

Ranked Choice Voting for Oakland

Frequently Asked Questions for Candidates

www.oaklandrcv.com
www.twitter.com/oaklandrcv

*This November the city of Oakland will be holding municipal elections using **ranked choice voting** (RCV). The following is a list of frequently asked questions about RCV.*

What is RCV?

RCV (also known as instant runoff voting) allows voters to rank a 1st, 2nd, and 3rd choice candidate for a single office. This makes it possible to elect local officials by majority vote without necessitating a separate run-off election.

How is voting with RCV different from voting in non-RCV elections?

1. Instead of selecting one candidate, **voters rank candidates in order of preference.**
2. In Oakland elections, voters can rank up to **three** candidates for each office.
3. Voters can rank candidates freely. A ballot counts for only one candidate at a time, and **a 2nd or 3rd choice never counts against your 1st choice.**
4. **Voters have a full range of choices in November, not just two.** In Oakland's prior system, more than half of elections were decided in low turnout primaries in June. The November general elections had only two candidates, limiting voter choice.

How is counting ballots different with RCV than non-RCV elections?

In non-RCV elections, every voter has only one vote. In each round a voter's ballot counts for their highest-ranked candidate. Votes are totaled, and the candidate with the most votes wins. In elections with more than two candidates, however, the winning candidate with the most votes could be opposed by a majority of the voters.

With RCV, the voter's ballot counts as one vote for their 1st choice. Votes are totaled. The election is over if more than half of the voters have ranked the same candidate as a 1st choice. If there is no majority winner in the first round, the "instant runoff" takes place. The candidate in last place is eliminated. All ballots that counted for that candidate are added to the totals of whichever remaining candidate is ranked next. This process continues until one candidate secures more than 50% of the active votes and is declared the winner.

How does a voter fill out a ranked choice ballot?

1. Voters mark their **1st** preference (the candidate they love) in the 1st column.
2. Voters mark their **2nd** preference (the candidate they like) in the 2nd column.
3. Voters mark their **3rd** preference (the remaining candidate they can live with) in the 3rd column.

What if voters rank only one candidate or rank the same candidate three times?

Voters have the option of ranking only one candidate or ranking the same candidate for all three of their choices – in both cases this candidate will earn one vote as a 1st choice. Ranking a candidate more than once does **not** help that candidate. It is counted exactly as if the voter ranked that candidate as their 1st choice only.



Ranked Choice Voting for Oakland

Frequently Asked Questions for Candidates

So, what does RCV mean for campaign strategy?

RCV rewards:

- Positive campaigning
- Inclusive campaigning, reaching out beyond your base of support
- Seeking 2nd and 3rd choice support from other candidates' supporters
- Seeking 2nd and 3rd choice endorsements
- Interacting with more voters
- Issue focused campaigns

RCV does not reward:

- Attacking your opponents in a way that alienates their supporters
- Focusing only on your supporters
- Discouraging voters from researching other candidates
- Only asking voters for 1st choice support and not seeking 2nd or 3rd choices

Does RCV give some voters more votes than others?

No. Every voter has only one vote. In each round a voter's ballot counts for their highest-ranked candidate. If your 1st choice candidate is still viable, your ballot will stay with that candidate. Just like in a runoff election, if your favorite candidate loses, you must select one of the remaining candidates. RCV completes this same process but in one election instead of two. **2nd or 3rd choices ONLY matter when a voter's first choice candidate loses.**

Do Oakland voters find RCV difficult?

No. Oakland voters have been using RCV very effectively. In the first mayoral election with the system in 2010, 99.7% of voters in the mayoral race cast an effective ballot for their 1st choice. Nearly 85% of voters ranked at least two candidates, and 72% of voters ranked three candidates. Winners of Oakland's RCV elections are garnering more voter support than in the old system; of the 18 offices elected by RCV, 16 were won with more votes than votes cast in the last non-RCV election for that office.

Did Jean Quan win the mayoral election in 2010 only by being everyone's 2nd choice?

No. In the 2010 mayoral election, there were several strong candidates. The leader in first choices was Don Perata. But with 33% of the vote, about two-thirds of voters preferred another candidate. Jean Quan was second in first choices with 24% support. So the election needed to go to an instant runoff.

In the RCV tally, last-place candidates were eliminated one by one, and ballots cast for these losing candidates were added to the totals of the candidates ranked next on each ballot. This continued until only Perata and Quan remained. By the time of this final instant runoff, Quan had 52% of the remaining vote and Perata had 48%. This was the "head to head" result between these two candidates – and very close to what a poll predicted the outcome would be, nearly two months before the election.

Ranked Choice Voting for Oakland Frequently Asked Questions for Candidates

Doesn't ranked choice voting slow the count down?

No. Ballots in Oakland's ranked choice voting elections are scanned at the same speed as they would be in an election without RCV. The RCV tally can be run at any time with what essentially amounts to the push of a button. In 2010, the first RCV tally was done three days after the election, due to a decision by election officials who wanted to have more votes scanned before running the tally. Today, RCV tallies are run the night of the election.

When did Oakland adopt RCV?

Oakland voters adopted ranked choice voting in **2006** through a charter amendment. The city council voted 6-2 to place it on the ballot, and voters approved it with **69% support**.

Has Oakland used RCV before?

Yes. Oakland used RCV in **2010** and **2012** to elect a total of 18 officials.

What other California cities use RCV?

RCV is used to elect city leaders in Berkeley, San Francisco and San Leandro. It is used by tens of millions of voters around the world, including elections for officers in other U.S. cities, the mayor of London, the House of Representatives in Australia and the "Best Picture" Oscar.

What Oakland offices are elected with RCV?

In Oakland, RCV is used to elect the Mayor, City Council members, City Attorney, City Auditor, and School Board members. On November 4th, 2014 RCV will be used to elect the: **Mayor**, **City Auditor**, **City Council** members in Districts 2, 4, and 6, and **School Board** members in Districts 2, 4, and 6. RCV will not be used for elections for county, state, and federal offices.