

# Fair Elections Fund

## 2023 Report



**OFFICE OF THE CLERK AND RECORDER**  
CITY AND COUNTY OF DENVER

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# Letter from Hon. Clerk Paul D. López



Dear Fellow Residents of Denver:

As we conclude the 2023 municipal election cycle, I am excited to present our report on the implementation of the Fair Elections Fund (FEF). This report provides information about the Fund's impact on our municipal elections and our Office's stewardship of the voter-approved program.

As your elected Clerk and Recorder, my commitment to fair and transparent elections is unwavering. This commitment extends to transparency regarding who is funding candidates for political office. Since voters approved the Fair Elections Fund Act in 2018, our office has worked to implement the will of the voters and build the first program of this scale in Colorado. The FEF was established to empower small donors, encourage greater political participation, and foster an open political process in Denver. In its first election cycle, it has proved to be a valuable tool to promote these objectives and increase accountability in our democratic system.

As the stewards of an \$8 million fund, we have worked diligently to account for all funds disbursed and exhaustively audited all processes from start to finish. We even launched a new national model for campaign finance reporting at a municipal level called SearchLight Denver, providing a greater level of access to campaign finance data to the public than ever before.

Through this report, you will see how the Fund has made meaningful changes in the municipal elections in the City and County of Denver, while allowing voters to see democracy work in plain sight. Voters now have more visibility into how campaign dollars are spent, and candidates have increased opportunity to run and win election to municipal offices.

As we move forward, I am committed to continuously enhancing our campaign finance oversight and the Fair Elections Fund to better serve the people of Denver. Your feedback and participation are crucial to this ongoing process, and I encourage you to stay involved in shaping the future of our city.

In Solidarity,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Paul D. Lopez". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Hon. Paul D. López, Clerk and Recorder,  
City and County of Denver

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# Executive Summary

In November 2018, Denver voters overwhelmingly approved Referred Issue 2E with a 70% majority, marking a pivotal moment in the city's electoral landscape. The vote established the Fair Elections Fund (FEF), a citizen-initiated and council-negotiated program under the Office of the Clerk and Recorder that came into effect for the 2023 election cycle. 2E and the Fair Elections Fund's primary objective was the empowerment of small donors while placing constraints on the influence of large contributors.

At the core of the Fair Elections Fund is an \$8 million budget, sustained by an annual transfer from the Denver General Fund, equal to \$2.88 per resident per year. This innovative and sustainable funding model ensures ongoing support for the program over multiple election cycles, underscoring Denver voters' commitment to democratizing the electoral process.

To qualify for funding, candidates are required to adhere to a comprehensive and robust set of steps including certifying their intent, collecting qualifying contributions, undergoing additional auditing, and participating in a public debate. These measures not only guarantee transparency but also ensure fiscal accountability and foster community engagement.

In the 2023 election, an impressive 81% of candidates chose to participate in the FEF, and an even higher percentage, 87.5%, of those candidates elected to office utilized the fund. As a result of high participation by candidates, the Fund disbursed \$7,695,471.92 to qualified candidates matching 21,520 donations from 19,275 unique donors.

The Fund's first election cycle achieved a 66% reduction in itemized donation amounts and a commendable 113.71% increase in the number of donations compared to the previous election cycle. Additionally, a record number of candidates successfully made it to the ballot, underscoring the program's success in increasing resident participation and fostering an open and inclusive political process directly attributable to the creation of the Fair Elections Fund.

Integral to this transformative process were mandated debates facilitated by the Office's Community Engagement Team, involving community sponsors throughout Denver hosting 16 debates across 10 districts. These debates played a crucial role in promoting civic discourse and informing voters about the candidates and their positions.

Post-election, the Office conducted thorough audits of every FEF expenditures, ensuring that taxpayer dollars were spent responsibly, and any surplus funds returned to safeguard public confidence in the Fund's management. The Fair Elections Fund has undeniably reshaped Denver's electoral landscape, achieving its goals and serving as a beacon for transparency, accountability, and continuous improvement in the realm of local democracy.

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# Introduction to the Fair Elections

## Fund

### History of the Fair Elections Fund

The Fair Elections Fund (FEF) Act was enacted by the passage of Referred Issue 2E by Denver voters in November 2018. Originally proposed as a citizen initiative, the Fair Elections Fund Act was referred to the ballot by the Denver City Council after negotiations with the citizen sponsors. Once put to the voters, it received more than 70% of votes cast in favor. The legislation established the Fair Elections Fund to empower small donors and limit the influence of large campaign contributors on municipal elections to go into effect for the 2023 municipal election cycle.

Candidates who choose to participate in the Fair Elections Fund abide by a lower maximum contribution limit and refuse to accept contributions from political action committees. They may only accept contributions from individuals and small donor committees. Small donor committees, newly created in the legislation, may make contributions up to ten times the individual limit for the candidate’s race.

The Fair Elections Fund Act lowered the individual contribution limit to candidates across the board, as well as prohibited direct donations from corporations, LLCs, and labor unions to all candidates, regardless of their participation in the Fund.

Office Sought	Pre-FEF 2019 Contribution Limit	2023 Non-FEF Contribution Limit	2023 FEF Contribution Limit
Mayor	\$3,000	\$1,000	\$500
Councilmember At-Large, Auditor, Clerk & Recorder	\$2,000	\$700	\$350
District Councilmember	\$1,000	\$400	\$200

The FEF is funded by an annual transfer from the City and County of Denver General Fund equating to approximately \$2.88 per Denver resident and an \$8 million fund balance for a four-year election cycle. After the conclusion of the 2023 election cycle, the fund size and

contribution limits were adjusted for inflation for the 2027 election cycle, which began on January 1, 2024.

To assist with implementation of the Fair Elections Fund Act, the Office of the Clerk and Recorder put forward legislation, which was unanimously passed by Denver City Council in January 2023. Council Bill 22-1641 assisted in synchronizing dates so that a candidate could not qualify for public funds after failing to make the ballot and required only one debate to be sanctioned by the Clerk’s office for each race.

## How it Works

To qualify for public matching funds, a candidate must certify their intent to participate in the program with the Office of the Clerk and Recorder and participate in an online training covering the program rules. After a candidate file their intent, they collect qualifying contributions of at least \$5 from a required number Denver residents before applying for funding.

After the required number of qualifying contributions from Denver residents is collected, candidates apply for funding. The Office of the Clerk and Recorder reviews the application and, if approved, the candidate is qualified to receiving matching funds. If the application is denied, the candidate may collect additional qualifying contributions and resubmit their application so long as they do so prior to 75 days before the election, when the qualifying period ends. If a candidate’s application is approved, the candidate must agree to participate in a public debate sanctioned by the Clerk and Recorder’s Office.

