

February 13, 2015

FROM: Chris Jerdonek
TO: Elections Commission;
John Arntz, Director of Elections

SUBJECT: RCV Education and Voter Use of Rankings (6 pages plus attachments)

This memo explores the possibility of improving voter understanding of RCV and voter use of rankings through the wording in RCV materials.

The Department of Elections already has very good materials and does excellent voter outreach, and it maintains a positive practice of continually improving its own processes. So the purpose of this memo is to explore improving an already good practice.

1. Background

San Francisco first used ranked choice voting (RCV) in November 2004. Since that time, many people, including elected officials and the media, have emphasized the need for and importance of good voter education around ranked choice voting.

For example, in June 2011 the Voting Systems Task Force (VSTF), which was created by the Board of Supervisors, recommended the following:

San Francisco should reenergize its voter outreach and education efforts on RCV to better assure that voters have a good understanding of how votes are to be cast and counted.

The above is from Section 2.4.4.1 “Public Understanding of RCV” of their report [B1, p. 45].

2. Overview

Currently, San Francisco's RCV materials seem limited mainly to the mechanics of filling out a ballot. However, this does not necessarily help voters understand how the rankings are used.

Consequently, even after reading some of these materials, voters could come to the incorrect conclusion for example that RCV is a “weighted” or “points-based” system (e.g. three points for first choice, two points for second choice, and one point for third choice).

Misunderstandings like this can cause voters to—

1. Leave the second or third choice blank (e.g. bullet voting), incorrectly thinking that this is better for their first choice, or
2. Mark the same candidate for all three choices, incorrectly thinking this will help their first choice even more.

Behaviors like the above, while good-intentioned, may be counter-productive to the voter. The voter may lose out on the chance to have a say in a later round of the RCV tabulation.

Improved instructions or understanding could help voters cast a more effective vote.

3. Voter Use of RCV Rankings

For context and additional background, this section contains data on how voters used their rankings in recent past RCV contests.

The author compiled this information by analyzing the RCV ballot image files posted on the Department website.

Election	Contest	Winner	Candidates	Ranked 3	Ranked 2	Ranked 1
2014 Nov*	D6 Supervisor	Kim	4	47.5%	11.2%	41.3%
2014 Nov*	D8 Supervisor	Wiener	5	33.7%	10.7%	55.6%
2014 Nov	D10 Supervisor	Cohen	5	49.1%	17.4%	33.6%
2012 Nov	D5 Supervisor	Breed	8	67.3%	15.0%	17.7%
2012 Nov	D7 Supervisor	Yee	9	66.1%	14.4%	19.5%
2011 Nov	Mayor	Lee	16	72.8%	11.3%	15.9%
2011 Nov	Sheriff	Mirkarimi	4	42.0%	19.7%	38.2%
2011 Nov	District Attorney	Gascón	5	51.9%	21.5%	26.6%
2010 Nov	D2 Supervisor	Farrell	6	42.4%	18.3%	39.3%
2010 Nov	D6 Supervisor	Kim	14	60.3%	12.8%	26.9%
2010 Nov	D8 Supervisor	Wiener	4	48.6%	23.7%	27.7%
2010 Nov	D10 Supervisor	Cohen	21	62.1%	14.5%	23.4%

Table 1: Number of Candidates Ranked by Voters in Recent RCV Contests

Table Details

Table 1 includes all RCV contests in San Francisco from 2010 onwards that (1) had three or more candidates on the ballot (i.e. three or more candidates that were not write-in candidates), and (2) went to more than one round of RCV tabulation. The necessity for (2) is that the Department has not normally released ballot image files if one candidate has a majority of the first-choice tallies. The November 4, 2014 D6 and D8 Supervisor contests (marked with a star *) were an exception. In those contests, the Department did release ballot image files on a couple reporting occasions, but November 10 was the last day they did this (when approximately 91% of ballots were counted). So these two rows do not reflect 100% of the ballots.

