# Voters	Their vote
10	G > C > P > M
3	C > G > P > M
5	C > P > M > G
6	M > P > C > G
4	P > M > C > G

- C looks like the clear winner, meaning he is preferred by a landslide majority over all his individual rivals. C is preferred over G, P, M all by an 18 – 10 margin.

But …. M wins,

- P is preferred to M by 22 of the 28 voters, yet he is the first candidate eliminated.
- G has more core support (10) than M's 6

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Ranked Choice Voting Implementation

Pierce County, Washington

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Ranked Choice Voting Implementation

The Pierce County Experience

Background

In 2008, the Pierce County Auditor's office implemented a new voting system for the citizens of Pierce County, Washington. Ranked Choice Voting (RCV) became a new part of the voting experience. Major accomplishments included: the formation of a Blue Ribbon Review Panel, development of policies and procedures, extensive testing and provisional certification of software, the addition of a second ballot card, a multifaceted voter education campaign and ultimately success in carrying out the nation's first partisan Ranked Choice Voting Election. Pierce County is the second largest county in Washington State with a population in excess of 805,000 and over 409,000 registered voters. The election was carried out by Pierce County's thirteen full time election staff, plus hundreds of part-time election workers. This professional practices paper highlights the Pierce County experience in implementing this new voting method.

Abstract of Program

In the 24 months leading up to our first RCV election, countless hours were spent preparing for the mission at hand. A Blue Ribbon Review Panel was formed, RCV staff was hired, additional charter amendments were passed, new procedures created and a multitude of software testing occurred leading to emergency/provisional certification granted by the State of Washington. The Blue Ribbon Review Panel included important stakeholders, i.e. political party chairs, representatives and attorneys from the Office of the Secretary of State's and Attorney General's Office, disability community members, The League of Women Voters, Veterans Advisory Council and respected members of the community.

Objective, Methods and Benefits

Four vital components of implementing Ranked Choice Voting were identified. These components would necessitate staff to work hours of epic proportions. They were:

- Voter Education
- Provisional certification of voting equipment and tabulation system
- Implementation
- 100% Success. We would accept nothing less than perfection.

Voter Education: An aggressive voter education plan was developed. The voter education campaign included the development of an enhanced website and interactive demonstration, usage of a speakers' bureau, two countywide mailings, a billboard, an enhanced voters' pamphlet that surpassed all expectations, detailed ballot instructions and polling place instructional posters. Public service announcements were aired on all major radio/television networks. The emphasis to **"GET READY"** for a new way of voting was the key message. In this message we instructed voters that they would receive two distinct ballot cards (traditional and RCV). Furthermore, they were given information on how to rank a first, second and third choice on their RCV ballot card.

Finally, voters were surveyed, although most (66%) did not like Ranked Choice Voting, over 90% of those returned said they understood how to mark the two separate ballot cards, proving that education efforts were not only important, but successful. This enormous education effort was taking place right alongside administering a Presidential Election with historic turnout. Voter education costs were approximately $137,000.

Provisional Certification of Voting Equipment and Tabulation System: Federally certified RCV software did not exist. Pierce County obtained budget funding for purchase of Sequoia Voting System's RCV software module. Internal and public logic and accuracy testing was conducted for many weeks, finally leading to the State of Washington granting emergency/provisional certification. We are still awaiting federal certification, with the product currently under testing at the iBeta laboratory. During the latter stages of testing, it was determined that the polling place tabulators could not be utilized: they were not robust enough to handle RCV ballot images and they would not support multiple precincts on one memory pack device. A central count procedure for tabulation of all polling place ballots was implemented. This course of action called for the hiring of 114 ballot transporters and processors. A 24 hour around the clock schedule was implemented to process the increased volume. Staff would work shifts of up to 17 hours daily to check in, visually scan and tabulate polling place ballots.

Implementation: The project implementation assumed requisites, such as hiring two additional staff members and a consultant, necessary funding, timely legal assistance and feedback from political parties, Pierce County Councilpersons, the Blue Ribbon Review Panel, staff and citizens. We conducted an internal legal review to study the newly passed charter amendments and changes to the charter. Ranked Choice Voting election laws did not exist. Staff developed policies, procedures and rules to conduct the election. Our staff worked closely with Sequoia Voting Systems to assure product availability, software parameters and the critical timelines.

The addition of the second ballot card to support RCV doubled our volume. A total of 646,595 ballot cards were processed and tabulated. The election was certified as scheduled with everything working as tested and planned.

