



**Celebrating 48
Years of
Innovation**

2018 Achievement Awards

Expanding Drop Box Locations to Improve Voter Access

King County, WA

Submitted by:

Julie Wise

Director of King County Elections

919 SW Grady Way

Renton, WA 98057

(206) 296-8683

Julie.Wise@kingcounty.gov

www.kingcounty.gov/elections

Abstract

Ballot drop boxes are an essential tool for increasing voter access in King County. In 2016, King County Elections evaluated 100 locations as potential sites for new drop boxes. After careful research and consideration, 45 sites were selected. King County Elections now operates a total of 55 permanent drop boxes, providing unprecedented convenience and access for voters. The county's voters are increasingly relying on drop boxes. More than half of all returned ballots were brought to a drop box during the 2016 General Election.

Why Drop Boxes?

Removing barriers to voting is a top priority for King County Elections (KCE). Ballot drop boxes serve as an important tool for improving voter access and reinforcing the public's trust in the elections system. In 2008, the King County Council enacted Ordinance 15523, which moved the county to a vote-by-mail system and authorized a study on the proposed cost and locations for drop boxes. King County Elections rolled out eight drop boxes for the 2008 Primary and General Election. By the 2010 General Election, we added two more drop boxes and 12 temporary ballot drop-off vans.



Ballot drop boxes provide ease, access and convenience to voters.

For voters, ballot drop boxes provide ease, access and convenience, especially when a postage stamp is a cost-barrier. Voters are increasingly relying on drop boxes, particularly last-minute voters. On average, 70 percent of ballots returned to drop boxes are deposited on Election Day or on the day before. For KCE, drop boxes give us more control over when we receive returned ballots since we do not have to work on the U.S. Postal Service's pick-up and processing schedule. We can retrieve ballots from drop boxes using our own staff and on our schedule, allowing us to process ballots more efficiently.

100 Locations Assessed

In 2016, the Council passed legislation to study the feasibility of adding more drop boxes. Identified sites for evaluation were based on the Council's motion to consider libraries, and suggestions from local jurisdictions, community partners and the voting public.

Over the course of a month, KCE staff visited 100 locations around King County. We documented existing conditions, opportunities and challenges of each site. Each location was given a score from one to 10 based on the following factors and criteria (See Supplement A):

- ▶ **Alignment with existing King County and Elections Department goals:** We assessed the impact of drop box placement on traditionally underserved communities. These include geographically isolated or culturally distinct communities that have lower than average voter registration rates (See Supplement B).
- ▶ **Operational effectiveness:** We established a set of criteria based on our requirements around retrieving ballots, closing drop boxes on Election Day, as well as other logistical, safety and security needs.
- ▶ **Accessibility:** We considered issues such as access and proximity to public transit and location visibility.

- **Continuity of service:** Sites were rated based on their history of service as a ballot drop-off location to promote continuity and avoid any reduction of established service in communities that already had drop boxes or temporary drop-off vans.

A total of 45 new sites were selected for new drop boxes. Of those, 22 are at public libraries and seven are located in unincorporated King County. Several sites are in geographically and culturally isolated communities.

Drop boxes were installed in three phases: 19 locations were added for the 2016 Primary Election and another 14 were added by the 2016 General Election. An additional 12 were opened in 2017. KCE now operates 55 permanent drop boxes, providing unprecedented convenience and access for voters. About 91 percent of county residents live within 3 miles of a drop box.

The new drop boxes are equipped with security features that prevent tampering or the effects of weather conditions, such as heavy rainfall. Each drop box weighs 1,000 pounds and is bolted to the ground. The roof is slanted to prevent water damage from rains, and the ballot slot is narrow enough so that books or other objects cannot be dropped in. Additionally, the door to the drop box does not close unless it is locked.


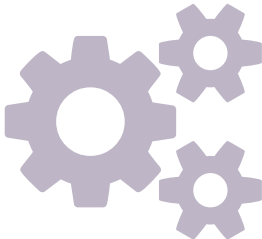


Achievement Award Worthiness

King County voters are increasingly relying on drop boxes. Historically, about 18 to 20 percent of returned ballots were brought to drop boxes. But the more drop boxes we added, the more voters used them. During the 2016 Primary, 36 percent of returned ballots were brought to drop boxes. By the General Election, 51.4 percent of ballots—or 519,400—were brought to a drop box. It is clear that more voters are choosing drop boxes as a convenient and cost-free way to return their ballots. The drop box expansion was a success and underscored our efforts to make voting as barrier-free as possible.



Lake City Library

12501 28th Ave NE

Criteria group	Measure	Score	Comments
Alignment with Department and County goals/priorities 	Isolated community?	0	
	Equity	10	more diversity, lower income, lower English proficiency
	Voter participation	8	located in lower voter registration area
	PSRC designation	0	
Operational effectiveness 	Daily ballot pick-up/closing process	10	site could support effective process
	Site owner input	5	SPL: no issues with this location
	Drive-up	0	drive-up option not feasible
	End-of-line management	5	no end-of -line concerns
Accessibility 	Visibility	10	no visibility concerns
	Proximity to public transit	5	Served by Bus Routes: 41, 64, 65, 75, 309, 312, 330, 372, 522
	Parking	5	adequate parking options
	ADA factors	5	no issues
Continuity 	Location history	10	proposed replacement for current van

Total score: 73

Consolidated Demographics: People of Color, Income, & English Proficiency by Census Tracts with Ballot Drop off Locations