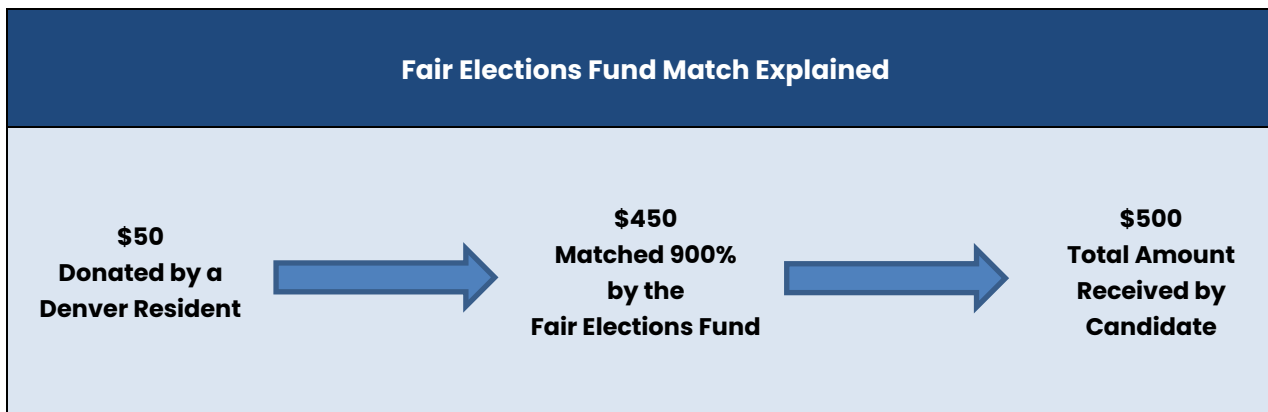
Office Sought	Qualifying Contributions Required	Maximum General Election Disbursement	Runoff Payment
Mayor	250	\$750,000	25% of FEF General Election Funds Received
Councilmember At-Large, Auditor, Clerk & Recorder	100	\$250,000	
District Councilmember	100	\$125,000	

As part of the qualification process, candidates must provide receipts to Denver contributors signifying that they understand their donation will be matched and include a copy of receipts with their application for funds.

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The Office of Clerk and Recorder reviews each contribution submitted by a candidate to ensure that the donation is eligible to be matched. Using data from the Colorado Secretary of State’s Statewide Voter Registration System (SCORE) and Denver address mapping, contributors are verified as Denver residents. Additional guardrails are included for contributors who donate using cash, who must give less than \$50.00 and sign a receipt before it can be matched.

After a candidate qualifies for funding from the Fair Elections Fund, individual donations from Denver residents of \$50 or less are matched nine to one by the fund (900%), meaning a candidate can receive \$450 from the Fund for a \$50 contribution from a Denver resident. Donations above \$50 from Denver residents are matched up to \$450. No donor may be matched in the aggregate more than \$450 for any individual candidate.



As outlined in the Fair Elections Fund Act, disbursements from the Fund are made starting the August before the election. Future payments correspond to campaign finance deadlines until the Municipal General Election. Candidates may continue to receive FEF disbursements until they hit the maximum allowable disbursement for their race.

Prior to each disbursement, a two-person team at the Office of the Clerk and Recorder audits match-eligible contributions for each candidate to ensure that only those contributions verified as Denver residents with a valid receipt provided are matched by the Fund. For any donations rejected, the committee receives a determination stating the reason for the rejection. If the rejection can be cured, the committee may resubmit any contribution during the qualifying period.

After the audit of each payment is complete, payment amounts are sent to the Department of Finance. The Department of Finance is responsible for disbursing payments to candidates via check or electronic bank transfer. Before any payment is made, candidates submit additional paperwork to the Office of the Clerk and Recorder and Department of Finance to confirm that payments are made only to eligible candidates and their designated FEF bank account.

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If a candidate advances to the Run-Off Election, a one-time disbursement is made equal to 25% of the total the candidate received during the Municipal General Election. FEF Run-Off candidates may continue to collect donations up to their FEF contribution limit, but no new donations are eligible to be matched.

After the election, no new expenditures may be obligated by a candidate and unspent money must be returned to the fund. All candidates who received funding are required to submit bank records, receipts, and other documentation to ensure that all funds are spent on campaign-related expenditures in line with Denver's [rules](#) and [ordinances](#).

# 2023 Election Review

## Election Overview

Candidates began qualifying for FEF funding in January 2020, as soon as the qualifying window began. In total, 63 candidates filed their intent to qualify. Of those, 47 candidates applied for and received public matching funds.

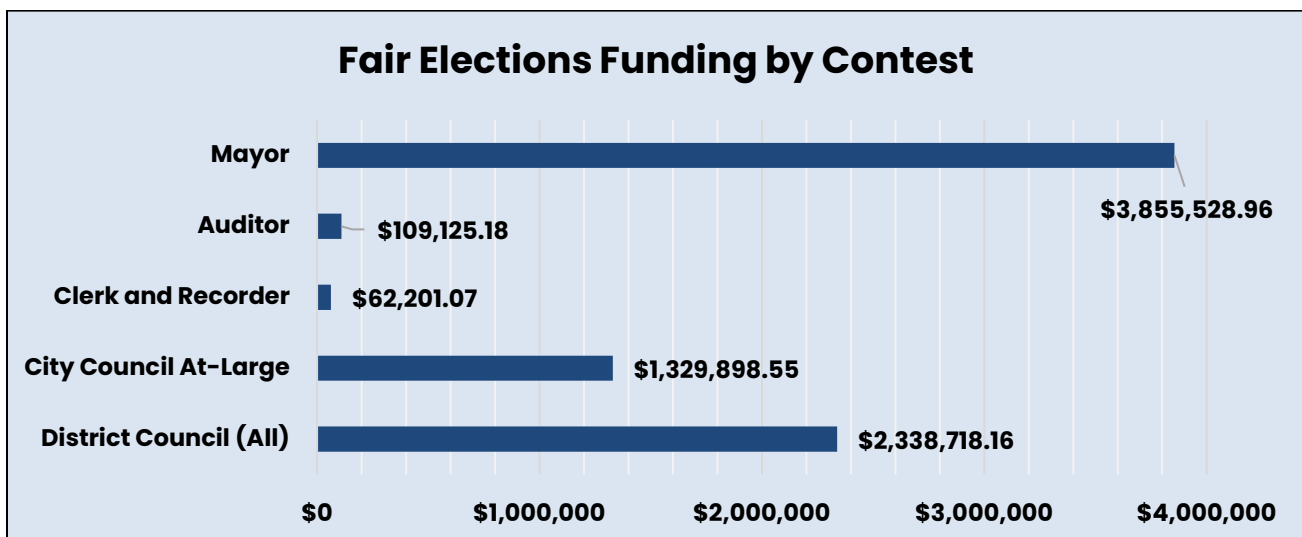
Not all candidates chose to participate in the Fair Elections Fund. Of the 58 candidates who made the ballot, 47 participated in the Fund and 11 did not, an 81% participation rate.

2023 Snapshot	
Number of Candidates Who Qualified for Public Funds	47
Participation Rate for Candidates on the Ballot	81%
FEF Funds Disbursed	\$7,695,471.92
Donations Matched	21,520

