SIGNATURE VOTER EDUCATION PLAN
King County Elections

Overview

King County Elections (KCE) conducts accurate, secure, and accessible elections for the county's approximately 1.4 million registered voters.

In June 2024, RCW 29A.40.110 was updated, impacting signature verification processes and requiring county elections offices to develop outreach plans to educate voters. This document was created in response to these legal changes and includes information about current voter education addressing the importance of signatures and KCE's verification processes, as well as plans for sustaining and expanding upon this ongoing work.

In our vote-by-mail system, we verify a voter's identity by comparing the signature on their ballot with any signatures we have in their voter registration records. This verification method works well for most, but not all, voters.

When a voter forgets to sign their ballot, or trained staff identify a mismatch between the signature on a ballot and the signature in a voter's record, that voter's ballot is held – or "challenged" – until the voter can respond to the challenge. In King County, we've seen that historically marginalized communities, including voters with disabilities, those whose first language is not English, people of color, and young people have their signatures challenged at higher rates than others.

The team at KCE is dedicated to remedying this disproportionate impact and ensuring we can count every valid ballot. We aim to reduce both initial and overall signature challenge rates, increase cure rates, and make signatures less challenging, in all ways, for all our voters.

We continue to improve and build on existing work through innovative ideas and sustained efforts, including voter education, ballot alerts, and our signature update program.

Existing Efforts to Educate Voters about Signatures and Challenges

Knowledge is power. Knowing how signatures are used in elections and how verification happens could help voters avoid a simple mistake that might leave their ballot uncounted. Similarly, having a baseline of knowledge about signatures and voting might make the process of voting less intimidating for first-time or sporadic voters.

With that in mind, over the past few years, KCE has added information and messaging about signatures on social media and in printed voter education materials, media interviews, ballot packet materials, the Local Voters' Pamphlet, and even on the return envelope that voters sign before

returning their ballot. As with all core voter education, messaging is featured in English, and translated to Chinese, Korean, Russian, Somali, Spanish, and Vietnamese on the website and printed materials.

- **Outreach after a signature challenge.**

  KCE mails a letter to the home of any voter with a signature challenge within one business day. In addition, if the voter has provided a phone number or email address, we reach out via these methods as well, urging them to take action to resolve their signature challenge promptly.

- **Sharing information on our website.**

  KCE provides robust FAQs for voters about signature challenges and signature updates on our website. These pages include information about how signatures are verified, what voters can do to cure a signature challenge or update their signature, and why their signature matters in elections.

  In addition, we've made signature challenge and cure rate data publicly available on our website in map and dashboard form. We opted to make this data public to provide community partners and external organizations with a better idea of which voters are most impacted by signature challenges.

- **Training community partners on signatures, the verification process, and how voters can cure their signature challenges.**

  Through our Voter Education Fund (VEF) we have provided training to community partners on all aspects of the election process, including signatures, verification, and navigating signature challenges. Our VEF partners have access to language access specialist who can support them in interpretation and translation of this content to Chinese. Korean, Russian, Somali, Spanish, and Vietnamese.

  We also include information about signatures and challenges in our Community Voter Education Toolkit that we provide to community partners and make available online.

- **Signature update mailings.**

  Between May 2022 and December 2023, KCE mailed approximately 400,000 voters a letter and corresponding form requesting that they update their signature. More than 130,000 voters returned their update form, many providing more than one signature and further reducing their risk of a signature challenge in a future election.

  The letter was usability tested with real voters before being sent out, and included three spaces for signatures so that voters could provide multiple signatures to be added to their registration file. These mailings were targeted to zip codes that had the highest signature challenge rates.

  While this program finished in December 2023, KCE has since increased the number of voters who are asked to update their signature after each election. We reach out to voters who had their ballot accepted in the election, who would also benefit from an updated signature due to

natural changes in the voter's signature over time. We can communicate in Chinese. Korean, Russian, Somali, Spanish, and Vietnamese.

- **Social media.**

  During election periods, KCE posts on social media channels to educate voters on the importance of signatures and how to resolve any signature challenges they may encounter.

  This can include everything from a simple text-based post to a carousel of infographics to video. KCE has created "How to Vote" videos in <u>English</u>, <u>Chinese</u>, <u>Korean</u>, <u>Russian</u>, <u>Somali</u>, <u>Spanish</u>, and <u>Vietnamese</u>, as well as a short explainer on <u>how to use the online signature resolution tool</u>. This explainer is currently available in English and will be available in Chinese, Korean, Russian, Somali, Spanish, and Vietnamese for the August 2024 Primary.