Success? YES! Success was built on the foundation we established over the prior two year period. The foundation was built on the premise of training, preparedness and the best practices of our RCV friends in San Francisco, California. It was a major accomplishment when the algorithm was applied accurately on election night, with results and ballot image reports being made available on the internet a few moments later. Success, however, did not come without a price. A gigantic price involving both financial resources and hours and hours of staff time. The 2008 General Election had a total cost of $3.29 million dollars with $1,626,798 directly attributable to the Ranked Choice Voting election.

Conclusion

The management of Ranked Choice Voting as a new method of voting was successful in Pierce County, Washington. Our efforts to administer this new voting method, while simultaneously experiencing record setting turnout was extra special and we're proud of our accomplishment. The four vital components: voter education, provisional certification, implementation and success met our expectations as well as our harshest critics'! As more and more jurisdictions across the country consider and adopt RCV, Pierce County stands ready to share lessons learned, best practices and offer assistance and guidance.

Words of Wisdom

- Involve stakeholders early
- Establish written rules and procedures
- Research best practices
- Work closely with your vendor
- Train your workers
- Secure necessary funding
- Make your processes litigation proof
- Be Prepared
- Educate your voters
- Test, test, test and proof, proof, proof

Supporting Documents:

Voter pamphlet cover
Ranked choice voting envelope and brochure
Interactive web video
Ranked choice voting ballot insert
Newspaper article

CHAPTER 4

Elk Grove Charter Exploratory and Election Reform Committee

Final Report 12/2007

Instant Run-off Voting (Ranked-choice Voting)

Chapter 4

A. What is IRV?

Instant Runoff Voting ("IRV") is a method of selecting the winner of an election for a particular office, e.g., city council or mayor. It is an alternative to plurality ("winner take all") and runoff elections. IRV is oftentimes referred interchangeably as "ranked choice," "ranked order," "preferential" or "alternative" voting.

B. Can All Cities Implement IRV?

No. Currently only charter cities have the legal authority to implement IRV for municipal elections. Assembly Bill 1294 (2007) would have empowered general law cities to use IRV, but it was vetoed.

Voters in four charter cities have amended their charters to provide for IRV – San Francisco, Oakland, San Leandro and Berkeley. Of these, only San Francisco has actually implemented IRV. This is because, to date, other cities have not acquired approved voting systems to handle IRV.
The voters of Davis, a general law city, recently held an "advisory vote" indicating their support for IRV, notwithstanding their recognition that as a general law city, Davis could not implement such a system without prior state authorization.

C. How does IRV Work?

IRV allows voters to rank candidates for a particular office in order of preference, e.g., 1, 2, 3, etc. Typically the number of "preferences" the voter may make corresponds with the number of candidates for a particular office.[102] In the event the city's voting system or equipment cannot accommodate the number of candidates for a given office, San Francisco and Oakland permit the city clerk to limit the number of preferences that voters can make, provided voters are always given at least 3 preferences.[103] If a voter selects the same candidate more than once, only the initial preference for that candidate will be counted. As explained below, a voters' second, third, etc. choice are counted only if their first choice candidate is eliminated in an instant runoff.

After the ballots are turned in, elections officials tabulate the results using only voters' first preference. If any one candidate is the first choice of a majority (greater than 50 percent) of voters, that candidate is elected to the office in question. Under this scenario, the manner in which voters ranked other candidates is not considered.

In the event none of the candidates is the first choice of a majority of voters, an "instant runoff" takes place in which some voters' second choice is considered. This occurs by eliminating the candidate(s) who received the fewest "first choice" votes. (Several options exist for dealing with a scenario in which two or more candidates tie for the lowest number of votes from among the voters' initial preferences, including eliminating both candidates or choosing between the candidates by lot.)[104] In the vote-off, all voters who initially preferred the eliminated candidate(s) are then redistributed among the remaining candidates according to those voters' second choice. If, after this redistribution of votes, any one candidate holds a majority of the votes, he or she is declared the winner and the election is over. If none of the candidates

[102] See, e.g., San Francisco City SF Charter, § 13.102 subd. (b).
[103] San Francisco City SF Charter, § 13.102 subd. (b); Oakland City Charter, art. XI, § 1105 subd. (k)(1).
[104] See, e.g., Oakland City Charter, § XI, § 1105 subd. (e).

has won a majority of the votes after the first redistribution of votes, the process described above is repeated until one candidate does have a majority of the votes.

So, as long as the number of preferences corresponds with the number of candidates, the eventual winner will have received a majority of the votes. However, if the number of preferences that voters may indicate on the ballot is less than the number of candidates running for that office, than the possibility exists that a candidate could win the election with only a plurality (less than 50 percent) of the vote.