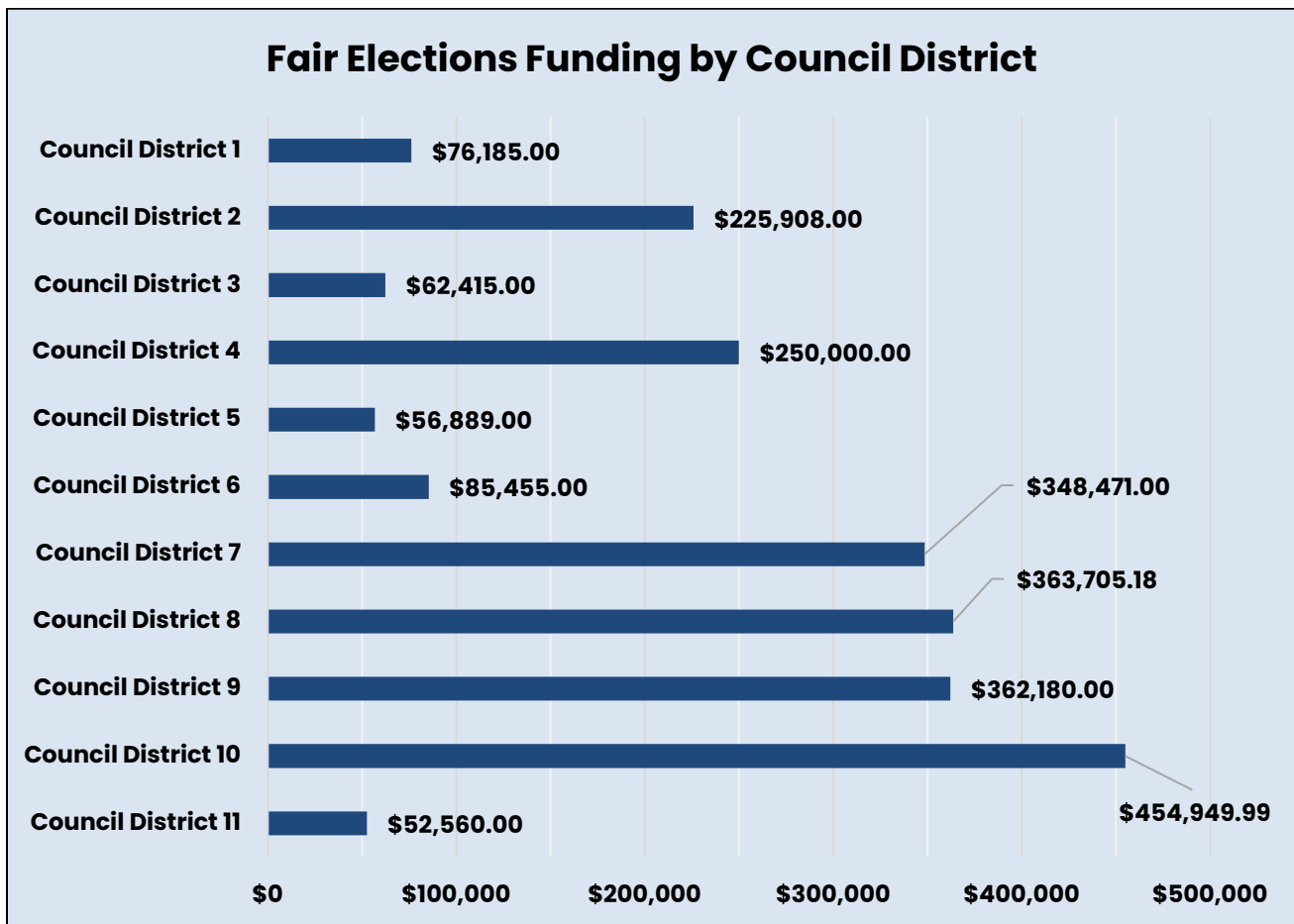
For the April Municipal General Election, \$7,131,830.14 was distributed to 47 candidates. Of the 47, ten received the maximum disbursement amount. Only one mayoral candidate, Kelly Brough, received the maximum disbursement a candidate is eligible for: \$750,000.

Five races went to the June Run-Off Election, with all ten candidates receiving funds totaling \$563,641.78. In May, one of the two Run-Off candidates in District 7 withdrew from the race, automatically

making Councilwoman Flor Alvidrez the winner of the contest. Unspent funds from both candidates were returned to the Fair Elections Fund.



The mayoral contest had 17 candidates on the ballot, 13 of whom qualified for FEF funding. As was expected, the largest number of FEF funds were distributed to mayoral candidates.



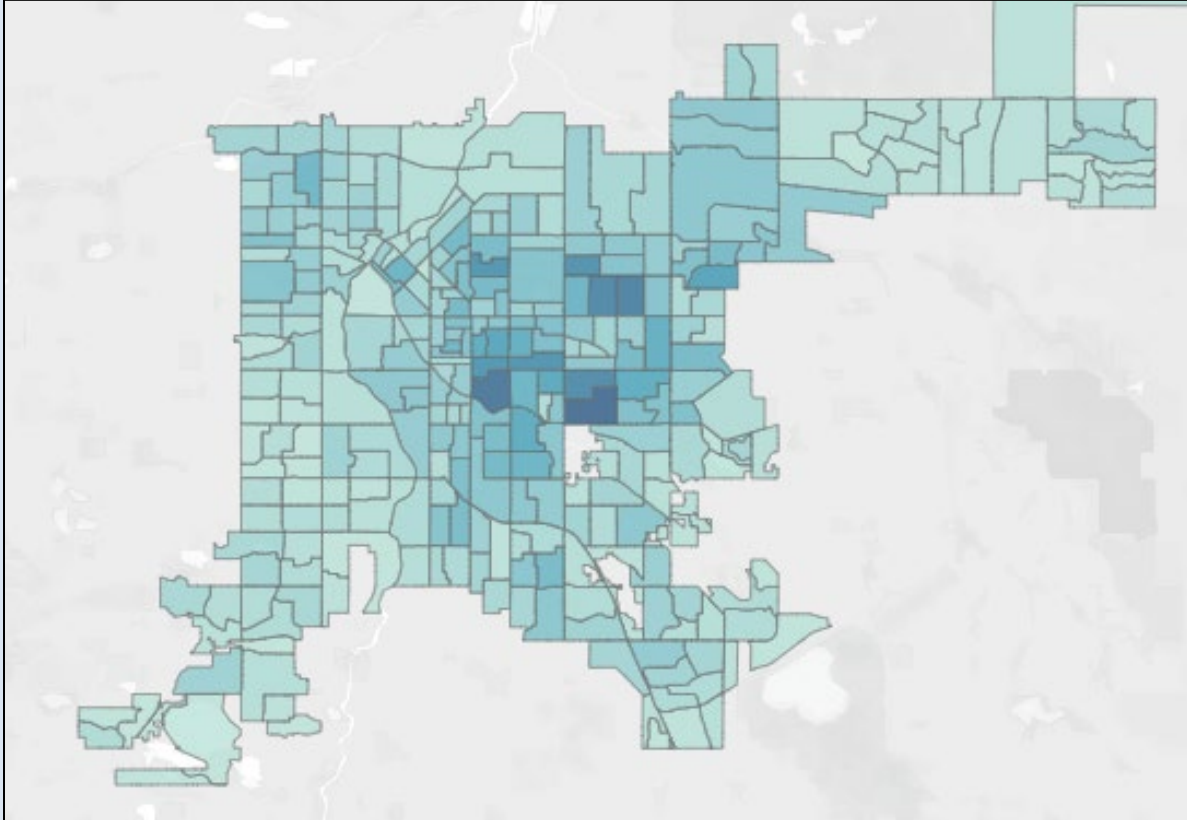
All Council District contests had at least one candidate qualify for FEF funding. Candidates for Council Districts 7, 8, 9, and 10 received the most FEF funding. These contests all had multiple candidates qualify for FEF funding and two FEF-qualified candidates advance to the Run-Off election.

Of the 16 candidates elected in the 2023 election, 14 participated in the Fair Elections Fund. Councilwoman Amanda Sawyer and Auditor Tim O'Brien both succeeded in their re-election campaigns without opting into the Fund.

## Mapping FEF Donations

After the election, the Office of the Clerk and Recorder analyzed the 21,520 contributions that were matched by the fund. Each matched contribution was geocoded by precinct and mapped. Signaling broad engagement with the Fair Elections Fund, every precinct in the city contained matched donations.

