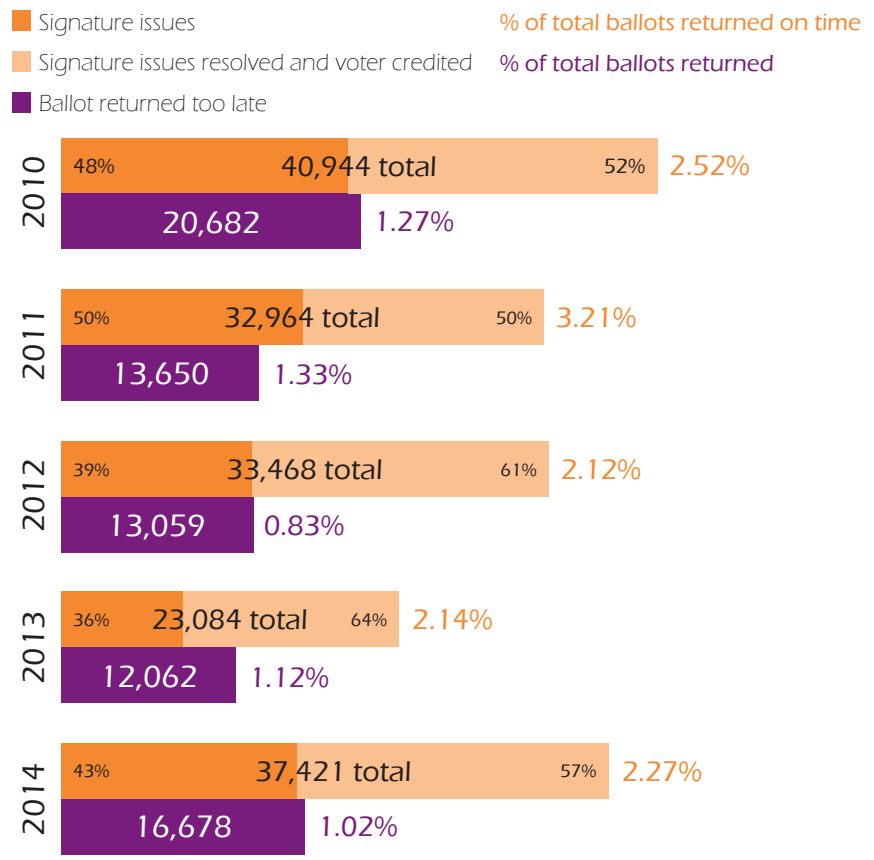
2014 Achievements

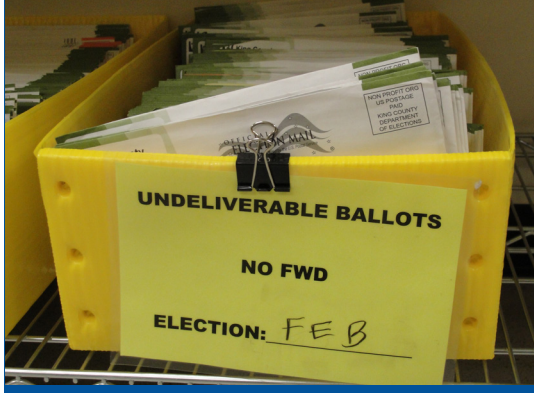
Environmental Sustainability

Safeguard and enhance the environment by minimizing our operational environmental footprint.

- Switched to electronic change of address notifications by the U.S. Postal Service saving nearly 50 cents per forwarded ballot by eliminating most of the required handling time and reducing use of paper.
- Began using Microsoft SharePoint application enabling staff to collaborate more efficiently and share documents, saving time and paper.
- Voter registration is a year-round operation that used many reams of paper each month to support its processes. Applying Lean strategies last year led to transitioning processes to greater online administration, saving time and use of paper. KCE appreciates that even simple improvements can combine for greater savings and compound over time for a reduction in our carbon footprint.

