



**Celebrating 48
Years of
Innovation**

2018 Achievement Awards

Providing Prepaid Postage to Improve Voter Turnout

King County, WA

Submitted by:

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Abstract

King County Elections tested pre-paid postage in the February and April 2017 special elections. Voters received ballot return envelopes with the postage already paid. Voter turnout exceeded projections in both elections, and a vast majority of voters chose to return their ballots by mail.

Why Test Pre-paid Postage?

King County Elections (KCE) tested pre-paid postage in the February and April 2017 special elections. Voters in three jurisdictions received ballot return envelopes with the postage already paid. We notified voters about the prepaid postage through a variety of ways. The ballot packet instructions included an informational insert about prepaid postage. We also reached out to voters through the media, and through our blog and social channels. Most voters were aware that the postage on their ballot return envelopes had been paid. We believe pre-paid postage provides ease, access and convenience to voters. A postage stamp can also be a cost barrier for some voters.

A vast majority of voters chose to return their ballots by mail.

One reason for testing pre-paid postage was to see if it increased voter turnout. We also wanted to confirm our understanding of the USPS process. In doing so, we measured the following:

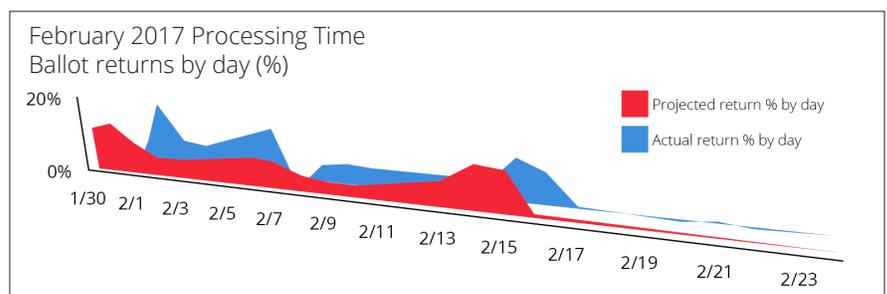
- ▶ Changes in the percentage of envelopes without a postal cancellation.
- ▶ If ballots returned to us were processed earlier or later than normal.
- ▶ Using a statistical sample to compare the ballot envelope’s signature date, the postmark date and the time we receive it in the office.

For the February 2017 special election, KCE tested pre-paid postage in the City of Maple Valley and the Shoreline School District. By testing in two locations, we sought to gain an understanding of whether or not there are significant differences between jurisdictions. For the April 2017 special election, KCE tested pre-paid postage in the Vashon Island School District. With Vashon, we wanted to understand the impact of pre-paid postage in a geographically isolated community with one drop box. In both elections, KCE used Business Reply Mail and only paid for the postage on ballots returned through USPS.

February 2017 Special Election

Voters in Maple Valley and the Shoreline School District received ballot return envelopes with paid postage. With a combined 64,000 voters, the jurisdictions provided small, discrete sample populations. Nine of KCE’s ballot drop boxes were open for the election. The pre-paid postage test cost KCE \$10,140.

We noticed a slight delay using Business Reply Mail. About 70 percent of ballots were received within 2 days of the postmark, which was in-line with our understanding of the USPS process. This means there was a consistent 1-day lag.



April 2017 Special Election

About 8,800 voters in the Vashon Island School District received ballot return envelopes with the postage paid. KCE opened three ballot drop boxes, including one on Vashon Island. We had ballots returned by mail routed to a USPS distribution center closer to our office, which eliminated the 1-day lag. The pre-paid postage test cost KCE \$2,500.

Majority of Ballots Returned by Mail

A vast majority of voters returned their ballots by mail. About 72 percent of Shoreline ballots were returned by mail and 28 percent were brought to drop boxes. In Maple Valley, about 81 percent of ballots were returned by mail and 19 percent through drop boxes. And in Vashon, 76 percent of ballots were returned through the mail, and 24 percent were brought to a drop box (See Supplement).



Ballot return envelope with postage paid.

Turnout Exceeds Projections

Turnout is driven by many factors, therefore we cannot draw any definitive conclusions from the pre-paid postage test. However, overall voter turnout exceeded our projections. Voter turnout in Shoreline was 40 percent, compared to our projection of 30 percent. Turnout in Maple Valley was 37 percent, up from our 31 percent projection. In Vashon, voter turnout was 53 percent, which was 7 points higher than our projection. We are surveying a sample population of voters who cast ballots in the February and April special elections about their experience. The survey results will help us understand voter behavior and determine if pre-paid postage is a service voters would like to continue.