The “Candidates” column contains the number of candidates that appeared on the ballot. The “Ranked N” columns contain the percentage of ballots that validly ranked N distinct candidates. In particular, if a voter ranked the same candidate three times, then that ballot would show up in the “Ranked 1” column. The percentages are relative to the total number of continuing ballots in the first round of the RCV tabulation (i.e. ballots that counted towards some candidate in the first round).

Table Observations

The percentage of voters using all three rankings ranged from 34% in the November 2014 D8 Supervisor race with 5 candidates, to 73% in the November 2011 Mayor race with 16 candidates. Similarly, the percentage of voters ranking only one candidate ranged from 16% in the November 2011 Mayor race to 56% in the November 2014 D8 Supervisor race (the same two races).

The number of rankings used seems influenced especially by both 1) the number of candidates in the race, as well as 2) the closeness of the race. In particular, when more candidates run or the race is closer, more voters seem to use more rankings.

Note that voters do not always “need” to rank more than one candidate to have their vote count in the final round. For example, in the November 2014 D8 Supervisor race, 55.6% of voters ranked only one candidate. However, because this contest was decided in the first round of the RCV tabulation, only the first ranking mattered for the purposes of determining a winner. This is an example of a race that was not as close.

In other contests, however, if a voter ranks only one candidate, their ballot might not count towards a candidate in the final round of the tabulation (i.e. it can become “exhausted”).

5. Ideas for RCV Wording

This section discusses wording to help voters understand how ballot rankings in RCV are used and counted.

This information is important for voters to know how to cast a more effective ballot. Without this information, voters could mistakenly think that ranking more choices will hurt their first choice (i.e. that bullet voting will help their first choice more), and so rank fewer choices. Rather, ranking more candidates makes it more likely that the voter will have a say in the later rounds of the RCV tabulation.

Here is possible wording:

Ranking a second choice cannot hurt your first choice, and ranking a third choice cannot hurt your first two choices. Your ballot will count towards a lower choice only if your higher choices are eliminated.

And possibly also—

You maximize the power of your vote by using all three of your rankings.

The City of Minneapolis, MN uses wording like the above in its RCV brochure. Minneapolis started using RCV in November 2009. The “How to Vote with a Ranked Choice Ballot” section of their brochure reads [A4]:

1. Select your preferred candidate and fill in the oval next to the candidate’s name in the 1st choice column.
2. Indicate your 2nd choice. Your ballot will count for this candidate if (and only if) your 1st choice loses. It doesn't help your 1st choice candidate to rank him or her more than once or to not rank anyone else.
3. Rank a 3rd choice if you have one. Your ballot will count for this candidate only if your 1st and 2nd choices lose.

At least one piece of San Francisco RCV literature has language similar to this. However, the piece appears to be older (possibly predating San Francisco's first RCV election in November 2004) and does not seem to accompany the main election materials. This is the RCV Trifold brochure [A3]. Under the “Marking the Ranked-Choice Ballot” section, it says—

Keep In Mind: Your second choice will be counted only if your first-choice candidate has been eliminated. Your third choice will be counted only if both your first-choice and second-choice candidates have been eliminated.

If you select the same candidate in more than one column, your vote for that candidate will count ONLY ONCE.

Excerpts of the RCV instructional wording in a selection of other San Francisco voter education materials is included in an appendix to this memo.

Attachments

1. “Ranked-Choice Voting,” San Francisco Voter Information Pamphlet (VIP), November 2014, p. 8.
2. “Ranked-Choice Voting in SF,” RCV Poster for November 2014 Election.
3. “Ranked-Choice Voting Explained,” RCV Trifold, possibly from before November 2004 (2 pages).
4. “Your City. Your Vote.” Minneapolis RCV Brochure (2 pages).

Bibliography

1. "Recommendations on Voting Systems for the City and County of San Francisco," San Francisco Voting Systems Task Force (VSTF), June 2011.
2. “Be a Voter,” SF Department of Elections household mailer, November 2014.