Signature issues and ballots returned too late





We are dedicated to providing citizens the opportunity to vote while also protecting the environment. By making it easy to vote by mail, we eliminate the need for most people to drive to a voting location.

As we implement our five-year strategic plan, we are analyzing additional options for contributing to environmental sustainability, such as reducing paper in ballot packets and the voters' pamphlet while maximizing online resources.

Above:
When voters don't update their address, ballots come back as undeliverable

King County recognized the Elections Department for its outstanding contributions to overall budget savings in the county in 2014. We are committed to making the most of our resources, reducing election costs and achieving greater efficiencies. To that end, we are formalizing efforts to achieve greater efficiencies from our workforce and developing a five-year capital improvement plan for technology.

Fiscal Stewardship

Exercise sound financial management to address our future operational needs.

- Our adopted budget decreased ongoing operating expenses by 6% as a result of efficiencies realized through process improvements, cross-training, and permanent staff reduction.
- 2014 marked the first year in which all election billings were completed for jurisdictions in the same calendar year, enabling them to more effectively manage their budget cycles.
- Terminated use of a project management software contract, transitioning to a less expensive and easier-to-use software, saving about $25,000 the first year and $35,000 in each future year. The switch is anticipated to increase efficiencies and reduce staff time needed to use the system.
- Trained and deployed Elections permanent staff to Accessible Voting Centers, reducing the number of temporary staff needed for this work by 32%.

Historical election costs

	Elections	Voters' Pamphlet	Total	Elections	Voters' Pamphlet	Total
	2009			**2010**		
Specials	$2,192,299	$132,374	$2,324,673	$3,563,004	$148,980	$3,711,983
Primary	$4,118,444	$218,364	$4,336,808	$3,984,150	$244,963	$4,229,113
General	$5,625,641	$239,755	$5,865,396	$5,006,021	$187,799	$5,193,820
Total	$11,936,384	$590,493	$12,526,876	$12,553,175	$581,742	$13,134,917
	2011			**2012**		
Specials	$435,361	$13,095	$448,456	$1,035,304	$27,210	$1,062,513
Primary	$3,930,258	$212,958	$4,143,216	$5,145,417	$331,156	$5,476,573
General	$6,729,795	$314,117	$7,043,911	$6,927,178	$182,009	$7,109,188
Total	$11,095,414	$540,169	$11,635,583	$13,107,900	$540,374	$13,648,274
	2013			**2014**		
Specials	$1,191,355	$84,886	$1,276,241	$3,504,328	$121,325	$3,625,653
Primary	$4,972,162	$244,311	$5,216,473	$4,729,310	$148,622	$4,877,932
General	$8,282,233	$390,296	$8,672,529	$5,891,874	$251,027	$6,142,901
Total	$14,445,750	$719,493	$15,165,243	$14,125,513	$520,973	$14,646,486

Above:
Online collaboration sites reduce the need for paper in meetings

Health and Human Potential

Support individuals and communities to influence their present and shape their future.

- Received a 98% overall positive score as a great place to work by temporary staff who complete exit employment surveys.
- Utilized 45% of our temporary workforce in multiple positions during the general election, implementing our commitment to and practice of "agile workforce."
- Employed more than 800 temporary employees in 2014.
- Department of Elections employees raised nearly $17,500 for not-for-profit organizations in King County through the Employee Giving Program, via payroll deduction and special events. Special events were scheduled for peak times when additional temporary staff would be in the building to increase participation and donations.
- Elections employees raised an additional $1,850 for the Employee Giving Program through Health Match, a new program that encouraged raising money via events that promote good health.
- KCE employees also contribute to the community through holiday adopt-a-family programs, food drives and other charitable activities. For example, employees raised more than $1,700 by participating in the American Heart Association Heart Walk.
- KCE had about 94% participation in Healthy Incentives, higher than the county average of 91%. Healthy Incentives is a King County program aimed at improving employee health and lowering healthcare costs for employees and the county.