D. Write-In Candidates & IRV

The charters of San Francisco and Oakland both expressly provide that the use of IRV shall not interfere with voters' ability to write-in candidates on the ballot. Thus, IRV ballots used in San Francisco include a space under each "choice" for the name of a write-in candidate.

As a legal matter, it is unsettled whether a city could totally bar voters from writing in candidates in IRV style elections. The United States Supreme Court upheld Hawaii's prohibition on write-in candidates on the basis that the other avenues of ballot access that the state provides are sufficient to protect voters rights under the federal constitution to effectively cast their votes.[105] Prior to that case, the California Supreme Court had struck down San Diego's prohibition on write-in candidates in the general (but not primary) elections on the basis that it violated the more expansive protections afforded to voters under the California Constitution. Recently, however, the California Supreme Court appeared to overrule that decision, at least in part, when it held that San Francisco's ban on write-in votes in traditional runoff elections did not violate the state or federal constitutions.[106]

E. Voters' Experience with IRV

During the November 2004 general election, the first of which San Francisco voters used IRV, San Francisco State University conducted a survey in an attempt to gage voters' overall "experience" with IRV. The results of the SFSU survey revealed that 51.6 percent of voters at the polls and 54.3 percent of absentee voters responded that they "understood perfectly well" how IRV worked;[107] 34.8 percent of voters at the polls and 35.1 percent of absentee voters reported that they "understood fairly well" how IRV worked.

On August 27, 2007, Ms. Jill LaVine, County of Sacramento registrar of voters, reported to the committee that there is currently no voting equipment certified to conduct an instant run-off/rank choice election. Benefits of this voting process were touted to increase in voter turnout; however, John Arntz, San Francisco director of elections, believed that quality candidates increase voter turnout, not the method of voting. According to Ms. LaVine, an extensive public outreach effort was undertaken in San Francisco and Mr. Arntz stated that the city is still paying for these costs after three years.

Ms. LaVine estimated that a stand-alone runoff election in Elk Grove would cost over $233,000, whereas a runoff consolidated with a general election would cost $32,000. Voting equipment must be certified at both the state and federal level, which could take six to 12 months. The cost for federal certification can be as much as $500,000 and state certification costs estimated to be approximately $400,000. Currently there are no state-wide uniform codes, policies or procedures for instant run-off voting because they can only be implemented at a charter city level. When IRV is combined with a regularly scheduled municipal election the process requires two ballots. Ms. LaVine stated that she believes that voters can be easily confused about varying processes and candidates might be concerned about voters understanding of the system.

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[105] *Burdick v. Takushi* (1992) 504 U.S. 428.

[106] *Edelstein v. City and County of San Francisco* (2007) 29 Cal.4th 164.

[107] Neeley, Francis, San Francisco State University, An Assessment of Ranked Choice Voting in the San Francisco 2004 Election (May 2005) page 16.

Hypothetically, the estimated costs for implementing an instant runoff voting process within Elk Grove could be as much as $1 million for equipment, certifications, added staff and voter education.

Committee Input

The following chart outlines the advantages and disadvantages as developed by committee members.

Characteristics for Instant Runoff Voting		
Characteristics	**Advantages**	**Disadvantages**
Instant runoff voting (IRV) allows voters to rank candidates for a particular office in order of preference rather than being forced to choose only one candidate for each office.	• Would be an advantage in a race with a large number of candidates. • Generally ensures the winning candidate has majority of votes. • Avoids a runoff election.	• Would be a disadvantage if a voter wanted to only vote for their first choice candidate. • Could easily lead to voter confusion and frustration • Elk Grove may not often have a large number of candidates. • Could "game" the system (e.g. groups could get together and collectively agree to vote for second and third choices to manipulate system). • The successful candidate may not have a true "majority" of votes because it is a hybrid type system. • IRV has not proven itself as a cost savings tool.
According to some news articles from other states and some county elections officials, IRV may have the potential to confuse voters.	• Nothing was identified.	• This characteristic in and of itself is a disadvantage.
Unlike plurality voting, in IRV elections a candidate must usually receive a majority of votes in order to be elected to a particular office.	• Would be an advantage in a race with a large number of candidates. • Ensures the winning candidate has majority of votes. • Avoids a runoff election.	• IRV has not proven itself as a cost savings tool.
According to the only academic study/survey conducted in the only California city to have actually implemented IRV in the modern era, approximately three out of four voters who used it reported that they understood IRV and had a positive experience with it.	• This characteristic was discussed, but was identified as neither an advantage nor disadvantage.	
Currently, there are no voting tabulation machines in California that are certified for use in IRV elections.	• Nothing was identified.	• Assuming that certified voting tabulations machines were available, there could be significant costs associated with purchasing the equipment.