Appendix: Current RCV Wording Examples

For background and comparison purposes, this section provides excerpts of the RCV wording from a selection of San Francisco voter education materials from the November 2014 election.

1. Household Mailer

The large postcard sent to all households says [B2]—

On the ballot, candidate names for these offices appear in repeating columns. Mark a first-, second-, and third-choice. To rank fewer choices, or if there are fewer than three names, leave remaining columns blank.

2. Voter Information Pamphlet (VIP)

In the section called “Marking the Ranked-Choice Ballot,” the Voter Information Pamphlet says [A1]—

- Select only one choice per column.
- To rank fewer than three candidates, leave any remaining columns blank.

3. Ballot Instructions

On the actual ballot, the RCV instructions say (above the three columns)—

- FIRST CHOICE: Vote for One
- SECOND CHOICE: Vote for One — Must be different than your first choice
- THIRD CHOICE: Vote for One — Must be different than your first and second choices

4. RCV Poster

The RCV Poster (the one with “smiley”) says [A2]—

- Mark a DIFFERENT candidate in each column 😊
- ☹ Do NOT mark more than one candidate in a column
- ☹ Do NOT mark the same candidate more than once

5. RCV Trifold Brochure

Under “Marking the Ranked-Choice Ballot,” the RCV Trifold brochure (which appears to predate San Francisco's first RCV election in November 2004) says [A3]—

Keep In Mind: Your second choice will be counted only if your first-choice candidate has been eliminated. Your third choice will be counted only if both your first-choice and second-choice candidates have been eliminated.

If you select the same candidate in more than one column, your vote for that candidate will count ONLY ONCE.



Ranked-Choice Voting

Ranked-choice voting was passed by San Francisco voters as an amendment to the City Charter in March 2002 (Proposition A).

Ranked-choice voting allows voters to rank up to three candidates for the same office. San Francisco voters use ranked-choice voting to elect the Mayor, Sheriff, District Attorney, City Attorney, Treasurer, Assessor-Recorder, Public Defender, and Members of the Board of Supervisors.

For the November 4 election, all San Francisco voters will use ranked-choice voting to elect the Assessor-Recorder and Public Defender. Voters who live in Supervisorial Districts 2, 4, 6, 8, and 10 will also elect their member of the Board of Supervisors using ranked-choice voting.

How Ranked-Choice Voting Works

Initially, everyone's vote counts for his or her first-choice candidate. If a candidate has the majority—more than half—of these votes, that candidate wins.

- If no candidate has the majority of votes, the candidate in last place is eliminated. Votes for the eliminated candidate transfer to the next-choice candidates marked on those ballots.
- If one candidate has the majority after these votes are transferred, that candidate wins.
- If there is still no candidate with the majority of votes, the process of eliminating candidates and transferring votes continues until one candidate has the majority.

Marking the Ranked-Choice Ballot

With ranked-choice voting, the names of all the candidates are listed in three repeating columns on the ballot. This allows you to rank up to three candidates for the same office: one favorite, and two others.

- Select only **one** choice per column.
- To rank fewer than three candidates, leave any remaining columns blank.
- To vote for a qualified write-in candidate who is not listed on the ballot, write the person's name on the blank line at the end of the candidate list and complete the arrow.

