

**King County Records and Elections
Voluntary Vote by Mail Conversion: 2006
A Joint Venture: The Connections Group & Rockey Hill and Knowlton**

August 29, 2006

Overview

With the announcement that King County Elections will move to all Vote by Mail (VBM) in the near future, there are many voters likely to be confused that it will go into effect this year – before the VBM is in place. There are some who have already inquired as to whether a ballot will be sent to them this year; still others are likely not to vote awaiting a ballot by mail. In addition, there are many poll voters who remain unenthusiastic about the transition to mandatory VBM. And, other voters believe they have lived through too many changes in the elections system in recent years (such as the “pick a party” primary still controversial and in court as recently as this month). Voters learned that the primary is moving from September to August next year, and those who are disabled, blind and hearing impaired are finding out how they can vote more easily on new machines made for them.

They need reassurance of what really is happening.

Through this continual era of change, we propose to focus on one important message: that automatic Vote by Mail doesn’t start this fall, and if you vote at the polls, you should try voting by mail which can be done very easily in the next month. Our tag line: “You should try it, you’ll like it.”

Analysis

In the past two years, The Connections Group and Rockey Hill and Knowlton have completed a series of focus groups, asking voters what they thought about the move to Vote by Mail. We researched young and older voters, new registrants, poll voters, recent and longtime Vote by Mail. We tested voters by age, party, geographic location and gender in King County. We found the most receptive groups to all voting by mail were:

- Poll voters under the age of 45 from across the County
- First time voters
- Young people
- Women, especially single women, from across the County

We also asked voters where they received the information they trust when it comes to news, elections or politics. When we asked where they got this information, they said:

- Friends, or just normal people who nobody knows but are real people
- Commercial radio stations such as KIRO, KVI, and 99.9 FM

- National public radio stations like KPLU and KUOW
- Newspaper, but especially the web pages of the newspapers
- Veteran Groups, League of Women Voters
- Former Governors Dan Evans & Gary Locke, University Presidents

When it comes to the messages that resonate with the voters who are currently poll voters, we explored what it would take to convert these voters to Vote by Mail. They want us to:

- Explain how easy it is and that it saves each voter time
- You will be able to track your ballot through all the stages of it being counted
- Let voters know how many people have, and are converting, to VBM
- It saves gas (especially for those living in rural King County)
- Your vote will be handled safely, and in fact, if everyone votes by mail, then we will only need one system (VBM) of voting – not two like we have now (poll and VBM)
- It will cost us less in the long run
- Many other counties have already made the switch

Our voter focus groups revealed many concerns as well. Poll voters recommended:

- If the county was going to make the switch then they needed to start informing voters ASAP
- Creating an accurate system for voters to trace and verify their ballot was received
- Notifying voters through call backs, or e-mails that ballots were mailed and received
- KCRE continue cleaning the voter rolls
- Voter outreach needs to include all of King County, not just Seattle proper
- The process needs to be extremely transparent
- Regional polling locations need to remain visible, well advertised and accessible

The Consultant Team

The Connections Group and Rockey Hill & Knowlton have now partnered for the past three years to assist King County Records and Elections in easing the mandated change on our record-setting number of voters. Cathy Allen, the principal of The Connections Group, and Randy Pepple of Rockey Hill & Knowlton, have served as a bi-partisan team for KCRE, helping the agency craft strategy for over a dozen different changes. This includes the “pick a party” primary change, the improvements mandated after the controversial 2004 Governor’s elections, the HAVA changes and new voting machines, and more accessibility for people whose first language is not English.

The Connections Group, a county-certified WMBE business, would be the lead contractor. In this past year, TCG/RH&K has completed five focus groups, analyses and proposed strategy recommendations for a voluntary vote by mail transition of poll voters. We currently have an active contract with KCRE through the end of this fiscal year.

In addition to the principals, The Connections Group will include Stanley Tsao, Robert Gara and Linda Kelly who have been quality control, account executive and chief administrators on all past KCRE contracts, and Rockey Hill & Knowlton will again include Scott Whiteaker and will add Mikki Choman.

Goals

The KCRE Proposed Voluntary Vote by Mail Plan for 2006 would feature four primary priorities:

1. Reassure poll voters that if they haven't converted to VBM, they should go to their poll locations and continue voting at their local precinct-designated polling place.
2. Urge Vote by Mail voters to consider transferring their voting status from poll to vote by mail for the November general election, which can be done in person, by mail, at special events or online. If they tried this mailing approach, our research tells us many would like it.
3. Convey the many advantages to having more people vote by mail: it simplifies the two different processes to one, making elections more efficient; it saves individuals time and expensive gas; and it will make the total conversion next year smoother. This helps ease the change, and hopefully reduces the opposition to the conversion from staunchly-entrenched poll voters.
4. Continue to re-enforce the improvements and voter safeguards now in place at KCRE, thus building the confidence and voter acceptance of changes that have been legislated, regulated, recommended or changed for good administrative reasons.

