

Briefing on Votermedia for Vancouver Mayor's [Engaged City Task Force](#)

Mark Latham ([mark\[at\]votermedia.org](mailto:mark[at]votermedia.org); cv: [linkedin.com/in/marklatham](https://www.linkedin.com/in/marklatham))

2013-05-03

Votermedia is a new system for informing and engaging voters in a democracy. It has been used successfully by the University of British Columbia's student union, the Alma Mater Society (AMS). It rewards bloggers financially for covering elections and the government. Citizens vote to decide which blogs deserve how much award funds.

Votermedia has been in place at UBC since 2007, and has resulted in an active student blogosphere covering AMS elections, student government, university policies and other campus issues. We've made videos of UBC students talking about votermedia (which they also call "voter funded media" or VFM). Here are some quotes from "Votermedia at UBC" (votermedia.org/videos/2):

Isabel Ferreras - AMS Elections Administrator 2010:

"Voter apathy is something that exists among all universities... So finding a new accessible way, a really easy way to get students interested in the issues that go on at their own universities, I think is always a positive thing. And it increases engagement."

Justin McElroy - Coordinating Editor, *The Ubysey*, 2010-2012:

"...in terms of creating a conversation though, on campus, I think that that's what [voter media] really do well. It allows it that if you do care or if you want to care about what's happening, with your student government, with the provincial government, with the UBC administration, there are lots of people talking about it, there are a lot of views there, and it's easy to quickly find a lot of people from different perspectives who want to engage you, and want to discuss the pros and cons of different situations."

Jason Ng, UBC student blogger:

"It's helped bring together students that were not interested, necessarily, in student politics before. And helped them realize that a lot of the issues that affect UBC are, go beyond students who have a direct interest in politics, and really affect all the students that are part of the community for the years that they're here. And voter funded media has helped start that and helped generate a greater interest. I think we're seeing that reflected through better voter turnout, through better attendance at voter-related events. That hasn't happened before in previous years..."

These results were achieved with an annual award budget of about \$8,000. We first experimented with allocating these funds during the January 2007 AMS election. In later years we have allocated funds partly during elections, and partly spread throughout the year, between elections. Both ways work well; it mainly depends on when you want coverage of the government and policy issues. Some examples of UBC blogger election coverage: ubcinsiders.ca/category/elections

Vancouver is much bigger than UBC, but the award budget need not scale up proportionally. I would estimate that the city could achieve worthwhile results with award budgets of about \$30,000 during an election, and \$30,000 per year between elections. The city would pay those funds to blogs that win the most citizen votes. Any blog could enter, on paying the city an entry fee. VoterMedia.org is a nonprofit open-source project, and would be willing to help with implementation at no charge. Our ideas are not patented; anyone can use them for free, and adapt them as they choose.

For more depth, please see our report [Experiments in Voter Funded Media](http://votermedia.org/publications) at votermedia.org/publications.