Ranked Choice Voting for Oakland
Frequently Asked Questions for Press

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What is RCV?
Ranked-Choice Voting (also known as instant runoff voting) allows 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.

How does RCV work?
In a single seat ranked choice voting election, sometimes called instant runoff voting, a candidate must receive more than 50% of the active votes to be elected. When counting a ranked choice voting election, votes are first distributed by first choices. If one candidate has a majority (50%+1 or more) of the first choices, they are declared the winner. If no candidate has passed the 50% threshold, then the candidate with the fewest first choices is eliminated. The voters who selected the defeated candidate as a first choice will then have their votes added to the totals of their next choice. Then officials would check once again to see if a candidate has more than 50% of the active votes. This process of eliminating the candidate with the fewest votes and recounting those ballots for the voters' second (or third) choices continues until one candidate passes has more than 50% of the active votes and is declared the winner.

When did Oakland adopt RCV?
Oakland adopted ranked choice voting, through a charter amendment in 2006. 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.

Who does Oakland elect using RCV?
In Oakland, RCV is used to elect the Mayor, City Council Members, City Attorney, City Auditor, and School Board members. On November 4th, ranked choice voting will be used to elect the Mayor, City Auditor, District 2 City Councilmember, District 4 City Councilmember, District 6 City Councilmember, District 2 School Board Member, District 4 School Board Member and District 6 School Board Member.

How is RCV different from non-RCV elections?

1. RCV eliminates the need for a runoff election.

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2. Voters rank candidates in order of preference instead of only selecting one candidate, knowing that if their first choice candidate cannot win, their vote will go to their second choice candidate.
3. Candidates need to have a majority of the active ballots to win.

How does a voter fill out a ranked choice ballot?

1. Voters mark their first preference (the candidate they love) in the first column.
2. Voters mark their second preference (the candidate they like), if they have one, in the second column.
3. Voters mark their third preference (the candidate they can live with), if they have one, in the third column.

What if voters only rank one candidate?
Voters have the option of ranking only one candidate. However, if that candidate is eliminated and no back-up choices are indicated, that ballot becomes "exhausted" and does not continue in the remaining rounds of counting. It is in the best interest of the voter as well as the candidates to use all rankings. By ranking beyond a first choice, voters are able to stay involved in the electoral process. It is essential for candidates to build support through the accumulation of second and third choices as other candidates are eliminated.

What happens if a voter chooses one candidate for all rankings?
If a voter selects the same candidate for more than one ranking, the outcome is the same as only indicating a first choice on their ballot. Each ballot counts for one candidate at a time. Listing a candidate for more than one ranking does not strengthen your vote for that candidate. It simply means that if that candidate is eliminated your vote is exhausted. *Remember, ranking a lower choice can never hurt the voter's first choice.*

What if voters rank multiple candidates for one of their 3 choices?
Each voter has exactly one vote in each round. If a voter gives more than one candidate the same ranking, that would be an overvote. It would be no different than attempting to vote for 2 candidates when only allowed to vote for 1. If a voter were to make this error they would be able to get a new ballot and correct the mistake.

Does RCV give some voters more votes than others?
No. In each round a voter's ballot counts for their highest-ranked candidate. If your first

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choice candidate is still viable, your ballot will stay with that candidate. Just like in a two-round runoff, 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. Second or third choices ONLY matter when a voter's first choice candidate loses.

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

No. In the 2010 mayoral election, there were several strong candidates. The leader in first choices was Don Perata. But his 33% of the vote was well short of a majority of 50% plus one. Jean Quan was second in first choices with 24%. As a result, 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 vote and Perata had 48%. This was the "head to head" result between these two candidates - and very close to what a poll showed the outcome would be that was taken nearly two months before the election.

What does RCV do?

- Accommodates voter choice to elect credible winners in event of 3 or more candidates.
- Saves localities, taxpayers and candidates money by eliminating the primary election.
- Officials are elected in one general election, where turnout tends to be much higher than in a primary or runoff election.
- Discourages excessive negative campaigning because victories may require candidates to be the 2nd or 3rd choices of the supporters of opponents.

What does RCV NOT do?

- Force voters to rank more than one candidate.
- Favor one party or group over another.
- Allow voters more than one vote.
- Elect candidates that the majority opposes.

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How does ranking candidates give voters more power?

In this video, the speaker makes the case that ranking candidates means more power for voters. Voters should rank three candidates unless they are indifferent to all but one or two candidates. By ranking beyond a first choice, voters are able to stay involved in the electoral process. They can help a second choice win and also can help defeat their last choice.

When candidates know that most voters will be ranking candidates, they have to reach out to more voters if they believe the election will be decided in an instant runoff. If a voter indicates first choice support for someone else, the candidate still has a reason to earn that voter's second or third choice. That also gives voters more power.

Is RCV used in places other than Oakland?
Yes. RCV is used across the US and around the world. In the Bay Area, RCV is used in neighboring cities of Berkeley, San Leandro, and San Francisco. It has been implemented in Minneapolis and St. Paul, MN and Portland, ME. RCV is used to elect the Mayor of London, England, the President of Ireland, and the House of Representatives in Australia. Follow this link to see the full list of where RCV is used.

Do Voters Understand RCV?
Yes. Voters overwhelmingly understand RCV. This video was taken during the 2013 Minneapolis municipal elections, and it shows that voters overwhelmingly understood the system and appreciated how easy and effective it was to use.