## Contributions Matched By Precinct



**This map shows the geographic distribution of matched contributions. Precincts with darker shading had more contributions matched by the Fund.**

Although contributors in each precinct had donations matched, mapping the geographic distribution shows a disparity between precincts. For example, the precinct with the fewest number of matched donations was Precinct 436 in the Westwood neighborhood: only three. In contrast, Precinct 211 in the Hilltop neighborhood had the greatest number of matched donations: 368. While precincts vary in size and geography, trends emerge. The neighborhoods identified as at risk of displacement by Denver's [Neighborhood Equity and Stabilization](#) (NEST) division identified as at greater risk of displacement contributed 1,645 matched donations, or 7.64% of all donations matched.

The [interactive data mapping is online](#), with the ability to view where donations were matched for each candidate and to conduct side-by-side comparisons between candidates. The Office continues to explore trends in FEF participation and encourages interested individuals and researchers to explore the public precinct-level data.

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## Fair Elections Fund Debates

As part of the certification process for receiving FEF funds, each candidate was required to attend a public debate certified by the Office of the Clerk and Recorder. The debate process is an additional opportunity for the Fund to increase public engagement with candidates.



**DENVER, CO – FEBRUARY 16: Thirteen Denver Mayoral candidates on stage for the Fair Elections Fund Denver Mayoral debate hosted by 9News at the King Center on the Auraria campus February 16, 2023. (Photo by Andy Cross/The Denver Post)**

In June 2022, the Office's Community Engagement Team developed the process for soliciting applications and approving hosts for the FEF-sanctioned debates. The foundation of the program was based on the belief that debates are a way to involve local community groups, such as registered neighborhood organizations, nonprofits, schools, businesses, and media outlets, to increase community engagement in the election process.

The Office ensured that debate applications complied with the detailed requirements listed in the FEF Act, including prohibiting a sponsoring organization from endorsing any candidate during the election. The prospective debate sponsors must propose dates, locations, and provide a publicity plan during the application process. Each debate must be at least one hour in length, and the format and ground rules submitted in advance.

The Office created a robust outreach plan to reach different community groups across the city. While the plan included broad city-wide outreach, particular detail was paid to finding organizations and locations that would be appropriate for each Council District. The Office held multiple information sessions and conducted direct outreach to solicit hosts for the debates, and guided interested applicants through the process. 24 total applications were received, with many sponsors applying to host more than one debate. Once applications were approved, hosts were notified and all debate dates, times, locations, and races were posted on the Denver Votes FEF Debate Sponsor website.

<b>Debate Highlights</b>	
<b>Debates Held</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>In-person Attendees</b>	<b>1,489</b>
<b>Online Debate Views</b>	<b>28,755</b>

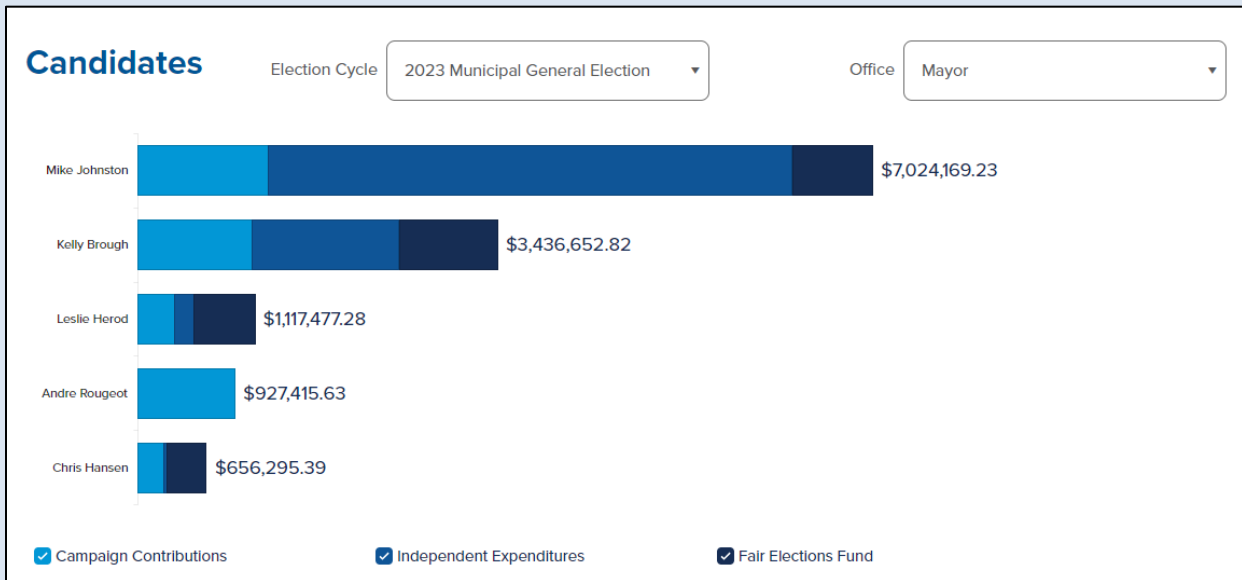
24 total applications were received, with many sponsors applying to host more than one debate. Once applications were approved, hosts were notified and all debate dates, times, locations, and races were posted on the Denver Votes FEF Debate Sponsor website.

The FEF Debate program resulted in 16 debates across 10 contests totaling more than 24 hours of debate. Attendance and viewer metrics show great interest in local communities' engagement with the FEF debate process with sponsors reporting at least 1,489 in-person attendees and 28,755 online views. Local media partners, several of whom served as debate sponsors, also publicized the debates widely, resulting in greater reach.

## **SearchLight Denver**

The Office of the Clerk and Recorder launched a transformative new technology tool in conjunction with the implementation of the Fair Elections Fund: [SearchLight Denver](#). The online campaign finance database was developed in partnership with MapLight, a nationally recognized technology nonprofit dedicated to providing elections and disclosure tools to state and local governments.

## SearchLight Denver Interactive Dashboard



**A screenshot from SearchLight Denver showing support for mayoral candidates.**

**Explore more data at [denver.maplight.com](https://denver.maplight.com)**

SearchLight Denver, also referred to as SearchLight, was launched in 2022 and represents a significant improvement over previous disclosure systems in the City and County of Denver. The online portal, where candidates submit match-eligible contributions and apply for Fair Elections Funding, was critical to the Office's ability to review applications and accurately disburse matching funds. For candidates, it represents a more efficient, accessible, and equitable platform by which to comply with reporting requirements. The database also houses lobbying disclosures and ethics reports filed by elected and appointed officials.

For the public, SearchLight represents a significant step forward, democratizing data and providing real-time insights into campaign contributions and expenditures. With the use of interactive and user-friendly data visualizations, the public has access to more campaign finance data than ever before. The Office will continue to use SearchLight to help bridge the information gap between residents and our constituents to promote an engaged and informed public.

SearchLight Denver is a nationwide leader in publishing transparent campaign finance information at the municipal level. The Office is dedicated to continuous improvement to the platform to ensure it remains at the cutting-edge for users and the public. Ongoing efforts aim to set the standard for transparency and accessibility, fostering a more vibrant and participatory democracy in Denver.

## The Role of Independent Spending

The 2023 municipal election cycle was a record year in another respect: a record amount of independent expenditure spending, more than \$9.34 million.

