

Ethics and Elections Commission

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<http://www.seattle.gov/ethics/>

Department Overview

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 Ethics Code, Whistleblower Code, and lobbying regulations. It also promotes informed elections through education, training, and enforcement of the City's Elections Code. With the passage of [Initiative 122](#) in November 2015, the Commission now administers and funds the Democracy Voucher Program.

The Commission's work on behalf of the City of Seattle centers around five main lines of business:

Ethics Code: The Commission conducts ethics training for all City of Seattle employees upon 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. The Commission issues advisory opinions regarding interpretations of the Code of Ethics and also investigates and rules upon alleged violations of the Code. More than thirty years of formal advisory opinions are available on the Commission's website.

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

Elections Code: The Commission fulfills the public's mandate of full campaign disclosure by:

- training organizations required to report campaign contributions and expenditures in proper reporting procedures;
- auditing campaign reports;
- working with organizations to correct errors; and
- making all campaign finance information available to the public.

Since 1993, the Commission has made summary reports of campaign financing information available to the public, and since 1995, the Commission has published campaign financing information on its website. The Commission also produces a video voters' guide with King County and the Seattle Channel.

Lobbying Regulations: The Commission is charged with administering the City's lobbying regulations. The Commission collects and posts information so that residents know who is lobbying and how much is being spent on lobbying activities. The Commission also enforces compliance with the lobbying regulations.

Democracy Voucher Program: The Commission administers the Democracy Voucher Program which was approved with the passage of I-122 in November 2015. The program provides \$100 in vouchers to eligible Seattle residents so that they can contribute to candidates for City office who qualify to participate in the program.

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Budget Snapshot

	2023 Actuals	2024 Adopted	2025 Proposed	2026 Proposed
Department Support				
General Fund Support	1,329,232	1,303,105	1,469,527	1,544,691
Other Funding - Operating	3,821,824	3,002,768	10,262,810	3,097,544
Total Operations	5,151,055	4,305,873	11,732,337	4,642,235
Total Appropriations	5,151,055	4,305,873	11,732,337	4,642,235
Full-Time Equivalents Total*	9.40	9.40	9.40	9.40

** FTE totals are provided for informational purposes only. Changes in FTEs resulting from City Council or Human Resources Director actions outside of the budget process may not be detailed here*

Budget Overview

The 2025-2026 Proposed Budget for the Seattle Ethics and Elections Commission provides funding for the bi-annual spending increase associated with the Democracy Voucher program. Otherwise, the budget maintains investments at current service levels.

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Incremental Budget Changes

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	Dollars	FTE
2024 Adopted Budget	4,305,873	9.40
Baseline		
Bargained Annual Wage and Market Wage Increases to Base Budget	201,819	-
Citywide Adjustments for Standard Cost Changes	(29,877)	-
Democracy Voucher Revenue Adjustment	-	-
Proposed Operating		
Final Adjustments for Standard Cost Changes	(15,478)	-
Proposed Technical		
Align Labor Budget with Actuals	70,000	-
Bi-Annual Election Year Technical Adjustment	7,200,000	-
Technical Adjustment to Annual Contribution to/Use of Fund Balance	-	-
Total Incremental Changes	\$7,426,464	-
Total 2025 Proposed Budget	\$11,732,337	9.40

Description of Incremental Budget Changes

Baseline

Bargained Annual Wage and Market Wage Increases to Base Budget

Expenditures \$201,819

This centrally administered change adjusts appropriations to reflect the Annual Wage Increases and Market Adjustments, as outlined in the agreements between the City and the Coalition of Unions or other standalone Unions, for personnel costs included in this department's baseline budget. This includes increases to salary, FICA, Medicare, retirement, overtime and temporary labor.

Citywide Adjustments for Standard Cost Changes

Expenditures \$(29,877)

Citywide technical adjustments made in the baseline phase reflect changes to internal services costs, including rates from the Department of Finance & Administrative Services, Seattle Information Technology Department, Seattle Department of Human Resources, and for healthcare, retirement, and industrial insurance charges for the department. These adjustments reflect initial assumptions about these costs and inflators early in the budget process.

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Democracy Voucher Revenue Adjustment

Revenues -

The Democracy Voucher Program began receiving funding in 2016 and the ten-year initiative was funded through 2025. This technical adjustment removes funding for 2026.

