

ELECTION ASSISTANCE COMMISSION

2020 CLEARINGHOUSE “CLEARIE” AWARD SUBMISSION

CATEGORY

Outstanding Innovations Competition

TITLE

The Voter Education Fund: A Government,
Philanthropic and Community Partnership

SUBMITTED BY

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About King County Elections

[King County Elections](#) is Washington state's largest jurisdiction with 1.4 million registered voters as of the November 2020 General Election. Since 2009, King County has done voting-by-mail and for many years we held the title as the largest vote-by-mail jurisdiction in the country.

In 2020 we saw an increase in voter turnout, culminating with 87% record-turnout during the Presidential Election. None of this would have been possible without the efforts of the Voter Education Fund, which helped us to address systemic inequalities and voting barriers among historically excluded communities.

Summary

The [Voter Education Fund](#) (VEF) is a government, philanthropic and community partnership led by King County Elections, the [Seattle Foundation](#) and local organizations to remove barriers to voting. The fund provides grants for community-based organizations working to increase access to the ballot among historically excluded and underrepresented communities.

After an initial pilot program in 2016, the Voter Education Fund was launched in 2017 and has since grown, with 39 organizations forming part of the last 2019-2020 funding cycle. During the last cycle nearly \$1 million was invested across 39 grantee organizations. Funding for each organization varies by cycle and is allocated based on each effort's reach and impact.

Grantees serve a wide array of communities, including communities of color, limited-English speaking residents, low-income youth, veterans, people experiencing homelessness, and people who have been convicted of a felony. This past cycle placed an increased emphasis on voter outreach to people with disabilities; Black, Brown and Indigenous voters; and historically excluded residents in South King County.



Voter Education Fund Partners: The Korean American Coalition, Refugee Women's Alliance and Institute for Community Leadership get out the vote.

A Model for Private and Public Partnerships

The Voter Education Fund is an innovative, replicable model and tool for counties looking to break down barriers to voting that historically excluded communities disproportionately face. The program shows how private and public partnerships can be leveraged to fund local community organizers who know their communities best but may not have the funding.

Through this partnership, there were three main pillars, each playing a key role in voter outreach:

- 1 Philanthropic:** The Seattle Foundation's goal is to "ensure all people have equal opportunity." By providing a network of partners for funding efforts, we were able to secure grant money.
- 2 Government:** At King County Elections we served as a technical expert, supporting our partners with educative materials, information and toolkits needed for voters to make their voices heard.
- 3 Community:** The grantee organizations selected for funding were key to this partnership. The 39 organizations from this cycle already had a relationship and built trust within their communities.

Voter Outreach Efforts

Grassroots Efforts

Grantee organizations supported and engaged communities to get out the vote through a range of grassroots efforts. These included, but were not limited to:

Voter Education: Informing voters about vote-by-mail, who can vote, how to vote and democracy 101.

Nonpartisan Information: Familiarizing voters with key information about what's on the ballot, the responsibilities each office has, and how candidates and ballot measures affect our day-to-day.

Voter Registration: Creating opportunities for eligible and future voters to register.

Technical Assistance: Providing culturally appropriate technical assistance in navigating the voting process. For example, how to update an address or change a language preference.



Voter Education Fund partner, International Community Health Services (ICHHS), gets out the vote. ICHHS provides medical services for Seattle and King County Asian & Pacific Islander communities.

Adapting to a Pandemic

The pandemic affected every single elections' department across the country. While none of this was easy and direct outreach was made nearly impossible, the ties grantee organizations already had within their communities were fundamental in overcoming some of these obstacles. Organizations got creative in how they worked to get the vote out.

[Asian Counseling and Referral Service](#) (ACRS):

ACRS provides multi-language and cultural services. During the pandemic, ACRS handed out informational voting materials in food assistance bags shared with their local community.

[Na'ah Illahee Fund](#) (NIF): Led by Indigenous women, NIF launched the "Get out the Native Vote" program to help register and engage Native youth. The org also held several "[Cafe Conversations](#)" on Facebook to engage voters.

[West Hill Community Association](#)

(WHCA): WHCA works to hold elected officials accountable within their community through public meetings and advocacy. When COVID-19 hit, the organization leveraged the VEF to set up mobile print stations outdoors to support voters who needed to print out their ballots.

[United Territories of Pacific Islanders Alliance](#) (UTOPIA):

Born out of the struggles, challenges, strength and resilience of the Queer and Trans Pacific Islander, UTOPIA is a grassroots organization that looks to form community and address systemic inequalities. The organization coordinated outside efforts to register and educate voters.

Ongoing Support

Throughout the program, the Seattle Foundation, King County Elections and community



Voter Education Fund community partner, West Hill Community Association, set-up outside printing stations for voters who needed to print ballots.