1 FIRST CHOICE 第一選擇 PRIMERA PREFERENCIA	2 SECOND CHOICE 第二選擇 SEGUNDA PREFERENCIA	3 THIRD CHOICE 第三選擇 TERCERA PREFERENCIA
Vote for One 請選一個 Vote por uno	Vote for One—Must be different from your first choice 選一個 (必須與第一個選擇不同) Vote por uno—Tiene que ser diferente de su primera preferencia	Vote for One—must be different than your first and second choices 選一個 (必須與第一個和第二個選擇不同) Vote por uno—Tiene que ser diferente de su primera y segunda preferencias
ALCATRAZ ISLAND 監獄島 ISLA DE ALCATRAZ	ALCATRAZ ISLAND 監獄島 ISLA DE ALCATRAZ	ALCATRAZ ISLAND 監獄島 ISLA DE ALCATRAZ
COIT TOWER 考伊特塔 TORRE COIT	COIT TOWER 考伊特塔 TORRE COIT	COIT TOWER 考伊特塔 TORRE COIT
FISHERMAN'S WHARF 漁人碼頭 FISHERMAN'S WHARF	FISHERMAN'S WHARF 漁人碼頭 FISHERMAN'S WHARF	FISHERMAN'S WHARF 漁人碼頭 FISHERMAN'S WHARF

Why do some contests have only one candidate?

For Assessor-Recorder, Public Defender, and District 4 Supervisor, only one candidate for each office filed before the deadline to appear on the ballot. Two candidates filed to appear on the ballot for District 2 Supervisor. There may be other people who file to be write-in candidates. Their names are not printed on the ballot but appear on the Certified List of Qualified Write-in Candidates, available at sfelections.org beginning October 22 and at polling places on Election Day.

How do I mark my ballot when there are fewer than three candidates?

To rank fewer than three candidates, or if there are fewer than three candidates for an office, mark your choice(s) and leave any remaining columns blank.



Ranked-Choice Voting in SF

Election Day is November 4!

Mark a **DIFFERENT** candidate in each column



CITY AND COUNTY / 市縣 / CIUDAD Y CONDADO		
Vote your first, second, and third choices / 投選您的第一、第二和第三選擇 / Vote por su primera, segunda y tercera preferencia		
<div>FAVORITE SAN FRANCISCO ATTRACTION 最愛的三藩市景點 ATRACCIÓN FAVORITA DE SAN FRANCISCO</div> <div>1 FIRST CHOICE 第一選擇 PRIMERA PREFERENCIA</div> <div>Vote for One 請選一名 Vote por Uno</div>	<div>FAVORITE SAN FRANCISCO ATTRACTION 最愛的三藩市景點 ATRACCIÓN FAVORITA DE SAN FRANCISCO</div> <div>2 SECOND CHOICE 第二選擇 SEGUNDA PREFERENCIA</div> <div>Vote for One—Must be different from your first choice 請選一名-必須與第一個選擇不同 Vote por Uno—Deberá ser diferente de su primera preferencia</div>	<div>FAVORITE SAN FRANCISCO ATTRACTION 最愛的三藩市景點 ATRACCIÓN FAVORITA DE SAN FRANCISCO</div> <div>3 THIRD CHOICE 第三選擇 TERCERA PREFERENCIA</div> <div>Vote for One—must be different from your first and second choice 請選一名-必須與第一和第二個選擇不同 Vote por Uno—Deberá ser diferente de su primera y segunda preferencia</div>
ALCATRAZ ISLAND 監獄島 ISLA DE ALCATRAZ	ALCATRAZ ISLAND 監獄島 ISLA DE ALCATRAZ	ALCATRAZ ISLAND 監獄島 ISLA DE ALCATRAZ
COIT TOWER 考伊特塔 TORRE DE COIT	COIT TOWER 考伊特塔 TORRE DE COIT	COIT TOWER 考伊特塔 TORRE DE COIT
FISHERMAN'S WHARF 漁人碼頭 FISHERMAN'S WHARF	FISHERMAN'S WHARF 漁人碼頭 FISHERMAN'S WHARF	FISHERMAN'S WHARF 漁人碼頭 FISHERMAN'S WHARF
GOLDEN GATE PARK 金門公園 PARQUE GOLDEN GATE	GOLDEN GATE PARK 金門公園 PARQUE GOLDEN GATE	GOLDEN GATE PARK 金門公園 PARQUE GOLDEN GATE