Proposed Operating

Final Adjustments for Standard Cost Changes

Expenditures \$(15,478)

Citywide technical adjustments made in the proposed phase reflect changes to internal services costs, including rates from the Department of Finance & Administrative Services, Seattle Information Technology Department, Seattle Department of Human Resources, and for healthcare for the department. These adjustments reflect final decisions about these costs made during the Proposed Phase of the budget process.

Proposed Technical

Align Labor Budget with Actuals

Expenditures \$70,000

This item annualizes the 2024 Supplemental Budget provision of \$70,000 for Ethics and Elections Commission labor costs. This adjustment addresses shortfalls that were previously absorbed with vacancy savings and therefore never incorporated into the base budget, leading to year-end budget exceptions in both 2022 and 2023. This item aligns the budget with actual labor costs which have increased over the past several years due to reclassifications, raises, and higher-than-anticipated part-time labor costs.

Bi-Annual Election Year Technical Adjustment

Expenditures \$7,200,000

This bi-annual increase funds the Democracy Voucher Program for the 2025 election cycle. It provides a total of \$7.2 million in additional funding for candidate voucher payments. In 2025, the citywide races for Mayor, City Attorney and two Council positions will be on the ballot. This is one-time funding for 2025 only and is funded by existing and planned levy revenues.

Technical Adjustment to Annual Contribution to/Use of Fund Balance

Revenues \$7,260,042

This is a technical item to balance revenues and expenditures for the funds managed by this department.

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Expenditure Overview

	2023 Actuals	2024 Adopted	2025 Proposed	2026 Proposed
Appropriations				
ETH - BO-ET-V1T00 - Ethics and Elections				
00100 - General Fund	1,329,232	1,303,105	1,469,527	1,544,691
Total for BSL: BO-ET-V1T00	1,329,232	1,303,105	1,469,527	1,544,691
ETH - BO-ET-VT123 - Election Vouchers				
12300 - Election Vouchers Fund	3,821,824	3,002,768	10,262,810	3,097,544
Total for BSL: BO-ET-VT123	3,821,824	3,002,768	10,262,810	3,097,544
Department Total	5,151,055	4,305,873	11,732,337	4,642,235
Department Full-Time Equivalents Total*	9.40	9.40	9.40	9.40

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Budget Summary by Fund Ethics and Elections Commission

	2023 Actuals	2024 Adopted	2025 Proposed	2026 Proposed
00100 - General Fund	1,329,232	1,303,105	1,469,527	1,544,691
12300 - Election Vouchers Fund	3,821,824	3,002,768	10,262,810	3,097,544
Budget Totals for ETH	5,151,055	4,305,873	11,732,337	4,642,235

Revenue Overview

2025 Estimated Revenues

Account Code	Account Name	2023 Actuals	2024 Adopted	2025 Proposed	2026 Proposed
311010	Real & Personal Property Taxes	3,207,646	3,000,000	3,000,000	-
	Total Revenues for: 12300 - Election Vouchers Fund	3,207,646	3,000,000	3,000,000	-
400000	Use of/Contribution to Fund Balance	614,178	2,768	7,262,810	3,097,544
	Total Resources for:12300 - Election Vouchers Fund	3,821,824	3,002,768	10,262,810	3,097,544
	Total ETH Resources	3,821,824	3,002,768	10,262,810	3,097,544

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Appropriations by Budget Summary Level and Program

ETH - BO-ET-V1T00 - Ethics and Elections

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

Program Expenditures	2023	2024	2025	2026
	Actuals	Adopted	Proposed	Proposed
Ethics and Elections	1,329,232	1,303,105	1,469,527	1,544,691
Total	1,329,232	1,303,105	1,469,527	1,544,691
Full-time Equivalents Total*	5.90	5.90	5.90	5.90

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ETH - BO-ET-VT123 - Election Vouchers

The purpose of the Election Voucher Budget Summary Level is to pay costs associated with implementing, maintaining and funding a program for providing one hundred dollars in vouchers to eligible Seattle residents that they can contribute to candidates for City office who qualify to participate in the Election Voucher program enacted by voters in November 2015.

Program Expenditures	2023	2024	2025	2026
	Actuals	Adopted	Proposed	Proposed
Election Vouchers	3,821,824	3,002,768	10,262,810	3,097,544
Total	3,821,824	3,002,768	10,262,810	3,097,544
Full-time Equivalents Total*	3.50	3.50	3.50	3.50

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