An independent expenditure (IE) is spending advocating for or against a candidate that is not controlled by or coordinated with any candidate. Federal courts have ruled that IE spending by individuals or organizations represents their free speech rights and cannot be prohibited. Court cases like *Citizens United* have significantly constrained the ability of regulators to confront a flood of outside money on political spending. However, regulatory entities like the Office of Clerk and Recorder may require these entities to disclose their spending.

In 2017, Denver City Council adopted new reporting requirements for IE spending that include reporting the name of the entity making the expenditure, the amount spent, and the source of funds used. After the 2017 law was enacted, \$783,860.93 in independent expenditures were reported during the 2019 election cycle.

With the implementation of the Fair Elections Fund, lower contribution limits, and new restrictions on PAC and business spending, an increase in independent expenditure spending designed to work around the new guardrails was expected for the 2023 cycle. On the Mayor’s race alone, more than \$7 million in IE money was spent supporting and opposing candidates – nearly the sum of the FEF funds disbursed to candidates.

Largest 2023 Independent Expenditure Funders		
Name of Donor	Amount Donated to Independent Expenditures	Top 3 Spending Targets
Reid Hoffman	\$2,015,875.47	In Support of Mike Johnston
Forward Denver	\$659,586.68	In Support of Darrell Watson and Brad Revare; in Opposition to Candi CdeBaca
National Association of REALTORS and National Association of REALTORS Fund	\$598,474.50	In Support of Kelly Brough, in Opposition to Mike Johnston, and in Support of Travis Leiker
Michael Bloomberg	\$500,000.00	In Support of Mike Johnston
Kent Thiry	\$450,000.00	In Support of Mike Johnston

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A small number of individuals and organizations funded a disproportionate amount of IE spending, with the top five donors accounting for over \$4.22 million, 45% of total IE spending.

Jurisdictions across the country have seen independent expenditures attempt to circumvent public funding program limitations and, in response, adopted legislation increasing public funding when outside money is expended. In 2011, the Supreme Court struck down a provision in Arizona law designed to blunt the effect of IE spending on its funding program while upholding the fundamental constitutionality of publicly funded campaign programs. Given the current legal landscape, additional restrictions on IE spending would likely be significant targets of litigation and unlikely to achieve their intended result.

The Office will continue to provide transparency to outside spending in Denver to the greatest extent possible and explore ways to ensure outside dollars are appropriately and transparently reported.

## **Post-Election: Protecting Taxpayer Funds**

In our commitment to safeguarding the interests of taxpayers, the Office of the Clerk and Recorder implemented a rigorous audit of every expenditure made using FEF dollars. The audit process ensures transparency, accountability, and responsible financial management for the program.

As part of the required FEF training, candidates were given notice that all FEF expenditures would be audited and that bank records must be provided to the Office for review. Candidates began submitting these records prior to the General Election, and the Office conducted individual audits over the course of 2023. Each candidate submitted all bank records showing expenditures made with taxpayer funds, provided invoices and receipts, and other information requested by the Office, including copies of checks and wire transfer records. The extensive documentation facilitated a comprehensive audit of all transactions and left no room for ambiguity.

As part of the audit, candidates with unspent FEF funds after the election were required to return those funds. Candidates were also obligated to reimburse the Fund for any expenditures that were impermissibly made after the election or made on non-election expenditures. The audit process ensured that Fair Elections Fund dollars were spent in line with program rules and Denver campaign finance ordinances.

The goal of the post-election audits is to ensure Denver residents and taxpayers have confidence that FEF dollars were used only on allowable expenditures and no financial improprieties occurred. By conducting thorough audits, taxpayers can be assured their dollars were meticulously accounted for and spent appropriately on election-related expenditures.

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# Impact of the Fair Elections Fund

## Voter-Approved Goals

When voters approved 2E in 2018, the language they approved laid out several goals for the Fair Elections Fund:

- Give a Greater Voice to Smaller Donors
- Encourage Greater Participation
- Foster an Open Political Process

Measured by these goals, the FEF rollout was a success. Using data gathered from the 2023 election cycle and previous election cycles, significant changes can be seen.

The Office of the Clerk and Recorder utilized the best data available in compiling the cross-election cycle comparisons, however, limitations in historical data and changes across election cycles pose challenges. The greater donation limits in 2015 and 2019, along with the option for candidates in previous elections to report a bundle of “un-itemized” donations not attributed to any donor, make apples-to-apples comparisons impossible. Despite these limitations, the data paints a picture of a successful program with a significantly increased number of donations, lower average donation size, and an increased number of candidates participating.

## Giving a Greater Voice to Small Donors

Between the 2019 and 2023 election cycles, the average donation amount dropped 66% from \$299.65 to \$100.71. In the 2023 cycle, 59% of all donations reported were \$50 or less. Smaller-dollar donors are making their voices heard. These changes can be attributed to at least two factors: lower overall donation limits and public matching funds.

In 2019, prior to FEF implementation, almost 500 donations of \$3,000 were made to mayoral candidates with more than half of those coming from businesses, such as LLCs. Not only did the FEF drop the donation limits from \$3,000, but it also prohibited direct contributions from a business to any candidate. This marked a massive change in campaign funding in favor of giving voice to small dollar donors.

<b>Average Donation Amount by Election Cycle</b>	
<b>2023</b>	<b>\$100.71</b>
<b>2019</b>	<b>\$299.65</b>
<b>2015</b>	<b>\$314.61</b>

In addition to dropping the limits, the 900% match for Denver residents further empowered them to make their voices heard. A \$10 donation to an FEF candidate was matched with \$90 in funds from the FEF fund, resulting in \$100 to the candidate of their choice. This calculation made donors who contributed under \$50 a valuable asset to candidates – and the numbers prove it.

## **Encouraging Greater Political Participation**

Between the 2019 and 2023 election cycles, the number of itemized donations reported increased 114%, with 53,618 individual donations reported.