Voting gives citizens a voice in shaping their communities. We are committed to strengthening citizen impact by building awareness about the importance of voting.

The Elections Department also helps build stronger, healthier communities by actively participating in fundraising efforts for not-for-profit organizations. In addition to participating annually in the county's charitable giving campaign, we "adopt" families in need at the holidays and raised funds to prevent heart attack and stroke.

We also provide opportunities for retirees, young adults and others in transition to work as temporary employees during elections, enabling them to learn new skills and sometimes transition into permanent positions.

Above:
A staff team dubbed "The Elections Energizers" contributed to employee fitness and raised funds to combat heart disease and stroke

Temporary employees learn new skills and make valuable contributions to the workforce and charity while at KCE

Common voting errors increase costs of administering elections and can prevent some voted ballots from being counted.

In addition to making sure voters know when elections are happening, significant effort is made to remind voters how to avoid making errors. We continue to build upon our successful marketing campaign that stresses the importance of signing the return envelope, returning ballots on time, and other key messages. We plan to expand our campaign targeting non-English speaking communities and other target audiences.

Public Engagement

Provide comprehensive public engagement to inform, educate and involve people and communities.

- Our successful "Be Informed" voter education campaign added new celebrity faces in 2014: Grammy Award-winning jazz legend, Diane Schuur, and vocalist and poet, Hollis Wong-Wear. The campaign continues to educate voters about how to reduce voting errors.
- The combined reach of our "Be Informed" campaign's television, radio and online advertisements generated over 12 million views or contacts with King County voters during the primary and general elections. This helped keep the number of ballots returned late very low (about 1%) and sustained the signature challenge reductions of less than 2.5% achieved in recent years.
- Several new media helped magnify the campaign's effects. As part of our partnership with KING TV, the campaign broadened to include ads on mobile phones.
- Our low-cost Facebook advertising expanded this year reaching nearly 175,000 people and generating more than 725 visits to our website during the 2014 general election.
- The foreign language component of our marketing campaign also grew. A King County grant sponsored delivery of information about voter registration deadlines directly to the Chinese- and Vietnamese-speaking communities. Facebook ads in Vietnamese and Chinese appeared for the first time this year and space on seven digital billboards in Vietnamese, Chinese and English was contributed by Clear Channel Outdoor thanks to a partnership initiated by Councilmember Rod Dembowski.
- Created a grassroots Instagram campaign to augment an existing social media campaign that encouraged voter participation in National Voter Registration Day promotions.
- 7 foot-tall banners featuring informed campaign celebrities and voting messages were created to support voter outreach at community events and identify elections services at various locations.

Justice and Safety

Provide fair and accessible voting opportunities for all citizens.

- Conducted 54 voter outreach events in 2014 and provided materials for voter registration drives resulting in 8,875 new voter registrations.
- KCE expanded outreach to Vietnamese- and Chinese-speaking citizens through ethnic media and Facebook promoting registering to vote and information about how to vote. The Facebook ad campaign reached more than 8,500 ethnic-language voters during the 2014 general election, generating more than 110 clicks to KCE's Vietnamese- and Chinese-language websites.
- Partnered with Seattle Central Library to provide a demonstration project using technology and special equipment for voters with disabilities. This project enabled them to access and mark their ballots using the online ballot marking program at the Library Equal Access Program (LEAP) Lab. This pilot program was open to all voters who may have had difficulty completing their mail-in ballots without assistance.
- 37 new election observers were trained on ballot processing activities.
- Over the last few years, many states have enacted restrictive voting laws while others grapple with ongoing challenges in election administration and electoral reform. KCE provided testimony to a panel of voting rights and elections experts holding a series of nationwide hearings to gather information on voting rights and election administration problems and opportunities.
- Continue to partner with the Department of Homeland Security to provide voter registration for new citizens at naturalization events. KCE hosted a naturalization ceremony at the Elections office for the first time as part of this partnership.

