

Archived: Thursday, January 7, 2021 4:12:17 PM

From: [John Norris](#)

Sent: Thursday, January 7, 2021 11:25:25 AM

To: [Will Hall](#); [Keith Scully](#)

Cc: [Debbie Tarry](#); [Pollie McCloskey](#); [Christina Arcidy](#); [Sara Lane](#); [Margaret King](#); [Eric Bratton](#); [Heidi Costello](#)

Subject: Effect of Voter Pamphlets on Potential Voter Turnout

Response requested: No

Sensitivity: Normal

Will and Keith,

At our Mayor/Deputy Mayor meeting on Monday, a question was posed by the Mayor whether research/data exists that would show that having a voter's pamphlet may increase voter turnout. This was asked in the context of the parks bond ballot measure that Council will be discussing at your meeting next Monday and potentially taking action on on January 25th. Staff reached out the City's Bond Council, King County Elections and the Municipal Services Research Center (MRSC) to see if they had any insight into this question.

While Bond Council, the City' Financial Advisor and King County elections staff responded that they haven't done or seen any research on whether or not a Voters' Pamphlet impacts voter turnout, MRSC did provide multiple research articles on this topic (email included below). The conclusion from MRSC is that, *"other things being equal, making more information available to voters would arguably be a net positive for participation"*.

Please let me know if you have any questions about this. We will also include this response in the Green Folder for Council for Monday night's discussion. Thanks.

John

John Norris

Assistant City Manager | City of Shoreline
17500 Midvale Avenue N, Shoreline, WA 98133
Pronouns: he/him
☎ (206) 801-2212 | www.shorelinewa.gov



NOTICE OF PUBLIC DISCLOSURE: This email account is public domain. Any correspondence from or to this email account may be a public record. Accordingly, this email, in whole or in part, may be subject to disclosure pursuant to RCW 42.56, regardless of any claim of confidentiality or privilege asserted by an external party.

From: Byron Katsuyama <bkatsuyama@mrsc.org>

Sent: Wednesday, January 6, 2021 11:33 PM

To: John Norris <jnorris@shorelinewa.gov>

Subject: [EXTERNAL] MRSC Research Request - Voter Pamphlets

CAUTION: This email originated from outside of the City of Shoreline. Do not click links or open attachments unless you recognize the sender and know the content is safe.

John,

This in response to your inquiry asking if there is any research or information suggesting that having a voters' pamphlet increases voter turnout. I found the following research supporting the use of voters' pamphlets or guides to enhance voter participation and engagement:

- [Engaging New Voters - The Impact of Nonprofit Voter Outreach on Client and Community Turnout](#), Nonprofit VOTE (study on nonpartisan voter turnout groups found that groups who provided information around voting including voter guides, ballot measure informational sheets, etc. were more effective at getting people out to vote)
- [Voter Pamphlets: The Next Best Step in Election Reform](#), Journal of Legislation, January 2002 ("The article will demonstrate that state-produced voter pamphlets provide an efficient and low-cost mechanism that can dramatically increase the quantity and quality of voter participation.")
- [The Impact of Voter's Guides on Responsiveness](#), MIT Student, Final Term Paper, December 2013 (references to multiple studies attesting to the high value that voters place on pamphlets)
- [Repairing Oklahoma's Broken Democracy](#), Oklahoma Policy Institute, December 2014 (recommending the publication and distribution of voter pamphlets among other measures to "to create a better informed and more highly engaged electorate")
- [Reducing the Voter Turnout Gap in San Francisco](#), Emma Fernandez, Goldman School of Public Policy, University of California Berkeley, Prepared for the San Francisco Elections Commission, May 2019 (includes recommendations for improving voter pamphlet messaging)

I don't think you have to be a political scientist to conclude that, other things being equal, making more information available to voters would arguably be a net positive for participation. Some of these studies caution that the quality of the messaging can make a big difference in the perceived value of a voters' guide. Well-crafted voters' guides can be particularly helpful when ballot measures involve complex issues that might otherwise prompt some voters to disengage. The report by Emma Fernandez offers some tips for improving the quality and effectiveness of voter pamphlet messaging.

It may also be worth reviewing the county's pamphlet guidelines in assessing the value of publishing a local voters' pamphlet for a given ballot measure. King County's [2021 Jurisdiction Manual](#) requires the formation of pro con committees to develop statements in favor and opposition to ballot measures. The associated neutral explanatory statements and the pro and con statements are subject to certain word limit and formatting rules. For example, according to King County Jurisdiction Manual explanatory statements are limited to 250 words and no more than five paragraphs, while pro and con statements are limited to 200 words and no more than four paragraphs. Rebuttal statements are limited to 75 words and no more than two paragraphs.

I hope this information will be of assistance.

Byron Katsuyama

Public Policy and Management Consultant

206.625.1300 x134

[MRSC](#) Empowering local government to better serve their communities