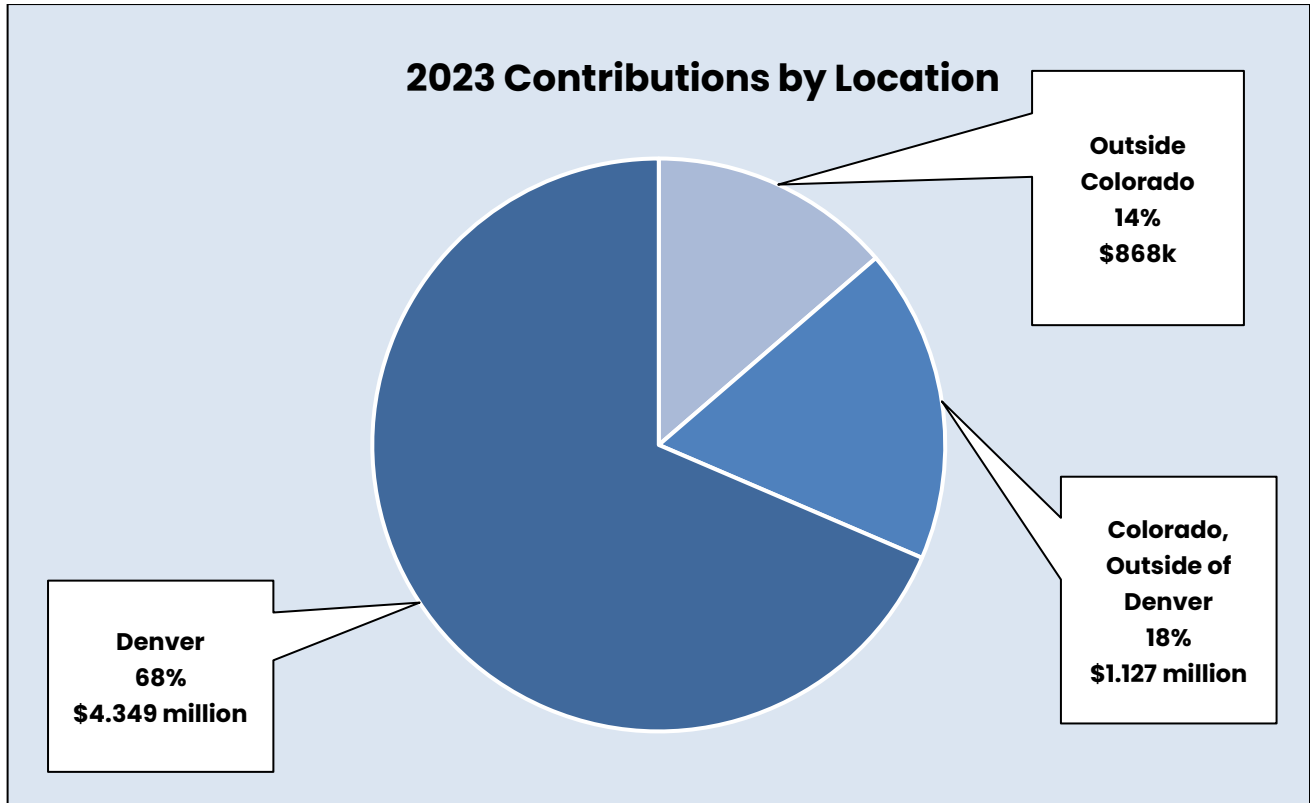
As a sign of increased engagement, the total number of unique donations made by Denver residents and matched by the fund, 21,521, is comparable to the total number of all donations reported in the 2019 cycle, 25,084.

<b>Number of Donations Reported by Election Cycle</b>	
<b>2023</b>	<b>53,618</b>
<b>2019</b>	<b>25,084</b>
<b>2015</b>	<b>16,240</b>

Fair Elections Fund contributions were matched in every precinct in the city. While the number of donations and the amount donated vary across the city, data analysis shows that all pockets of the city were able to participate in the program.

While disparities throughout the city exist, the program was successful in reaching Denver residents in every precinct and reporting a record level of grassroots small donor engagement.

For all donations made directly to candidates, regardless of their participation in the Fund, 68% of money contributed was reported from a Denver address.



## Fostering an Open Political Process

A record number of candidates ran for office in the 2023 election cycle, with some candidates specifically citing the FEF as a motivating factor for their campaign. A total of 58 candidates qualified for the ballot, an increase from 52 and 50 in the two previous election cycles.

After the election, the Office of the Clerk and Recorder anonymously surveyed participating candidates. Of the candidates who responded, 72% answered that the Fair Elections Fund impacted their decision to run, with many citing making it easier to fundraise or making it easier to launch a competitive campaign. All respondents surveyed stated that if they were to run for office in Denver again, they would participate in the Fund.

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### Survey Response Highlights

**“Knowing I had the FEF, I felt I could compete in the race because I could raise a lot of money without big donors which I didn’t have. Without, I don’t think I would have run.”**

**“I believe that the transparency of the fund provided an equal playing field, which was helpful for a political newcomer like myself.”**

**“FEF allowed me to put fundraising in its proper place in the priority list- behind formulating policy and voter outreach.”**

In addition to the number of candidates, the Fair Elections Fund furthered an open political process through the Office’s Community Engagement Team debate program. The Office solicited local sponsors to host FEF debates, resulting in 16 FEF debates and in-person and online debate engagement of over 30,000 residents.

Despite the overall increase in candidates on the ballot, the percentage of contested races, where more than one candidate was listed on the ballot, remained the same between the 2023 cycle and the 2019 cycle. 75% of all races were contested, with only four uncontested offices. In 2015, only two offices were uncontested. The Office will monitor this trend in future cycles to assess how the FEF may affect the number of contested races in the longer run.

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# The Future of the Fair Elections Fund

The 2027 municipal election cycle began January 1, 2024, marking the start of the second cycle of the Fair Elections Fund. As mandated by law, some dollar amounts associated with the Fund have been adjusted based on the local consumer price index (CPI) changes over the past four years.

The total fund cap, maximum match amounts, and individual contributions limit have been recalculated and posted in [Election Rule 3.1](#). The per-resident annual transfer from the general fund has been calculated with the updated allocation to begin in 2025.

Reflecting on the 2023 election cycle, a combination of factors, including the large number of open seat races and the inauguration of the new Fair Elections Fund program generated significant interest. With 47 candidates qualified for FEF funding, including 13 mayoral candidates, the Fund was stretched to its limits and nearly exhausted. It is unlikely that a similar confluence of events will occur in upcoming election cycles, leaving the Fund in a strong financial position.

In the spirit of continuous improvement, the Office of the Clerk and Recorder continues to work diligently to ensure the Fair Elections Fund fulfills voters' intent. The Office is working with partners and vendors to identify improvements in user experience and public transparency in SearchLight Denver. Feedback from stakeholders and community members is valued as the Office identifies areas of possible change or improvement. The Community Engagement Team's expertise will be used to leverage existing outreach efforts, enhancing the understanding of the program for prospective candidates, donors, and Denver residents.

The Office remains involved in advising City Council during discussion about potential legislative changes to the program. As a voter-approved initiative, any modifications to the Fair Elections Fund Act require a two-thirds majority vote by City Council until 2028.

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# About the Clerk and Recorder

The Denver Office of the Clerk and Recorder has a staff of 63 full-time employees. The office serves several important functions for the City and County of Denver including administering and certifying elections, preserving various records while ensuring public accessibility, recording land transactions, and overseeing foreclosures.

The Honorable Clerk Paul D. López is a passionate elected official who works to empower all Denverites to participate in the voting process and be civically engaged. Prior to serving as the third ever elected Clerk and Recorder for the City and County of Denver, López served as the youngest elected City Council member for three terms, representing his own Council District 3 on Denver’s west side.

López’ passionate leadership has spurred civic engagement, ushering in the long-overdue community revitalization of West Denver. He has spearheaded efforts to transform the west side’s long-ignored streets, sidewalks, bridges, and parks; and nearly eliminated graffiti vandalism with urban mural art. He also led efforts to build healthier communities, replacing an overabundance of liquor stores with grocery stores, access to new health clinics, parks, libraries, and a new recreation center.

The overall mission of the Office of the Clerk and Recorder is to provide customer friendly processes that are efficient and transparent, records that are easy to access, and elections that are accurate, secure, and convenient for voters.

The office puts a strong emphasis on informing, engaging, and energizing the community, while encouraging involvement in the democratic process. The Office of the Clerk and Recorder is an access-point for residents of the City and County of Denver to participate in their local government.



## OFFICE OF THE CLERK AND RECORDER CITY AND COUNTY OF DENVER

CITY CLERK | ELECTIONS | PUBLIC TRUSTEE | RECORDING

**City Clerk, Public Trustee & Recording**  
201 W. Colfax Ave. Suite 100  
Denver, CO 80202

**Denver Elections Division**  
200 W. 14th Ave. Suite 200  
Denver, CO 80204

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# Appendix 1: FEF Summaries by Contest

Each contest for the 2023 municipal election is listed below. For each race, all candidates who were listed on the ballot are included. The winning candidate is listed first, followed by all other candidates in order of the number of votes received. Candidates who did not participate in the Fair Elections Fund are included and listed as “N/A” for donors matched and funds returned.

