

Ethics & Elections Commission

Terry Thomas, Executive Director

Contact Information

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Department Description

The Seattle Ethics and Elections Commission (SEEC) helps foster public confidence in the integrity of Seattle City government by providing education, training, and enforcement of the City's Code of Ethics and Whistleblower Code. SEEC also promotes informed elections through education, training, and enforcement of the City's Elections Code and Election Pamphlet Code.

SEEC conducts ethics training for all City employees on request, and through the City's New Employee and New Supervisor Orientation programs. It also provides ethics training information for City employees via the City's intranet site.

SEEC issues advisory opinions regarding interpretations of the Code of Ethics and also investigates and rules upon alleged violations of the Code. Thirty years of formal advisory opinions, organized and searchable by topic, are available on SEEC's web site.

Through the Whistleblower Code, SEEC helps to protect an employee's right to report improper governmental action, and to be free from possible retaliation as a result of such reporting. SEEC either refers allegations of improper governmental actions to the appropriate agency or investigates those allegations itself.

SEEC fulfills the public's mandate of full campaign disclosure by training every organization required to report contributions and expenditures in proper reporting procedures, auditing every organization that reports, working with those organizations to correct errors, and making all campaign finance information available to the public. Since 1993, SEEC has made summary reports of campaign financing information available to the public. Since 1995, SEEC has published campaign financing information on its web site.

SEEC produces voters' pamphlets for City elections and ballot measures. It makes these pamphlets available in several languages and produces both an audio version and, with King County, a video version.

Policy and Program Changes

The 2003 Adopted and 2004 Endorsed Budget reduces the number of hours worked by the Commission's Training and Education Specialist by 20%. This action results in a reduction in the number of training sessions for City Employees on the Ethics Code from approximately 30 per year to approximately 24 per year. It also increases the Commission's response time for inquiries from an average of 24 hours to an average of up to five days.

The hours of the Commission's IT Professional are also reduced by 20%. This position is currently developing a software package to greatly enhance the ease with which campaigns file their reports. The software will also make campaign information available to the public almost as soon as it is submitted. Reducing the hours of this position results in delaying these improvements until after the 2003 election cycle. It also results in reducing the

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frequency of updating campaign finance information on the Commission's website from three times per week to once per week.

This budget reduces the time spent on Campaign Finance Audits by the Commission Office by 20%, from 70 hours per month to 56 hours per month. This action increases the amount of time it takes the office to review reports and notify interested parties of any discrepancies. Campaign treasurers may be impacted by having a shorter turn-around time to correct errors.

As the resources table below shows, the Ethics and Elections budget grew in absolute terms between 2002 and 2003 despite the budget cuts just described. The growth in the Commission's 2003 Budget is explained by the recognition that five Council positions will be up for election in 2003. The 2003 Budget includes \$120,000 designated for election expenses that were added to the 2002 budget and were not affected by adjustments made to develop the 2003 Budget.

City Council Budget Changes and Provisos

There are no Council changes or provisos.

| Resources | Summit Code | 2001 Actual | 2002 Adopted | 2003 Adopted | 2004 Endorsed |
|--|--------------------|--------------------|---------------------|---------------------|----------------------|
| Ethics and Elections Budget Control Level | | | | | |
| Appropriation | V1T00 | 566,988 | 473,178 | 553,000 | 567,000 |
| Department Total | | 566,988 | 473,178 | 553,000 | 567,000 |
| Department Full-time Equivalents Total* | | 5.50 | 5.50 | 5.20 | 5.20 |

**The department FTE total is provided for information only. All authorized positions are listed in Appendix A.*

Compliance, Training, and Public Information

Purpose Statement

The purpose of the Compliance, Training, and Public Information program is threefold: 1) to audit, investigate, and conduct hearings regarding non-compliance with, or violations of, Commission-administered ordinances; 2) to advise all City officials and employees of their obligations under Commission-administered ordinances; and 3) to publish and broadly distribute information about the City's ethical standards, City election campaigns, and campaign financial disclosure statements.

Program Summary

The Ethics and Elections Commission's contribution to the City's cost-cutting measures to contend with reduced City revenues results in service level reductions averaging 26%.

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| Resources | 2001 Actual | 2002 Adopted | 2003 Adopted | 2004 Endorsed |
|-------------------------------------|------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|
| General Subfund | 566,988 | 473,178 | 553,000 | 567,000 |
| Total | 566,988 | 473,178 | 553,000 | 567,000 |
| Full-time Equivalents Total* | 5.50 | 5.50 | 5.20 | 5.20 |

**The program FTE total is provided for information only. All authorized positions are listed in Appendix A.*