FAVORITE SAN FRANCISCO ATTRACTION	FAVORITE SAN FRANCISCO ATTRACTION	FAVORITE SAN FRANCISCO ATTRACTION
1 FIRST CHOICE	2 SECOND CHOICE	3 THIRD CHOICE
ALCATRAZ ISLAND	ALCATRAZ ISLAND	ALCATRAZ ISLAND
COIT TOWER	COIT TOWER	COIT TOWER
FISHERMAN'S WHARF	FISHERMAN'S WHARF	FISHERMAN'S WHARF
GOLDEN GATE PARK	GOLDEN GATE PARK	GOLDEN GATE PARK

Do NOT mark more than one candidate in a column



FAVORITE SAN FRANCISCO ATTRACTION	FAVORITE SAN FRANCISCO ATTRACTION	FAVORITE SAN FRANCISCO ATTRACTION
1 FIRST CHOICE	2 SECOND CHOICE	3 THIRD CHOICE
ALCATRAZ ISLAND	ALCATRAZ ISLAND	ALCATRAZ ISLAND
COIT TOWER	COIT TOWER	COIT TOWER
FISHERMAN'S WHARF	FISHERMAN'S WHARF	FISHERMAN'S WHARF
GOLDEN GATE PARK	GOLDEN GATE PARK	GOLDEN GATE PARK

Do NOT mark the same candidate more than once



Be A Voter

sfelections.org
(415) 554-4375



What is ranked-choice voting?

Ranked-choice voting allows San Francisco voters to rank a first, second, and third choice candidate for a single office. This makes it possible to elect local officials by majority vote without the need for a separate run-off election.

Who is elected using ranked-choice voting?

Starting in November 2004, San Francisco will use ranked-choice voting to elect most local officials. Ranked-choice voting does not affect the election of State and federal officials or the adoption of ballot measures.

How does ranked-choice voting work?

To start, every voter's first-choice vote is counted. Any candidate who receives a majority (*more than 50%*) of the first-choice votes is declared the winner. If no candidate receives more than 50% of the first-choice votes, a process of eliminating candidates and transferring votes begins:

- **First**, the candidate who received the fewest number of first-choice votes is eliminated from the race.
- **Second**, voters who selected the eliminated candidate as their first choice will have their vote transferred to their second choice.
- **Third**, all the votes are recounted.
- **Fourth**, if any candidate receives more than 50% of the votes he or she is declared the winner. If no candidate receives more than 50% of the votes, the process of eliminating candidates and transferring votes is repeated until one candidate has a winning majority.



The Ranked-Choice Ballot

This brochure shows a sample ranked-choice ballot. This fall, the exact ballot you will see at the polling place will be on the Department's website and in your voter information pamphlet.

How To Find Out More

For more information on ranked-choice voting please contact the Department of Elections.

Stop by: The Department of Elections
City Hall, Room 48
1 Dr. Carlton B. Goodlett Place
San Francisco, California 94102

Call: English: (415) 554-4375
Chinese: (415) 554-4367
Spanish: (415) 554-4366
TDD: (415) 554-4386

Visit Our Website: sfelections.org

Ranked-Choice Voting Explained



Marking the Ranked-Choice Ballot

First Column

Select your **first-choice** candidate by completing the arrow pointing to your choice.

Second Column

To indicate a **second choice**, select a *different* candidate in the second column by completing the arrow pointing to your choice.

Third Column

To indicate a **third choice**, select a *different* candidate in the third column by completing the arrow pointing to your choice.

Keep In Mind

Your second choice will be counted only if your first-choice candidate has been eliminated. Your third choice will be counted only if both your first-choice and second-choice candidates have been eliminated.

If you select the same candidate in more than one column, your vote for that candidate will count **ONLY ONCE**.