District	Previous special election	Projected turnout	Actual turnout
Maple Valley	30%	30%	40%
Shoreline	31%	31%	37%
Vashon	46%	46%	53%

Achievement Award Worthiness

As the largest county in the United States to conduct elections exclusively via vote-by-mail, we strive to be an industry leader. We are committed to being as inclusive as possible - and to conduct fair, open and accurate elections. We are consistently doing whatever we can to remove barriers to voting and fill gaps in services so that the 1.24 million customers we serve can exercise their civic right to vote without hindrance, hardship or hassle.

As a result of the pilot program and the compelling increase in citizen participation, we are seeking to secure approval and support of the King County Council to ensure we can provide this added value service to all our customers for every election from now on. At the time of this writing, we are preparing local legislation and have Council sponsor(s). Early indications are promising that this program will likely be launched permanently in 2018.

Mail vs. drop box returns

2012 General



2013 Primary



2013 General



2014 Primary



2014 General



2015 Primary



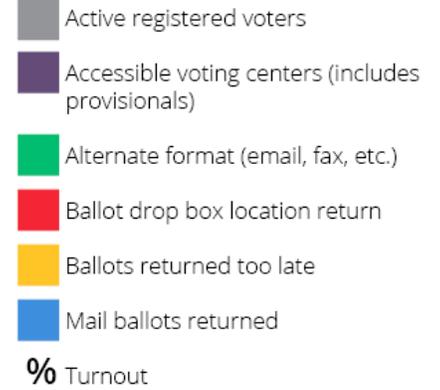
2015 General



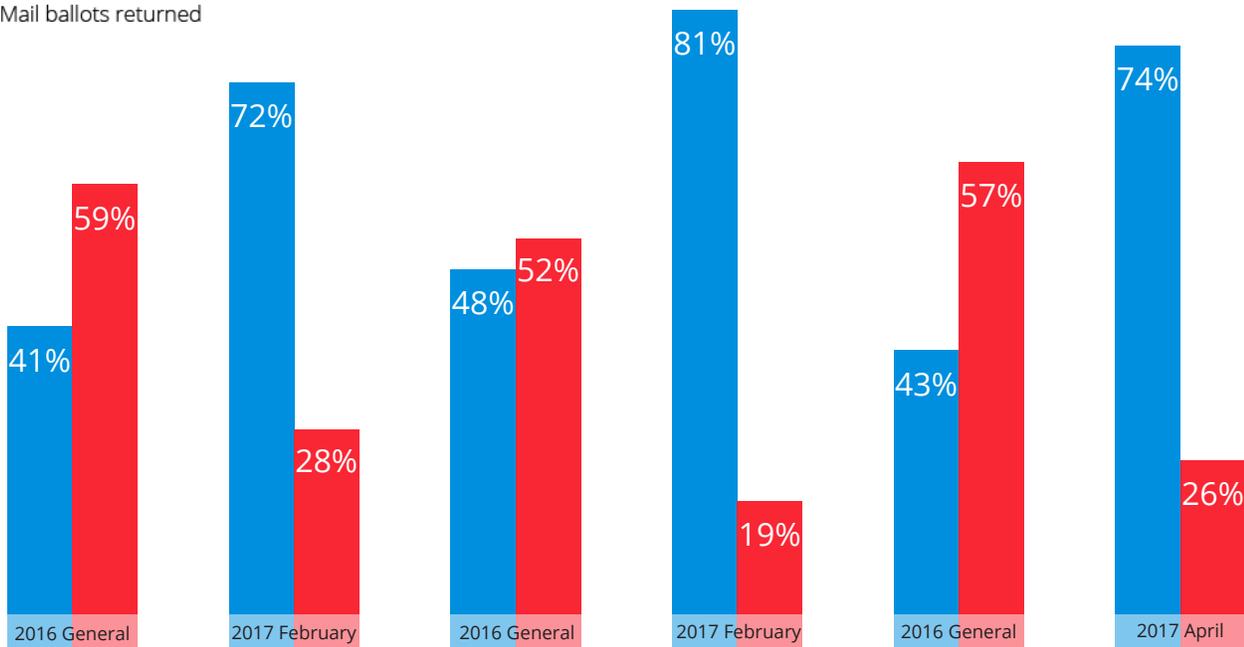
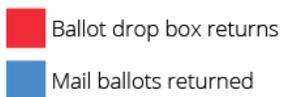
2016 Primary



2016 General



Prepaid postage vs. drop box returns



Shoreline

Maple Valley

Vashon

Supplement