Candidates who withdrew from the election or faced no opposition on the ballot were obligated to return unspent FEF dollars. Candidates who had unspent FEF dollars after the election also returned excess funds as part of the FEF audit undertaken by each candidate. If a candidate returned no funds, a dash is listed.

Additional campaign finance data can be found at [denver.maplight.com](https://denver.maplight.com). For any questions about the data below, contact [campaignfinance@denvergov.org](mailto:campaignfinance@denvergov.org).

## Mayor

Snapshot	
Donors Matched	9,667
FEF Funds Received	\$3,855,528.96

Candidate	Campaign Contributions	FEF Funds Received	Donors Matched	Campaign Expenditures	FEF Funds Returned
Mike Johnston	\$1,249,451.00	\$766,923.75	1,478	\$2,019,118.84	\$525.39
Kelly Brough	\$1,095,925.54	\$937,500.00	1,736	\$2,017,519.04	-
Lisa Calderón	\$79,662.76	\$195,351.03	571	\$275,013.79	-
Andy Rougeot	\$927,415.63	N/A		\$922,195.49	N/A
Leslie Herod	\$346,024.13	\$587,057.13	1,612	\$928,855.10	-
Chris Hansen	\$248,561.87	\$375,187.50	933	\$614,301.26	\$52.55
Deborah "Debbie" Ortega	\$159,052.89	\$249,705.00	660	\$403,650.68	-
Ean Thomas Tafoya	\$53,788.86	\$153,713.07	515	\$200,641.10	Remains Outstanding
Terrance Roberts	\$28,007.50	\$73,908.18	308	\$101,094.44	\$17.40
Thomas Wolf	\$21,865.27	\$105,329.43	316	\$127,194.70	-
Trinidad Rodriguez	\$64,754.28	\$120,243.60	365	\$179,981.28	\$21.60
Aurelio Martinez	\$12,169.98	\$50,984.82	295	\$62,324.34	\$141.84
Al Gardner	\$14,069.11	N/A		\$14,069.11	N/A
James Walsh	\$19,056.94	\$51,219.00	306	\$63,414.32	\$1,876.34
Renate Behrens	\$429.00	N/A		\$408.00	N/A
Robert Treta	\$125.00	N/A		\$0.00	N/A
Kwame Spearman	\$106,091.25	\$188,406.45	572	\$289,497.70	\$36,514.64

## Auditor

Snapshot	
Donors Matched	361
FEF Funds Received	\$109,125.18

Candidate	Campaign Contributions	FEF Funds Received	Donors Matched	Campaign Expenditures	FEF Funds Returned
Timothy M. O'Brien	\$6,113.93	N/A		\$21,838.63	N/A
Erik J. Clarke	\$36,189.71	\$109,125.18	361	\$145,314.89	-

## Clerk and Recorder

Snapshot	
Donors Matched	165
FEF Funds Received	\$62,201.07

Candidate	Campaign Contributions	FEF Funds Received	Donors Matched	Campaign Expenditures	FEF Funds Returned
Paul D. López	\$20,471.23	\$62,201.07	165	\$76,049.13	\$0.29

## City Council At-Large

Snapshot	
Donors Matched	3,339
FEF Funds Received	\$1,329,898.55

Candidate	Campaign Contributions	FEF Funds Received	Donors Matched	Campaign Expenditures	FEF Funds Returned
Serena Gonzales-Gutierrez	\$74,885.43	\$220,652.64	582	\$294,246.94	-
Sarah Parady	\$151,808.05	\$250,000.00	657	\$395,703.42	\$986.71
Penfield Tate	\$56,021.23	\$114,390.00	299	\$157,720.89	\$213.66
Travis Leiker	\$161,243.27	\$250,000.00	575	\$411,243.27	-
Tim Hoffman	\$100,257.00	\$222,363.00	525	\$317,862.35	\$62.65
Marty Zimmerman	\$46,983.22	\$151,803.00	380	\$198,786.22	-
Will Chan	\$36,899.41	\$120,689.91	321	\$149,724.28	-
Jeff Walker	\$12,074.52	N/A		\$4,600.10	N/A
Dominic Diaz	\$5,303.05	N/A		\$3,539.98	N/A

## Council District 1

Snapshot	
Donors Matched	175
FEF Funds Received	\$76,185.00

Candidate	Campaign Contributions	FEF Funds Received	Donors Matched	Campaign Expenditures	FEF Funds Returned
Amanda Sandoval	\$29,903.00	\$76,185.00	175	\$79,433.62	\$3,363.77
Ava Truckey	\$1,745.00	N/A		\$1,373.55	N/A

## Council District 2

Snapshot	
Donors Matched	664
FEF Funds Received	\$255,908.00

Candidate	Campaign Contributions	FEF Funds Received	Donors Matched	Campaign Expenditures	FEF Funds Returned
Kevin Flynn	\$46,690.00	\$125,000.00	283	\$205,662.23	-
Tiffany Caudill	\$26,192.00	\$67,464.00	224	\$93,551.20	-
Chris Herr	\$7,581.00	\$33,444.00	157	\$32,961.79	\$551.65

## Council District 3

Snapshot	
Donors Matched	154
FEF Funds Received	\$62,415.00

Candidate	Campaign Contributions	FEF Funds Received	Donors Matched	Campaign Expenditures	FEF Funds Returned
Jamie Torres	\$28,040.24	\$62,415.00	154	\$53,160.26	\$13,326.37

## Council District 4

Snapshot	
Donors Matched	616
FEF Funds Received	\$250,000.00

Candidate	Campaign Contributions	FEF Funds Received	Donors Matched	Campaign Expenditures	FEF Funds Returned
Diana Romero Campbell	\$42,304.25	\$125,000.00	292	\$160,342.65	-
Tony Pigford	\$37,623.45	\$125,000.00	324	\$162,600.98	\$22.47

## Council District 5

Snapshot	
Donors Matched	150
FEF Funds Received	\$56,889.00

Candidate	Campaign Contributions	FEF Funds Received	Donors Matched	Campaign Expenditures	FEF Funds Returned
Amanda Sawyer	\$71,631.69	N/A		\$71,746.83	N/A
Michael Hughes	\$23,852.00	\$56,889.00	150	\$77,681.19	\$1,059.81

## Council District 6

Snapshot	
Donors Matched	208
FEF Funds Received	\$85,455.00

Candidate	Campaign Contributions	FEF Funds Received	Donors Matched	Campaign Expenditures	FEF Funds Returned
Paul Kashmann	\$19,709.00	\$85,455.00	208	\$27,213.30	\$85,455.00

## Council District 7

Snapshot	
Donors Matched	853
FEF Funds Received	\$348,471.00

Candidate	Campaign Contributions	FEF Funds Received	Donors Matched	Campaign Expenditures	FEF Funds Returned
Flor Alvidrez	\$46,827.42	\$134,308.69	268	\$172,550.16	\$6,668.74
Nick Campion	\$22,312.57	\$89,170.31	243	\$104,952.24	\$2,826.76
Adam Estroff	\$24,862.00	\$88,137.00	221	\$111,445.71	-
Guy Padgett	\$16,927.99	\$36,855.00	121	\$53,501.32	\$264.90
Arthur May	\$1,797.29	N/A		\$1,797.29	N/A

