



# Improving Elections with Instant Runoff Voting

**Instant Runoff Voting (IRV)** - Used for both government and private elections around the United States and the world, *instant runoff voting* is a simple election process used to avoid the expense, difficulties and shortcomings of runoff elections. Compared to the traditional "delayed" runoff, IRV saves taxpayers money, cuts the costs of running campaigns, elects public officials with higher voter turnout and encourages candidates to run less negative campaigns.

## How instant runoff voting works:

- **First round of counting:** The **voters rank their preferred candidate first and may also rank additional choices (second, third, etc.)**. In the first round of counting, the voters' #1 choices are tallied. A candidate who receives enough first choices to win outright (typically a majority) is declared the winner. However, other candidates may have enough support to require a runoff – *just as in traditional runoff systems*.
- **Second round:** If no one achieves a clear victory, **the runoff occurs instantly**. The candidate with the fewest votes is removed and the votes made for that candidate are redistributed using voters' second choices. Other voters' top choices remain the same. The redistributed votes are added to the counts of the candidates still in competition. The process is repeated until one candidate has majority support.

## The benefits:

Instant runoff voting (IRV) would do everything the current runoff system does to ensure that the winner has popular support – but it does it in one election rather than two.

- *Saves localities, taxpayers and candidates money* by holding only one election.
- *Ensures higher voter turnout* than when voters are asked to return for a second, runoff election.
- *Eases the administrative burden on election officials* who only have to run one election, not two.
- *Discourages negative campaigning* because victories may require candidates to be the second or third choices of other candidates' supporters.

## Where instant runoff voting is used:

- **California:** San Francisco started running IRV with a successful election in November 2004. By using IRV, the City expects to save at least \$15 million over the coming decade.
- **Utah:** Since 2002, the Utah Republican Party has used IRV at its state conventions for nominating candidates for congressional and statewide offices.
- **Vermont:** In May 2005 Gov. Douglas (R) signed a bill to allow Burlington to use IRV in mayoral elections in 2006, as approved by city voters by a two-to-one margin in 2005.
- **Louisiana:** More than 10,000 overseas and out-of-state military voters received IRV ballots in 2004. The system has been a success. Since, **Arkansas** and **South Carolina** have passed similar laws.
- **Washington State:** In April 2005 Gov. Gregoire (D) signed a bill that gained bipartisan support in the legislature to allowing IRV for a pilot program in three major cities.
- **Universities:** Many colleges and universities use IRV for student elections, including Wake Forest, William and Mary, Princeton, Rice, University of Washington, Duke, UC Berkeley and UC Davis.
- **Businesses and Organizations:** Many groups and corporations use IRV to elect their board of directors.
- **Sports Awards:** Even the winners the Heisman Trophy are picked by a ranked voting system.