Voter Education Fund community partner, UTOPIA, coordinate efforts to register and inform voters.

partners met to debrief and identify additional needs. During the pandemic, these meetings became virtual. By keeping in touch, we were able to provide supporting materials, like social media toolkits, voter pamphlets and infographics for community partners to share with their communities. Furthermore, with King County Elections' Language Services and Community Engagement team we held regular monthly VEF refreshers and trainings and we were able to distribute materials in Chinese, Korean, Spanish and Vietnamese.

Here are examples of the materials we created and shared with our partners:

- [Social media toolkit](#)
- [Educational graphics](#)
- [Hit90 toolkit](#)
- [Flickr informational graphics](#)

Impact on King County Voters

In 2020 alone the Voter Education Fund has impacted hundreds of thousands of voters. Here are some of the numbers that reflect this.

2020 Voter Education Fund: By the Numbers

Voters Reached **663,168**
Events + Activities Held **2,465**
Voters Registered **2,351**

By starting the program a few years prior to the general election, the Voter Education Fund was able to help local organizations begin to focus on voter outreach efforts and build a foundation.

2018-2019 Voter Education Fund: By the Numbers

Voters Reached **224,440**
Events + Activities Held **2,958**
Voters Registered **15,199**

The Future of the Voter Education Fund

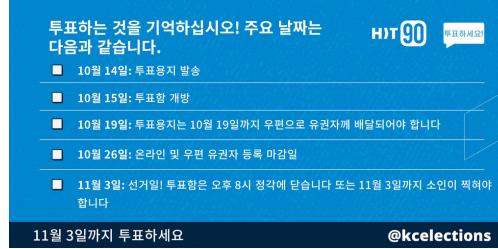
The Voter Education Fund will open applications for a new grantee cycle this year. We are currently in discussion with the Seattle Foundation regarding logistics, but plan on launching the new cycle in March 2021.



El Centro de la Raza



Meetings with VEF partners and Elections became virtual during the pandemic.



Educational materials King County Elections developed for voters and Voter Education Fund partners.

VEF Community Partner Testimonials

"Through our work with the Voter Education Fund, we were able to reach out to more than 8,000 AAPI voters through both phone and text banking in King and Pierce county. We also reached 1,500 ACRS clients by putting in-language King County Elections voter resources in our food delivery bags. Providing services to our communities is core to what we do and making voting and our democracy more accessible is integral to that."

Jinxia Wu, Asian Counseling and Referral Service

"The Seattle/King County Coalition on Homelessness believes that our democracy is strengthened when everyone's voice is heard. The Voter Education Fund grant has helped our staff and volunteers get to community sites where our neighbors who are unhoused, unsheltered, or low-income receive resources and help them register to vote, provide resources needed to cast their ballot, or just give them the final encouragement to vote simply by reinforcing that their voice matters."

Saleena Salango, Advocacy Coordinator for the Seattle/King County Coalition on Homelessness

"The work that BEST has been able to do through participation in the Voter Education Fund consist of bringing a new awareness to hundreds of people who have been disenfranchised from the voting process because of their involvement with the criminal justice system and homelessness. This awareness is tearing down the myths and that informs and educates them on how they do have the right and ability to register and vote. There is no other pleasure and joy to watch a person eyes light up when they realize that the barrier they thought was stopping them from voting is torn down. It means they are now, truly, being reintegrated into society by their participation in the political process that will determines their hope and a future."

The Reverend Jimmie James, Executive Director B.E.S.T

"ReWA works one-on-one to make sure new voters with limited English have the support they need to make their voices heard in the democratic process. Each year ReWA offers this service to refugees and immigrants as they become citizens and we are very proud to offer this service to communities that are typically underrepresented and left out of the electoral democratic process."

Mahnaz Eshetu, Executive Director of Refugee Women's Alliance (ReWA)

"Participating in the VEF helped us to activate existing networks and partnerships and explore new avenues of outreach to 'Get Out the Native Vote'. We engaged the voices of our Youth and community so that we were seen, heard and responded to."

Susan Balbas, Co-founder and Executive Director of the Na'ah Illahee Fund

"From pre-show registrations at Skyway Outdoor Cinema to new partnerships with students at our local high schools, the Voter Education Fund has equipped us with the ability to bolster our existing programming in ways that increase visibility of the registration and voting processes in our community. The fund has also come through in critical times of change. As part of VEF, WHCA began hosting voter support booths at Skyway Library on election days to provide replacement envelopes, answer questions, and help voters reprint their ballots. When computer and print services were unavailable at the library due to COVID19 measures, we were able to leverage our grant funds to set up a mobile print station outdoors and continue the support our community deserves."

Jeremy Williams, board president of the West Hill Community Association



Rev. Jimmie James of B.E.S.T provides informational and voter registration support outdoors leading up to the 2020 General Election.