Voter-Owned Elections

Voter-Owned Elections are an alternative way to fund campaigns for specific offices. They are also called Fair Elections, Clean Elections, and Public Campaign Financing. If a VOE program exists for an office, a candidate may opt to use the program, provided they meet the requirements and follow its rules. However, candidates do not have to participate in a VOE program: it is completely voluntary.

How Do Candidates Qualify?

To qualify for funds, VOE programs require that candidates show they have enough voter support to have a chance at winning election. Candidates do this by collecting small donations from a minimum number of registered voters. Qualifying candidates can then receive public grants to run their campaigns in exchange for accepting spending limits. They must follow special reporting rules and other guidelines, restrict their fundraising from big donors, and show they are spending the program money only for campaign purposes.

How a VOE Program Works

Step 1: Candidate decides to seek public funds.
Step 2: Candidate proves he or she is a viable candidate.
Step 3: Qualifying candidates receive a public grant.
Step 4: Candidates abide by program rules.

What Are The Program Rules?

Rules vary from program to program and are tailored to the needs of the office being sought. But, in general, all VOE programs require participating candidates to follow these basic program rules:

- **Thresholds must be met to qualify.** This means candidates must raise a certain amount in small donations from a certain number of donors before they qualify.
- **Private fundraising after qualifying is prohibited.** Once a candidate has entered a VOE program, they may not supplement their campaign with new contributions from donors.
- **Large donations from individuals, out of state donors, and PACs are prohibited** after the candidate enrolls in the program. This keeps special interests from corrupting the campaign financing process.
- **Candidates may use only a limited amount of their personal money before qualifying.** After qualifying, they may not use any of their private money.
- **Unused funds are returned.** After the election, VOE candidates must return any public money they did not use.
What Are the Benefits of Voter-Owned Elections?

- **VOE is a proven alternative** to our existing electoral system. VOE is not a new idea, it is a system that has been shown to work in NC and in states as diverse as Arizona and Connecticut.

- **VOE has widespread, bi-partisan public support.** Democrats and Republicans, conservatives and liberals, men and women, candidates of all races have all endorsed and used VOE as a fair and practical campaign financing system.

- **VOE opens doors for hardworking candidates.** If a candidate is not connected to wealthy donors or does not want to be beholden to large donors, they still have at least a shot at running for office under a VOE program. A VOE candidate still has to work hard and raise funds — but they do not have to accept large donations to have a chance at winning.

- **VOE encourages accountability.** When special interests can no longer buy elections, they become less important, and elected officials pay more attention to what their constituents want. Why? In part because they *have to* if they hope to be re-elected.

- **VOE strengthens democracy** by reducing the perception that candidates primarily represent their donor interests. Actual corruption erodes democracy, but perceived corruption can harm it as well, especially when people lose confidence in their government and accept corruption as “the way things are.” So long as we have an electoral system that orbits around big money, we are only encouraging cynicism and inaction by NC citizens without big money.

Source: [www.democracy-nc.org](http://www.democracy-nc.org)