Campaign Plan

The Connections Group and Rockey Hill & Knowlton are proposing a five-part plan to reach the voters we believe might voluntarily consider changing their registration from poll voters to vote by mail.

In reviewing our own research, and applying it to the basic rule of successful campaigns, we believe we will need the right message ("try it, you might like vote by mail"), going to about 100,000 poll voters from September 20th to October 13th, five times in a variety of ways. Message would inform voters that this change would start beginning in the November general election.

We believe the target will include about 100,000 good voters (voters who traditionally vote in two out of four recent primary and general elections). These will be predominately young, new to the area, women and independent voters who vote frequently. We believe we need to reach these voters at least five times.

We suggest five separate approaches, all discussed and recommended by our focus groups.

1. The first is a person-to-person approach. We will create "The Ambassadors Program", the recruiting, training, supervising, and coordinating about 100 people to reach out to poll voters, asking these voters if they want to convert to VBM. We will start by reaching them at the polls themselves (in the primary on September 19th) and at special events thereafter through October 13th. These might include Republican and Democratic district meetings, candidate and initiative events, and other places where poll voters might be found in greater numbers.
2. The second priority will be radio advertising, especially those stations whose target audience is younger (under 45), women, and Independent voters. We will also devise an ad buy and sponsorship strategy to get our message on both commercial and public radio stations.
3. Our third priority will be banner ads on the web sites of the local newspapers. Not only did our focus groups indicate a changing demographic reading the newspapers online, the local papers have very credible studies detailing how the younger voters are very

- attracted to banner ads. Indeed this year will double the campaign ads purchased for local newspaper web sites.
4. Fourth, we suggest a direct mail piece be sent to our target from across King County with a VBM conversion form attached (that can be mailed back to KCRE). This will explain, recommend and help voters fill out and convert to a mail ballot process.
 5. And finally, we suggest an aggressive media campaign to attract media coverage of primary election conversion to VBM, radio talk show discussions, special features of VIP's and common folk who have made the conversion to vote by mail.

Proposed Budget	Connections	RH&K
Outreach/Voter Education – \$161,500		
Consulting	\$25,000	\$25,000
Strategy		
Analysis		
Targeting		
Message Development		
Meetings		
Securing VIP's, Talents		
 Media Program		 \$20,000
Creating Events		
Building Momentum with columnists, feature writers		
Radio Talk Shows		
Editorial Board coordination		
 The Ambassador Program		
Primary Election Event	\$25,000	
Post-primary events, booths, canvassing	\$ 7,500	
Flyer Production & Distribution	\$ 5,000	
T-Shirt Production	\$ 2,000	
Materials	\$ 2,000	
 Direct Mail Printing/Labeling	 \$50,000	
Renton Printery		
 Broadcast/Banner Paid Media – \$120,000		
Broadcast Ad time buys		\$75,000
Banner Ad Placement	\$45,000	
 Material Design & Broadcast Ad Development – \$34,000		
(Lori Wardian, Design)		
Print Mailer Design (\$4,000)		
Flyers Design (\$2,500)		
T-Shirts Design & Production (\$2,500)		
Banner Ad Design (\$2,500)		
Other Collateral material (\$10,000)		
(Pure Audio Radio Production)		
Radio Spot Production, Talent, Music, Post production (\$12,500)		
 TOTAL BUDGET: VOLUNTARY VOTE BY MAIL PLAN 2006: \$315,500		



Invoice Schedule

Budget Category:		Budget	8-Sep	15-Oct	15-Nov
Outreach/Voter Education	(TCG/RHK)	\$50,000		\$25,000	\$25,000
Media Program	(RHK)	\$20,000		\$10,000	\$10,000
Ambassador Program	(TCG)	\$41,500	\$9,000	\$25,000	\$7,500
Direct Mail	(TCG)	\$50,000	\$50,000		
Broadcast Ads	(RHK)	\$75,000	\$75,000		
Banner Ads	(TCG)	\$45,000	\$45,000		
Material Design and Production	(TCG)	\$34,000		\$24,000	\$10,000
Total Contract		\$315,500	\$179,000	\$84,000	\$52,500