

Democracy North Carolina

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Successful Council of State Pilot Program Should Be Expanded

The success of the Voter-Owned Elections pilot program during the 2008 elections provides ample reason to expand the program to include more offices before the 2012 election cycle.

The Council of State pilot for three offices in 2008 had:

- **high levels of participation**
 - facilitated more **grassroots-oriented campaigning**
 - **reduced the role regulated industries** in the election process
 - **reduced the perception** of a conflict of interest
 - **freed candidates from the need to constantly fundraise**
 - allowed candidates **more time to spend with voters** throughout the state
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- **Four of six general election candidates** running for Commissioner of Insurance, State Auditor, and Superintendent of Public Instruction qualified to receive public financing, including two Republicans and two Democrats. A fifth candidate, Beth Wood opted into the program but did not qualify.
 - **Nine of 11 candidates** opted into the program during the primary, including several first-time candidates who said the program empowered them to run.
 - Candidates raised over **4,000 small contributions** between \$10 and \$200 from registered voters residing in all 100 counties.
 - Participating candidates stopped all fundraising after May 6 and were able to spend hundreds of additional hours listening to the concerns of people throughout the state.
 - The **average contribution fell dramatically** in all of these races. For example, in the Commissioner of Insurance race, the average contribution dropped from \$500 in 2004 to just \$70 in 2008. For the other two races the average was less than \$50.
 - Contributions from industries with financial ties to Council of State agencies dropped dramatically. In the Insurance Commissioner race, the total **dollars donated by regulated industries dropped** from 66% of the total contributions in 2004 to less than 5% in 2008.
 - The total cost of grants during the 2008 cycle was **\$1,360,818**, far less than the budgeted amount. 527 groups did not overwhelm the program and no matching money was triggered.
 - The **majority of the elected office holders of the 2009 Council of State support Voter-Owned Elections** and would like to see their offices included in the program be added as an option for qualifying contributions.