MEMBER, BOARD OF SUPERVISORS MIEMBRO, CONSEJO DE SUPERVISORES 市參議員 DISTRICT 00-DISTRITO 00-第00選區 1 FIRST CHOICE PRIMERA SELECCIÓN 第一選擇 Vote for One / Vote por Uno / 請選一人	MEMBER, BOARD OF SUPERVISORS MIEMBRO, CONSEJO DE SUPERVISORES 市參議員 DISTRICT 00-DISTRITO 00-第00選區 2 SECOND CHOICE SEGUNDA SELECCIÓN 第二選擇 Vote for One/Vote por Uno/請選一人	MEMBER, BOARD OF SUPERVISORS MIEMBRO, CONSEJO DE SUPERVISORES 市參議員 DISTRICT 00-DISTRITO 00-第00選區 3 THIRD CHOICE TERCERA SELECCIÓN 第三選擇 Vote for One/Vote por Uno/請選一人
ELEANOR ROOSEVELT 愛麗諾·羅斯福 Incumbent Titular 現任者	ELEANOR ROOSEVELT 愛麗諾·羅斯福 Incumbent Titular 現任者	ELEANOR ROOSEVELT 愛麗諾·羅斯福 Incumbent Titular 現任者
CESAR CHAVEZ 西薩·舍瓦茲 Labor Organizer Organizador Laboral 勞工組織者	CESAR CHAVEZ 西薩·舍瓦茲 Labor Organizer Organizador Laboral 勞工組織者	CESAR CHAVEZ 西薩·舍瓦茲 Labor Organizer Organizador Laboral 勞工組織者
WALTER LUM 沃爾特·林 Publisher Editor 出版商	WALTER LUM 沃爾特·林 Publisher Editor 出版商	WALTER LUM 沃爾特·林 Publisher Editor 出版商
JOHN HANCOCK 約翰·漢考克 Physician Médico 醫生	JOHN HANCOCK 約翰·漢考克 Physician Médico 醫生	JOHN HANCOCK 約翰·漢考克 Physician Médico 醫生
MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. 小馬丁·路德·金 Minister Pastor 牧師	MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. 小馬丁·路德·金 Minister Pastor 牧師	MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. 小馬丁·路德·金 Minister Pastor 牧師
ANNA MAE PICTOU AQUASH 安娜·梅·皮克投·阿夸施 Indigenous Rights Organizer Organizadora para Derechos Indígenas 土著權益組織者	ANNA MAE PICTOU AQUASH 安娜·梅·皮克投·阿夸施 Indigenous Rights Organizer Organizadora para Derechos Indígenas 土著權益組織者	ANNA MAE PICTOU AQUASH 安娜·梅·皮克投·阿夸施 Indigenous Rights Organizer Organizadora para Derechos Indígenas 土著權益組織者



Complete the arrow as shown here.

Write-In Candidates

If you wish to vote for a qualified write-in candidate for any of your three choices, write the person's name on the blank line provided **and complete the arrow** pointing to your choice.

MINNEAPOLIS

YourCity. YourVote.

NOVEMBER 5



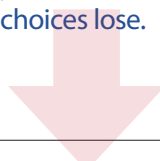
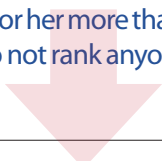
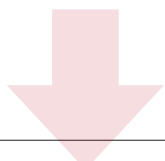
RCV: Easy as 1, 2, 3...

This November, you'll vote for Mayor, City Council, Park Board and the Board of Estimate and Taxation using Ranked Choice Voting (RCV).

With RCV, there is no primary election – RCV folds two elections into one, so you only have to make one trip to the polls in November.

How to Vote with a Ranked Choice Ballot

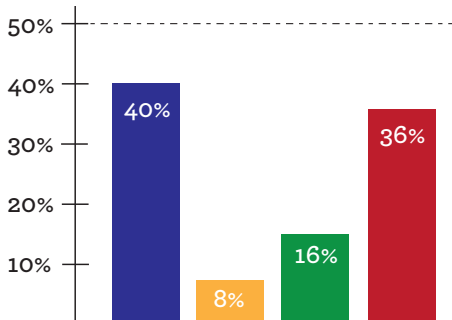
- 1) Select your preferred candidate and fill in the oval next to the candidate's name in the 1st choice column.
- 2) Indicate your 2nd choice. Your ballot will count for this candidate if (and only if) your 1st choice loses. It doesn't help your 1st choice candidate to rank him or her more than once or to not rank anyone else.
- 3) Rank a 3rd choice if you have one. Your ballot will count for this candidate only if your 1st and 2nd choices lose.



