



KING COUNTY AUDITOR'S OFFICE

AUGUST 2, 2021

Audit Follow-up on King County Elections Could Further Reduce Risks and Barriers to Voting

King County Elections has implemented all of our recommendations, making an already secure ballot processing system even more impervious to potential abuse. Since our follow-up in 2019, Elections has added technological safeguards that will detect and block any attempts at a theoretical avenue for voter fraud. Elections has continued to monitor and update its comprehensive risk management strategy, trained its staff to report on any suspicious activity, and tightened procedures to ensure that staff do not have any opportunities to improperly write on ballots. Elections has also implemented policies that require secondary review for rejected challenge letter returns, further safeguarding the ability for all eligible voters to be able to cast their votes.

Of the 14 audit recommendations:

	13 DONE		0 PROGRESS		0 OPEN		1 CLOSED
Fully implemented Auditor will no longer monitor.	Partially implemented Auditor will continue to monitor.	Remain unresolved Auditor will continue to monitor.	No longer applicable Auditor will no longer monitor.				

Please see details below for implementation status of each recommendation.

Recommendation 1

DONE



King County Elections should develop, document, and implement a comprehensive risk management strategy, including regular risk assessment, risk mitigation, and monitoring and review of these processes.

STATUS UPDATE: At the time of the prior follow-up in 2019, King County Elections had completed a risk appetite exercise and conducted a risk profile assessment. Since that time, Elections has completed its risk profile, which includes an assessment of the likelihood and severity of risks, steps that Elections can take to mitigate those risks, and a staff person assigned to lead those efforts. Elections leadership has established a process to monitor these risks and re-evaluate the risk management strategy twice a year.

IMPACT: By implementing this comprehensive risk management strategy, Elections is better able to prepare and mitigate risks before they occur. Elections staff stated that the work done to proactively identify risks and strategies helped the department successfully navigate elections conducted during the 2020 pandemic, when several risks occurred simultaneously.

Recommendation 2

DONE



King County Elections should develop, document, and implement recurring training for full-time and temporary employees on the criminal penalties for intentional elections tampering and how to detect and report these activities.

STATUS UPDATE: At the time of the prior follow-up in 2019, King County Elections trained its employees on the criminal penalties for tampering. Since that time, Elections has also incorporated a "See Something, Say Something" element into its trainings, directing employees to report any suspicious behaviors to supervisors.

IMPACT: By training employees to watch for any suspicious behavior, Elections has strengthened its existing internal control of using two people to perform sensitive ballot processing tasks.

Recommendation 3

On August 2, 2019

DONE



Recommendation 4

DONE



King County Elections should develop, document, and implement procedures to ensure that there is a review process when a single person determines whether non-standard items received during an election contain a ballot or verify a voter's identity.

STATUS UPDATE: At the time of the prior follow-up in 2019, King County Elections had developed and implemented written policies that require a second-level review of all materials received by mail. Since that time, Elections has also instituted policies requiring that a second employee review

any challenge letter where the first employee determines that the signature on the challenge letter does not confirm the voter’s identity and a signature issue will not be cured.

IMPACT: These changes ensure that no single employee determination can invalidate a ballot without review and concurrence by a second employee. This in turn should increase voters’ confidence that their ballots will be counted.

Recommendation 5

DONE



King County Elections should develop, document, and implement procedures to ensure that staff do not have opportunities to write directly on a ballot in a way that could alter a vote without being detected.

STATUS UPDATE: King County Elections policies require almost all employees who handle ballots to work in teams of two. The only exception is scanning operators, who handle ballots as a group in a video-recorded area under the watch of a supervisor, but not in teams of two due to space limitations at the scanning machines. Since our prior follow-up in 2019, Elections has updated its scanning procedures so that these employees do not have pens when ballots are being handled. Elections has developed a policy where a pen is kept in a receptacle until the ballots have been secured inside a box. This allows employees to write the number of ballots on the outside of the box without being able to mark on the ballots themselves.

IMPACT: By tightening its internal controls around the use of pens, Elections has made it extremely difficult for any employee to write on a ballot without being detected. This practice further ensures that all votes will be counted as cast.

Recommendation 6

On August 2, 2019

DONE



Recommendation 7

On August 2, 2019

DONE



Recommendation 8

On August 2, 2019

DONE



Recommendation 9

On August 2, 2019

DONE



Recommendation 10

DONE



King County Elections should record and monitor the number of ballots it receives that are signed with a mark and two witnesses and analyze this data to set benchmarks and help detect potential abuse.

STATUS UPDATE: Since the prior follow-up, King County Elections has put in place technological safeguards at multiple points during the process that would detect any potential abuse of ballots signed with a mark and two witnesses. There is no evidence that any person has ever attempted to exploit this potential avenue for abuse, but these safeguards will block their ability to do so and immediately alert Elections staff.

IMPACT: King County Elections has gone above and beyond our recommendation in order to ensure that any potential voter fraud is both exceedingly difficult and easily detectable.

Recommendation 11

On August 2, 2019

DONE



Recommendation 12

On August 2, 2019

DONE



Recommendation 13

On August 2, 2019

DONE



Recommendation 14

On August 2, 2019

CLOSED



Peter Heineccius conducted this review. If you have any questions or would like more information, please contact the King County Auditor's Office at KCAO@KingCounty.gov or 206-477-1033.