



# Memorandum

**TO:** HONORABLE MAYOR AND  
CITY COUNCIL

**FROM:** Lee Wilcox  
Rosario Neaves

**SUBJECT:** 2020 Election Outreach

**DATE:** May 20, 2019

Approved

Date

5/20/19

## BACKGROUND

On March 3, 2020, the City of San José will hold primary elections in Council Districts 2, 4, 6, 8, and 10 in conjunction with the California presidential primary. In addition, voters will also take action on Statewide offices and measures, as well citywide measures if placed on the ballot by the Council.

On April 16, 2019, the City Council approved a memorandum from Mayor Liccardo and Vice Mayor Jones directing the City Manager and City Clerk to explore means to increase voter turnout and voter registration for every election for every seat on the City Council, particularly in underrepresented communities.

In 2020, the County of Santa Clara (County) will implement the Voter's Choice Act<sup>1</sup>, with a goal of making it easier for all voters to cast their ballot. San José voters will see extensive changes in where, when, and how they can vote as Santa Clara County implements the Voter's Choice Act for the Presidential primary and general elections.

The changes will also impact the San José city elections, which are held concurrently with the statewide elections. They include:

- Instead of having to request a vote-by-mail ballot, ALL registered voters in the County will automatically receive a mail ballot, and postage will be pre-paid.
- Ballot drop-off locations will be increased countywide.
- Instead of having to vote at a traditional neighborhood polling place, voters will be able to vote at ANY voting center in the County. The voting centers will have new voting machines and ballots can be provided on demand.
- Voting centers will be open for early voting. Approximately 20 voting centers will be open for 11 days, including Election Day. Approximately 100 voting centers will be open

<sup>1</sup> California Voter's Choice Act: <https://www.sos.ca.gov/elections/voters-choice-act/>

for four days, the Saturday, Sunday, and Monday before Election Day, as well as Election Day.

- Voters may register to vote on the spot at the voting centers and cast a conditional ballot.
- The County is required to appoint a Language Accessibility Advisory Committee and a Voter Accessibility Advisory Committee to advise on a variety of access and equity issues.

The goal of the Voter's Choice Act is to make it easier to vote and to improve access to voting. According to preliminary research led by the University of San Diego, the five California counties that implemented the Voter's Choice Act in 2018 saw "a modest but measurable increase" in turnout, including increases of 2 percent to 7 percent among young voters, Latinos, and Asian Americans<sup>2</sup>.

The County is planning extensive media and community outreach around Voter Choice Act implementation and has expressed great interest in partnering with the City on outreach efforts. City staff has shared the memorandum from the Mayor and Vice Mayor and learned that the Council direction dovetails well with the County's existing work.

The County shared three areas where City assistance is most needed:

1. Facilities – The County has need for accessible sites that can be used as voting centers. Both the Library and Parks, Recreation and Neighborhood Services Departments are working with the Registrar of Voters to assist with this effort.
2. Volunteers – The County needs people to serve as poll workers/election officers on many more days this year, not just Election Day. The Administration is exploring opportunities for City employees to serve in voting centers, much as the County allows its employees to do. However, this approach may raise meet-and-confer issues with the City's bargaining groups.
3. Grassroots Outreach – There is an existing effort, led by the Silicon Valley Community Foundation, to provide grant funding for voter registration and turnout activities to local community-based organizations. It is important to note that many trusted nonprofit and grassroots organizations in San José are simultaneously working on an outreach campaign to encourage all residents to participate in the 2020 U.S. Census. The Administration is concerned that some organizations may not have capacity to take on additional grassroots organizing around the March 3, 2020 primary, as the 2020 U.S. Census peak work will take place between January and July of 2020. Still, targeted funding could potentially increase outreach in San José neighborhoods.

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<sup>2</sup> Eric McGhee, Mindy Romero, Laura Daly, and Thad Kousser, "New Electorate Study: How Did the Voter's Choice Act Affect Turnout in 2018?" <https://img1.wsimg.com/blobby/go/c92d7bc9-677d-4ebb-a41a-e1191fcd0cfa/downloads/Research%20Brief%20-%20How%20Did%20the%20VCA%20Affect%20Turnou.pdf?ver=1554988632732>

The Administration has also reached out to several universities with expertise in voter engagement, messaging, and turnout. The goal is to vet the potential project and develop it in a way that is measurable and can contribute to the body of knowledge around voter turnout.