MAYOR		
Rank your first, second and third choice candidates in the columns below. One to be elected.		
1	2	3
1st Choice	2nd Choice, if any Must be DIFFERENT from your 1st choice	3rd Choice, if any Must be DIFFERENT from your 1st and 2nd choices
Select one	Select one	Select one
<input type="radio"/> HARALSON Apple Party	<input checked="" type="radio"/> HARALSON Apple Party	<input type="radio"/> HARALSON Apple Party
<input checked="" type="radio"/> HONEYCRISP Classic Party	<input type="radio"/> HONEYCRISP Classic Party	<input type="radio"/> HONEYCRISP Classic Party
<input type="radio"/> MCINTOSH Apple Party	<input type="radio"/> MCINTOSH Apple Party	<input checked="" type="radio"/> MCINTOSH Apple Party
<input type="radio"/> REGENT Cold Hardy Party	<input type="radio"/> REGENT Cold Hardy Party	<input type="radio"/> REGENT Cold Hardy Party
<input type="radio"/> SNOWSWEET Apple Party	<input type="radio"/> SNOWSWEET Apple Party	<input type="radio"/> SNOWSWEET Apple Party
<input type="radio"/> FIRESIDE Apple Party	<input type="radio"/> FIRESIDE Apple Party	<input type="radio"/> FIRESIDE Apple Party

How to count RCV ballots:

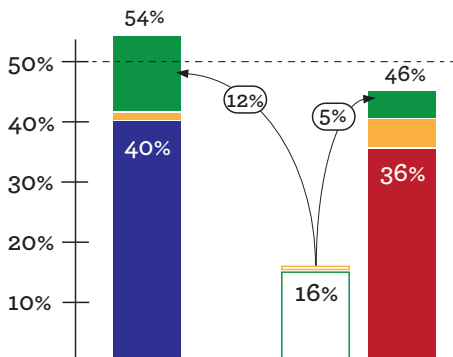
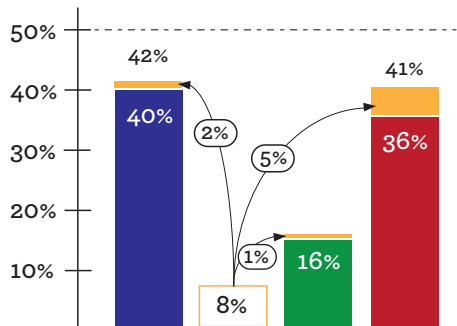
Everyone has one vote, but is able to indicate their “backup” choices. Here’s how we count RCV ballots in a single-seat race.



1 All 1st choices on the ballots are counted. Did someone meet the threshold of 50% +1 of the votes? If yes, s/he wins. If not....

2 The candidate with the fewest 1st choice votes is defeated. The ballots cast for him/her are reassigned to those voters’ 2nd choices.

(Note: ONLY the defeated candidate’s ballots are reassigned. Ballots cast for all other candidates continue to count for those candidates.)



3 Did a candidate meet the threshold with the additional votes allocated? If yes, s/he wins. If not, repeat step 2.

Keep going until a candidate reaches the threshold (or until 2 candidates remain and the one with the most votes wins).

In the multi-seat elections, like Park Board, you use the same ranking process. The threshold to win is different because there are more seats to fill and rounds of counting occur until all seats are filled.

Ranked Choice Voting is as easy as 1-2-3!
Visit vote.MinneapolisMN.gov for more information.