

Ethics and Elections Commission

Wayne Barnett, Executive Director

(206) 684-8500

<https://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 and 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.

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 that are 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 and renewed with the passage of Seattle Proposition 1 in August 2025. The program provides 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

	2025 Actuals	2026 Adopted	2027 Proposed	2028 Proposed
Department Support				
General Fund Support	1,502,236	1,533,091	1,548,761	1,575,649
Other Funding - Operating	5,647,539	3,091,560	3,102,417	3,114,823
Total Operations	7,149,775	4,624,652	4,651,178	4,690,472
Total Appropriations	7,149,775	4,624,652	4,651,178	4,690,472
Full-Time Equivalents Total*	9.40	9.40	9.80	9.80

** 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 2027-2028 Proposed Budget for the Seattle Ethics and Elections Commission maintains investments at current service levels. The appropriations from the Election Voucher Fund vary with the election cycle.

The budget incorporates a change made in the 2026 Mid-Year Supplemental Budget Ordinance (Ordinance 127496) that converts a part-time position to full-time in support of the Democracy Voucher Program.

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Incremental Budget Changes

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	Dollars	FTE
2026 Adopted Budget	4,624,652	9.40
Baseline		
Citywide Adjustments for Standard Cost Changes	39,400	-
Reduce SCERS Retirement Contribution Rate	(12,874)	-
Proposed Technical		
Fund Balancing Entry	-	-
Ongoing Changes from Current Year Legislation	-	0.40
Total Incremental Changes	\$26,526	0.40
Total 2027 Proposed Budget	\$4,651,178	9.80

Description of Incremental Budget Changes

Baseline

Citywide Adjustments for Standard Cost Changes

Expenditures \$39,400

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 and other central cost factors. These adjustments reflect initial assumptions about these costs and inflators early in the budget process. In 2028, this item is \$78,000.

Reduce SCERS Retirement Contribution Rate

Expenditures \$(12,874)

The City's employee retirement system, the Seattle City Employees Retirement System (SCERS), is a defined benefit pension program funded by a combination of salary-based employer (i.e., the City) and employee contributions, and investment earnings. Based on the updated actuarial valuation for 2026, this item reduces the employer contribution rate from the endorsed rate of 15.06% to the SCERS minimum actuarial required rate of 13.48% for 2027 and 13.52% for 2028.

Proposed Technical

Fund Balancing Entry

Revenues \$(1,339,083)

This is a technical item to record a fund balancing entry for the Election Vouchers Fund, which is managed by the Ethics and Elections Commission.

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Ongoing Changes from Current Year Legislation

Position Allocation	0.40
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This change includes ongoing or position changes resulting from current year legislation passed by City Council in 2026. This item increases a part-time position to full-time consistent with Ordinance 127496, the Mid-Year Supplemental Budget Ordinance. The position supports the increased work associated with the Democracy Voucher Program.

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Expenditure Overview

	2025 Actuals	2026 Adopted	2027 Proposed	2028 Proposed
Appropriations				
ETH - BO-ET-V1T00 - Ethics and Elections				
00100 - General Fund	1,502,236	1,533,091	1,548,761	1,575,649
Total for BSL: BO-ET-V1T00	1,502,236	1,533,091	1,548,761	1,575,649
ETH - BO-ET-VT123 - Election Vouchers				
12300 - Election Vouchers Fund	5,647,539	3,091,560	3,102,417	3,114,823
Total for BSL: BO-ET-VT123	5,647,539	3,091,560	3,102,417	3,114,823
Department Total	7,149,775	4,624,652	4,651,178	4,690,472
Department Full-Time Equivalents Total*	9.40	9.40	9.80	9.80

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Budget Summary by Fund Ethics and Elections Commission

	2025 Actuals	2026 Adopted	2027 Proposed	2028 Proposed
00100 - General Fund	1,502,236	1,533,091	1,548,761	1,575,649
12300 - Election Vouchers Fund	5,647,539	3,091,560	3,102,417	3,114,823
Budget Totals for ETH	7,149,775	4,624,652	4,651,178	4,690,472

Revenue Overview

2027 Estimated Revenues

Account Code	Account Name	2025 Actuals	2026 Adopted	2027 Proposed	2028 Proposed
311010	Real & Personal Property Taxes	2,988,747	4,441,500	4,441,500	4,441,500
Total Revenues for: 12300 - Election Vouchers Fund		2,988,747	4,441,500	4,441,500	4,441,500
400000	Use of/Contribution to Fund Balance	-	(1,349,940)	(1,339,083)	(1,326,677)
Total Resources for: 12300 - Election Vouchers Fund		2,988,747	3,091,560	3,102,417	3,114,823
Total ETH Resources		2,988,747	3,091,560	3,102,417	3,114,823

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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	2025 Actuals	2026 Adopted	2027 Proposed	2028 Proposed
Ethics and Elections	1,502,236	1,533,091	1,548,761	1,575,649
Total	1,502,236	1,533,091	1,548,761	1,575,649
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 vouchers to eligible Seattle residents that they can use to contribute to candidates for City office who qualify to participate in the Election Voucher program.

Program Expenditures	2025 Actuals	2026 Adopted	2027 Proposed	2028 Proposed
Election Vouchers	5,647,539	3,091,560	3,102,417	3,114,823
Total	5,647,539	3,091,560	3,102,417	3,114,823
Full-time Equivalents Total*	3.50	3.50	3.90	3.90

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