One challenge is that while voter turnout is likely to increase due to Voter's Choice Act implementation and interest in the Presidential primary and general election, San José regularly experiences voter roll off of 4 to 10 percentage points. Over the past four election cycles, thousands of voters turned out and cast a ballot, but did not cast a vote in one of the City elections, as shown in the tables below. Voter turnout in local elections is important—thus ensuring voters complete the local sections is an important factor that the Administration will focus on and measure.

### San José Voter Roll Off 2016 & 2018

<b>June 7, 2016 Primary Election</b>			
<i>Citywide Election</i>			
	<b>Registration</b>	<b>Ballots Cast</b>	<b>Turnout</b>
City of San José Overall	402,985	212,897	52.8%
Measure B - Sales Tax	402,985	197,084	48.9%
Measure C - Marijuana Initiative	402,985	193,125	47.9%
<i>District Elections</i>			
	<b>Registration</b>	<b>Ballots Cast</b>	<b>Turnout</b>
District 2 Overall	40,705	21,136	51.9%
District 2 Primary	40,705	18,117	44.5%
District 4 Overall	39,703	20,334	51.2%
District 4 Primary	39,703	17,350	43.7%
District 6 Overall	46,757	27,337	58.5%
District 6 Primary	46,757	23,371	50.0%
District 8 Overall	44,641	23,540	52.7%
District 8 Primary	44,641	20,803	46.6%
District 10 Overall	46,863	25,228	53.8%
District 10 Primary	46,863	21,009	44.8%

<b>November 8, 2016 General Election</b>			
<i>Citywide Election</i>			
	<b>Registration</b>	<b>Ballots Cast</b>	<b>Turnout</b>
City of San José Overall	448,485	360,949	80.5%
Measure E – Opportunity to Work	448,485	316,897	70.6%
Measure F – Pension Agreement	448,485	309,047	68.9%
Measure G – Business Tax	448,485	311,278	69.4%
<i>District Elections</i>			
	<b>Registration</b>	<b>Ballots Cast</b>	<b>Turnout</b>
District 2 Overall	45,572	37,023	81.2%
District 2 Runoff	45,572	32,070	70.3%
District 6 Overall	51,838	43,719	84.3%
District 6 Runoff	51,838	37,810	72.9%
District 8 Overall	49,241	40,014	81.3%
District 8 Runoff	49,241	34,419	69.9%

<b>June 7, 2018 Primary Election</b>			
<i>Citywide Election</i>			
	<b>Registration</b>	<b>Ballots Cast</b>	<b>Turnout</b>
City of San José Overall	434,008	177,979	41.0%
Mayor of San José	434,008	159,346	36.7%
Measure B - Evergreen Initiative	434,008	168,142	38.7%
Measure C - Urban Sprawl	434,008	163,140	37.6%
2018 Primary Overall	434,008	177,979	41.0%
<i>District Elections</i>			
	<b>Registration</b>	<b>Ballots Cast</b>	<b>Turnout</b>
District 1 Overall	40,753	18,117	44.5%
District 1 Primary	40,753	12,440	30.5%
District 3 Overall	39,111	13,399	34.3%
District 3 Primary	39,111	10,077	25.8%
District 5 Overall	33,440	11,124	33.3%
District 5 Primary	33,440	9,729	29.1%
District 7 Overall	36,682	12,821	35.0%
District 7 Primary	36,682	11,778	32.1%
District 9 Overall	48,456	23,220	47.9%
District 9 Primary	48,456	20,204	41.7%

<b>November 6, 2018 Election</b>			
<i>Citywide Election</i>			
	<b>Registration</b>	<b>Ballots Cast</b>	<b>Turnout</b>
2018 Primary Overall	454,312	305,185	67.2%
Measure S - Construction Contracts	454,312	274,801	60.5%
Measure T - Public Safety Bond	454,312	277,797	61.1%
Measure U - Council Salary Adjustments	454,312	270,280	59.5%
Measure V - Affordable Housing Bond	454,312	277,341	61.0%
<i>District Elections</i>			
	<b>Registration</b>	<b>Ballots Cast</b>	<b>Turnout</b>
District 7 Overall	38,671	22,492	58.2%
District 7 Primary	38,671	20,617	53.3%
District 9 Overall	50,048	37,449	74.8%
District 9 Primary	50,048	31,344	62.6%

## **ANALYSIS**

Per Council direction, the Administration is returning to Council with an effort to improve and measure voter turnout during the March 2020 election. If the funding outlined in the table below is appropriated by Council, the below work plan developed by the Administration can be implemented this Fall. As this work is not included in the 2019-2020 Proposed Budget, the Council would need to allocate funding from the Essential Services Reserve or other eligible source to implement this work plan.