## Council District 8

Snapshot	
Donors Matched	877
FEF Funds Received	\$363,705.18

Candidate	Campaign Contributions	FEF Funds Received	Donors Matched	Campaign Expenditures	FEF Funds Returned
Shontel M. Lewis	\$44,958.41	\$122,621.18	308	\$163,186.80	-
Brad Revare	\$84,029.25	\$156,250.00	299	\$240,120.00	-
Leslie Twarogowski	\$17,49.00	\$57,492.00	150	\$69,659.49	\$80.41
Tyler Drum	\$10,753.00	\$27,342.00	120	\$32,710.22	\$355.78
Christian Steward	\$3,551.88	N/A		\$3,525.00	N/A

## Council District 9

Snapshot	
Donors Matched	804
FEF Funds Received	\$424,680.00

Candidate	Campaign Contributions	FEF Funds Received	Donors Matched	Campaign Expenditures	FEF Funds Returned
Darrell Watson	\$172,791.43	\$156,250.00	290	\$326,279.91	-
Candi CdeBaca	\$86,079.57	\$156,250.00	340	\$244,078.48	\$18.77
Kwon Atlas	\$22,826.10	\$49,680.00	174	\$67,287.10	Remains Outstanding

## Council District 10

Snapshot	
Donors Matched	1,114
FEF Funds Received	\$454,949.99

Candidate	Campaign Contributions	FEF Funds Received	Donors Matched	Campaign Expenditures	FEF Funds Returned
Chris Hinds	\$101,199.01	\$156,250.00	307	\$256,188.00	\$6.57
Shannon Hoffman	\$51,810.17	\$142,684.99	363	\$192,074.97	\$1.51
Noah Kaplan	\$33,511.00	\$114,183.00	312	\$144,461.56	-
Margie Morris	\$16,395.13	\$41,182.00	132	\$55,853.14	-

## Council District 11

Snapshot	
Donors Matched	128
FEF Funds Received	\$52,560.00

Candidate	Campaign Contributions	FEF Funds Received	Donors Matched	Campaign Expenditures	FEF Funds Returned
Stacie Gilmore	\$17,335.00	\$52,560.00	128	\$5,072.50	\$52,560.00

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# Appendix 2: Survey Feedback

The Office of the Clerk and Recorder maintains an ongoing commitment to transparency and accountability in the implementation of the Fair Elections Fund, while also striving for a positive experience on behalf of FEF participants. As a part of this commitment, the Office anonymously surveyed participating candidate committees to gather their insights and experience with the Fund. 23 responses were received, 11 from candidates and 12 from committee treasurers and staff members.

By engaging directly with the individuals who have participated in this initiative, the Office was able to gain a deeper understanding of various candidates' experiences and challenges. The feedback helped guide the Office's evaluation of the Fund's efficacy and identify areas where improvements may be needed to safeguard the Fair Election's Fund future viability.

The survey data shows that participants experienced the intended benefits of the Fund, with most candidates stating that the Fund impacted their decision to run for office. Survey participants also largely agreed with the structure of the Fund as approved by the voters. The positive feedback aligns with the Fund's goals to give greater voice to smaller donors, encourage greater participation, and foster an open political process.

Survey participants were also encouraged to provide open-ended feedback and identify areas for improvement. Participants proposed ideas for improvements the candidate reporting in SearchLight, FEF debates, the payment process, and additional process changes that the Office is reviewing in preparation for the next election cycle.

Survey responses are summarized in the table below. Results may not tally to 100% due to rounding.

Summarized Survey Results	
<b>Did the Fair Elections Fund impact your decision to run for office?</b>	<b>Yes – 73%</b> <b>No – 27%</b>
<b>Would you have run for office in 2023 without the Fair Elections Fund?</b>	<b>Yes – 64%</b> <b>No – 36%</b>

Did you highlight that you were part of the Fair Elections Fund during your campaign?	Yes – 100%
Did the Fair Elections Fund make it easier or harder to run for elected office?	Easier – 82% Harder – 18%
If you were to run for office in Denver again, do you think you would participate in the Fair Elections Fund?	Yes – 100%
Before qualifying for FEF dollars, a committee must collect 100 or 250 qualifying contributions from Denver residents depending on office sought. Do you feel the qualifying contribution threshold is . . . ?	Too High – 13% About Right – 57% Too Low – 30%
Once a committee qualifies for FEF funding, the first \$50.00 donated by a Denver resident are eligible to be matched. Do you feel that the \$50.00 cutoff for matching is . . . ?	Too High – 4% About Right – 74% Too Low – 22%
Donations are matched 90% up to the \$50.00 threshold. Do you feel that the match is . . . ?	Too High – 9% About Right – 83% Too Low – 9%
The maximum amount a committee is eligible to receive from the fund for the General Election is \$125,000, \$250,000, or \$750,000 depending on office sought. Do you feel the maximum amount is . . . ?	Too High – 4% About Right – 74% Too Low – 22%
Committees that participate in the Run-Off Election receive a one-time disbursement equal to 25% of the amount the committee received in the General Election. If you were affiliated with a committee that participated in the Run-off Election, do you feel that the 25% disbursement amount is . . . ? <i>(Runoff Committees Only)</i>	Too High – 0% About Right – 50% Too Low – 50%
As a mandatory participant in FEF debates, were the number of required debates . . . ?	Too High – 4% About Right – 48% Too Low – 48%

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# Appendix 3: Media Outreach

Media outreach was a major component of the Office of the Clerk and Recorder's effort to educate the public and potential candidates about the Fair Elections Fund. The Office aimed to enhance public understanding of the Fair Elections Fund and ensure transparency in the electoral process by empowering both the public and potential candidates. Through strategic engagement with various media channels, including TV, print, online platforms, and podcasts, over 80 stories were successfully generated that provided information about the Fair Elections Fund and its objectives.

## Media Goals

- **Raise Public Awareness:** inform and educate the public about the Fair Elections Fund, emphasizing its significance in fostering fair and transparent electoral practices.
- **Educate Potential Candidates:** provide potential candidates with insights into the Fair Elections Fund, encouraging their participation and adherence to its principles.
- **Media Empowerment:** streamline the dissemination of information by developing a user-friendly tool for the media to effortlessly review candidate filings. This tool was designed to enhance the efficiency and ease of access to crucial information, offering a level of convenience for the public and media alike.

## Outreach

- **Strategic Media Partnerships:** establish partnerships with key media outlets, leveraging their reach to disseminate information about the Fair Elections Fund. This included collaborations with prominent TV channels, print publications, online news platforms, and popular podcasts.
- **Press Releases and Media Kits:** timely and informative press releases crafted to announce key developments related to the Fair Elections Fund. Additionally, media kits were prepared to provide journalists with comprehensive resources for accurate reporting.
- **Education:** interactive workshops and webinars for journalists to familiarize them with the SearchLight Denver and the Fair Elections Fund when requested by media

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members or agencies. These sessions facilitated direct engagement, addressed queries, and ensured accurate reporting.

- **Social Media Campaigns:** leveraging the power of social media, executed targeted campaigns to reach a wider audience. Engaging content, infographics, and video materials were shared across various platforms to enhance visibility and encourage public discourse.

## **Impact**

- **Media Coverage:** the outreach efforts resulted in over 80 media stories across diverse channels, amplifying the reach of the Fair Elections Fund message.
- **Public Engagement:** the public response exceeded expectations, with increased awareness and active participation in discussions about fair elections and the importance of the Fair Elections Fund.
- **Media Tool Adoption:** the developed media tool witnessed widespread adoption, empowering journalists with a user-friendly interface to review candidate filings efficiently.