- **Ballot alerts.**

  In October 2022, KCE launched ballot alerts, which are text and email notifications letting voters know where their ballot is in the process. Voters who sign up get an alert when their ballot is mailed, received back at Elections HQ, and when their signature is counted and ballot ready to be counted. They also get a reminder email shortly before Election Day to remind them to return their ballot.

  Voters with a signature challenge receive a message informing them of the issue and encouraging them to take action. This notification includes links to more information, and a link to our online signature resolution tool. Those with signature issues will receive an additional reminder alert five days before the deadline for resolving the issue.

  Voters who are subscribed to ballot alerts cure their signature challenges at a rate consistently over 80%. Non-subscribed voters typically cure their signature challenges at a rate between 50-60%. As of June 2024, 75,000 voters are subscribed to ballot alerts.

  Ballot alerts are available in English, Chinese, Korean, Russian, Somali, Spanish, and Vietnamese.

- **Online signature resolution tool.**

  During the 2023 General Election, KCE launched a new online signature resolution tool where voters can complete and return signature resolution forms right on their device by signing with their finger or mouse.

  Beginning in the 2024 Primary Election, voters challenged for a signature that does not match their voter registration signature will be able to sign into the online signature resolution tool and resolve their signature challenge in a number of ways:

  - By providing a signature and signing with their finger or mouse, OR

  - Providing the last four digits of their social security number, OR

  - Providing their full Washington State ID or drivers license number, OR

- By uploading a copy of one of the following:

    o Photo identification;

    o Valid enrollment card of a federally recognized Tribe in Washington State;

    o Copy of a current utility bill or current bank statement;

    o Copy of a current government check;

    o Copy of a current paycheck, or a government document (other than a voter registration card) showing the voter's name AND address.

The online signature resolution tool has made resolving signature issues substantially easier and more efficient. For example, voters who are signed up for ballot alerts can receive a text or email letting them know there's an issue with their signature, and then they can resolve that issue, all on the same device, within in minutes.

We've been happy to see strong early adoption of the tool, with approximately half of voters opting to return their form online during the 2023 General Election.

The online signature resolution tool, and all signature resolution forms, are available in English, Chinese, Korean, Russian, Somali, Spanish, and Vietnamese.

- **Educating young and future voters.**

    In 2023, KCE launched a Civic Engagement Internship program that provides peer-based education on voting and elections. Our interns work with staff and a local educator to develop the curriculum and present to high schools across South King County. During the internship's first year, we reached students in more than 60 classes.

    The curriculum emphasizes the importance of signatures and includes an interactive activity for the students to practice providing five matching signatures. If students do not yet have a signature, presenters talk through creating a signature and why it's important to stick to it when voting. This curriculum is currently available in English and Spanish and can be provided in Chinese, Korean, Russian, Somali, and Vietnamese upon request.

- **Survey of challenged voters.**

    After each election, voters who experienced a signature challenge and have an email on file are emailed a brief survey about their experience. This survey seeks to gather information about how the voter learned about their challenge, if they knew what to do to resolve it, and any other comments they had about their experience.

    Through this survey, we've identified and implemented many changes – large and small – to address feedback from our voters and make signatures a little less challenging. This survey is available in English, Chinese, Korean, Russian, Somali, Spanish, and Vietnamese.

Expanding Education on Signatures

Many of the Signature Education and Outreach efforts listed above are ongoing. In addition to those efforts, King County Elections will:

- Share information with voters about Department of Licensing registration and the relationship between their DOL signature and their voter registration record.
- Create and translate a brochure ahead of the 2024 General Election that includes:
    - the signature verification process,
    - where we get signature files,
    - why ballots are rejected, and
    - how to cure rejected ballots.
- Create and translate a poster and/or infographics to share at community outreach events.
- Continue providing social media outreach during Election cycles.
- Continue to update our assessment metrics. This will include:
    - comparing rejection and cure rates in similar elections,
    - conducting a survey of voters who have had their signatures challenged,
    - conducting a survey of our community partners to better understand their knowledge of and questions about signatures and signature cure processes,
    - conducting a survey on college and university campuses to better understand those communities' knowledge of and questions about signatures and signature cure processes, and
    - review of social media data.

Resources

Signature Challenge information in English, Chinese, Korean, Russian, Somali, Spanish, and Vietnamese

Signature Update information in English, Chinese, Korean, Russian, Somali, Spanish, and Vietnamese

"How to Vote" videos in English, Chinese, Korean, Russian, Somali, Spanish, and Vietnamese

Guide to Voting, available in 23 languages

How to Use the Online Signature Resolution Tool

Signature Cure Rate data

Community Voter Education Toolkit