### *Research*

In addition to communication with the County, review of past City election data, and a literature review, the Administration has reached out to several universities with expertise in voter engagement and turnout to further develop and measure voter outreach. Preliminary conversations with these experts informed this analysis.

### *Outreach Plan*

Following is an overview of the scope of the Administration's proposed objectives and outreach strategy for the 2020 March primary election.

The objectives of the Administration's outreach would be to measure how registration, overall turnout, and voter roll off improve. To accomplish this, the Administration proposes to identify the 40 lowest-turnout precincts in San José and select 20 of them at random for outreach in addition to the countywide outreach around the Voter's Choice Act. Twenty precincts will be randomly selected to serve as a control group, allowing staff to measure the impact of the targeted outreach activities. The Administration's approach would be scientifically sound, and focus on measuring voter registration, overall turnout, and roll off – particularly compared with the 20 control group precincts and those for the March 2020 election. This approach will support and supplement the County's outreach, and the primary focus will be grassroots and neighborhood-oriented activities.

It is important to note any City-funded outreach efforts would be strictly nonpartisan and would not advocate any positions or take any action beyond informing residents how, when, and where to register to vote, cast a ballot, and cast a vote for City issues and of the importance of being an informed and engaged voter.

The November 2020 general election will fall in the 2020-2021 fiscal year, and the Administration will bring forward a proposal based on lessons learned from any outreach activities that are funded in 2019-2020.

#### *Budget*

This memorandum provides preliminary budget estimates for conducting the outreach to increase voter turnout and voter registration as outlined in the memorandum from the Mayor and Vice Mayor and based on staff analysis. The expenditure plan outlined below is preliminary and would be further refined following additional collaboration with the County and other funders. The goal would be to not duplicate efforts, but to enhance and connect with a scientific sample of San José's hard-to-reach voters.

Based on staff's experience with outreach around the upcoming Census, the Administration envisions funding two full-time equivalent (FTE) staff to manage the Election Outreach Project: 1.0 FTE Project Lead supported by 1.0 FTE staff member. These individuals would engage directly in education and outreach and be responsible for coordinating and tracking the outreach activities adopted by Council. In addition, they would identify, facilitate, and track pro bono services. They would also develop contracts, write memoranda, administer grants, and oversee the various partnerships necessary to facilitate an effective outreach campaign.

The estimated cost for this staffing is \$225,000. Additional costs, such as media buys and citywide banners, are outlined below. This budget represents a standard outreach program, however, additional funding would increase the frequency and saturation of outreach. This does not include potential costs of an employee volunteer program or lost revenues should the City subsidize rental of library or community center space for the County to use as voting centers.

<b>Outreach Activity</b>	<b>Estimated Cost</b>
1. Research & Outreach Development	\$ 60,000
2. Grants to community-based organizations for grassroots mobilization	\$ 300,000
3. Neighborhood-based advertising - 300 Street Banners, installed twice, with a focus on targeted precincts - VTA bus stop signage (100 stops, focused on 20 lowest turnout precincts)	\$ 175,000
4. Technology (e.g. geo-fencing)	\$ 30,000
5. Ethnic media buys	\$90,000
6. Library/Community Centers - Volunteer stipends, collateral materials	\$60,000
8. Translation and Interpretation	\$ 50,000
9. Other: Copies, mailings, rental, food, promotional items	\$50,000
10. City Coordination: Staff (12 months)	\$225,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$1,000,000</b>

*Funding Alternatives*

The outreach strategy outlined above (Alternative A) is designed to be scalable with various amounts of funding. Research has shown that making even an incremental difference in turnout requires messaging to be consistent and plentiful, which the above strategy incorporates. However, given the countywide implementation of the Voter's Choice Act and the related outreach, as well as the attention of the Presidential primary and general elections, a smaller effort could be successful.

Alternatives could include:

- A) Comprehensive Targeted Outreach Strategy: This approach follows the budget outlined above. Cost estimate: \$1 million.

- B) Focused Grassroots Outreach Strategy: This approach would scale back advertising and outreach efforts, relying instead on one new temporary staff position and grassroots efforts with community-based partners to conduct outreach activities. Cost estimate: \$500,000.
- C) Grassroots Outreach Strategy: This approach would provide grants to grassroots community-based partners for outreach activities. Coordination would be absorbed into existing workloads, likely displacing other work. This approach is not recommended, as staff who would absorb the workload will be focused on 2020 Census outreach implementation. Cost estimate: \$300,000.

### **COORDINATION**

This memorandum has been coordinated with the City Clerk's Office, the Office of Immigrant Affairs, the Office of Economic Development (Work2Future), the Office of Employee Relations, and the City Manager's Budget Office.

/s/  
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