

Los Angeles and Seattle Revamp Campaign Finance Rules for City Elections

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Los Angeles. The Los Angeles City Council made substantial changes to the city's campaign finance rules, which became effective on October 29, 2012. The major changes focused on bringing the city's public financing regime into compliance with constitutional principles set forth in major public financing litigation and making the public financing system more attractive to candidates.

Contribution limits for citywide races will be increased from \$1,000 to \$1,300 per person per election, and contribution limits for all other races will be increased from \$500 to \$700 per person per election. Los Angeles also now permits contributions to be made via text messages.

Starting in 2013, local candidates participating in the public financing system will receive four matching dollars of public funds for every eligible dollar raised for the general election and two matching dollars of public funds for every eligible dollar raised for the primary election. Beginning in 2015, local candidates must collect contributions from at least 200 individuals living in their district in order to be eligible for matching funds, and matching funds will only be given for contributions raised from individuals residing in Los Angeles.

Seattle. The Seattle City Council recently approved a bill imposing two significant changes to the city's campaign finance rules. First, candidates for local office will be prohibited from raising contributions outside of a defined fundraising window. Second, candidates for local office will be prohibited from rolling over surplus campaign funds from one campaign to the next.

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Candidates for local office may now solicit and accept contributions only during an "election cycle," which is from January 1 of the year before a general election to April 30 of the year following a general election. All surplus campaign funds must be disposed of by April 30 following the election, whether by issuing refunds, donating to a charity or disgorging the money to the city.

The amendments are effective January 1, 2013.