

Instant Runoff Voting Pilot in N.C. - *Easy as 1, 2, 3*

A Pilot Program to Address Expensive, Low Turnout Runoff Elections

State law allows cities and counties to pilot a voting method that avoids the expense and problems of runoff elections. Compared to the traditional runoff, rank-choice voting or Instant Runoff Voting saves taxpayers (and candidates) money and elects candidates with higher voter participation. The towns of Cary and Hendersonville used the pilot method for city elections in 2007 with overall success; Hendersonville used it again in 2009. Cities and counties should explore this option with the State Board of Elections.

How IRV or Preference Voting works:

- First round of counting: The **voters rank their choices for an office: 1, 2, 3.** (*Nobody has to rank more candidates than they want to.*) In the first round of counting, only the 1st choices are tallied. A candidate who gets the prescribed threshold of 1st-choice votes (usually a majority) is declared the winner – *just as in the current system.*
- Second round: In the “virtual” runoff, all candidates except the top two vote-getters are eliminated, *just as in the current system.* If your 1st choice is in the runoff, your vote stays with that candidate. If your 1st choice was cut, your vote goes to the runoff candidate you ranked best. The candidate with the most votes wins.

The benefits:

Preference voting protects the interests of voters, candidates, and the public:

- *It saves counties, taxpayers, and candidates money now used to hold two elections.*
- *It achieves higher voter turnout than when voters are asked to return for a runoff.*
- *It makes government more representative – more voters’ choices decide who wins.*

Where it is used:

Preference voting is used in many places in the US and around the world. Louisiana, Arkansas, and South Carolina use it for overseas and military voters. Utah Republicans use to choose nominees for their party. Cities in Maryland, Florida, Vermont, California, Minnesota, Tennessee and Washington use it in local elections.

The North Carolina Experience – 2 Cities in 2007

Hendersonville:

“The IRV experience went well. Even with the elderly population, the voters understood the ballot and felt it was easy to vote. It certainly saved the municipality and the candidates time and money. It also eliminated one election for our office, so even with all the time spent on education, it was worth it. I hope other county BOEs will be eager to try it next year.”

- **Beverly Cunningham, Director, Henderson County BOE**

Cary:

“The Wake County Board of Elections found the administration of the IRV for the Town of Cary easy. Voter education played a large part in the overall understanding of the IRV by the voters. Also, developing an educational program with the Town staff was very helpful.”

- **Cherie Poucher, Director, Wake County BOE**

For more information, contact Gary Bartlett, Keith Long or Brooks Garrett-Jones at the State Board of Elections, 919-733-7173 or Bob Hall at Democracy NC, 919-489-1931