Ensuring all citizens who are eligible to vote have the opportunity to do so is key to fulfilling our mission. Maintaining vigilance to identify and remove barriers to voting, partnering with other agencies, and using technology creatively as well as providing the necessary tools are all ways that KCE works to advance this goal.

Above:
A partnership with the Seattle Public Library helped voters with disabilities

Outreach staff registered citizens to vote

Party observers witness scanning equipment testing

Left page:
Outreach staff take our "Be Informed" campaign on the road to encourage good voting habits

National Voter Registration Day campaign

Providing excellent service is a goal embraced by every work group in the Elections Department.

Additionally, every employee participates in cross-functional teams established in 2014 to review services, processes, and voter and stakeholder input to identify opportunities for improvement and/or meet future needs.

Above:
KCE installed new, faster ballot sorting machines

Service Excellence

Deliver effective services that are responsive to community needs.

- Promoted use of the online ballot marking program (developed for overseas and service voters) to improve the voting experience of voters with disabilities. It is also available to all voters. Nearly 11,000 voters accessed their ballots online in 2014. Of those, nearly 5,000 were overseas and service voters and more than 6,000 were other voters.
- KCE acquired two new ballot sorting machines that are speeding up our work by more than 50%, processing a total of 80,000 ballots per hour and doing some of the work that staff previously had to do by hand.
- Established an ongoing, dedicated voter registration annex location in downtown Seattle at the Administration building to better facilitate voter registration.
- E-Canvass results files are now available the day after an election is certified, allowing the public faster access to precinct level results.
- We adopted precinct boundary changes to conform to the new Seattle city council districts and updated the "Find My District" web mapping application.
- King County Elections sent more than 22,000 signature update letters to voters to receive a more current version of their signature so that future elections are less likely to produce signature challenges.
- King County Elections received nearly 90,000 ballots from drop boxes on election day (Nov. 4) alone, an unprecedented amount for an election this size, representing 63% of all ballots returned to drop boxes in the general election.
- Initiated new services in the city of Sammamish, operating a ballot drop-off van during the primary and general elections.
- KCE selected a new election management system, a database that holds all voter registration and elections information, to modernize and improve our operations. KCE staff are preparing to deploy it in 2015.

Quality Workforce

Develop and empower our most valuable asset, our employees.

- Efforts to cross-train staff to maximize efficiencies and support customer service expanded in 2014, improving customer service and reducing the need to hire temporary staff. Utilized 45% of our temporary workforce in multiple positions during the general election, part of our efforts to develop an "agile workforce."
- Met seasonal election staffing needs placing 843 temporary staff and received a 98% positive score in our temporary staff employment survey.
- The Secretary of State requires election offices to have at least 2 certified election administrators in each office. King County Elections has 26 certified employees. KCE requires all new employees to attend state elections training.
- Conducted training on ballot scanner maintenance. Elections' staff learned side-by-side with maintenance technicians from the equipment vendor. Now Elections staff can do more troubleshooting, basic diagnostics and calibrating of the scanners instead of waiting for an out-of-state vendor.

KCE staff are collectively responsible for the outstanding performance and reputation achieved by our organization.

Although not required, every employee attends the Washington Secretary of State's Office training for elections administrators. This not only builds a greater knowledge pool within our department, it encourages advancement and supports collaboration and creative problem solving.

Left:
An employee manages ballots at the new ballot sorter machine

A worker inspects ballots

A voter returns a ballot at a drop box

What's Ahead?

In 2014, 29 projects identified in the Elections Department's strategic plan were launched. Project launch involved organizing project teams and creating and approving work programs, which were used to identify resource needs and inform budget development.

In 2015, several of the strategic plan projects are scheduled for completion including:

- Finalize a capital improvement program for technology
- Obtain a Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system to track voter contacts
- Complete a countywide voter survey
- Strengthen activities to advance priorities associated with our legislative agenda
- Conduct a pilot classroom civics program
- Expand language translation of voting information