

FAQ on Instant Runoff Voting in North Carolina

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The following are questions frequently asked by North Carolina municipalities considering implementation of instant runoff voting (IRV) and answers based on responses from the State Board of Elections, the University of North Carolina School of Government, and scientific exit poll surveys conducted in North Carolina.

1. What is instant runoff voting (IRV)?

IRV is a majority voting system that combines a regular election and a runoff by giving voters the option of ranking candidates in order of choice. The two candidates with the most first choices advance to the runoff. In the runoff, each ballot is counted for whichever runoff candidate is ranked higher. As with a traditional runoff election, the winner is the candidate with the majority of votes in the runoff round.

2. How is IRV an improvement over a city's current method of election?

IRV can improve each method of election used in our cities:

- If a city has a *plurality election method*, IRV would eliminate the possibility of a winner who was strongly opposed by a majority of voters, but won because votes for opposing candidates were divided among them.
- If a city has a *partisan primary method*, IRV would eliminate the problem of a majority of voters having limited choices that have been filtered by political parties and save the cost of an extra election.
- If a city has an *automatic nonpartisan runoff*, IRV would ensure a majority winner without the guaranteed cost of holding two separate elections.
- If a city has a *conditional runoff*, IRV would prevent the need for a separate costly low-turnout runoff.

3. What does an IRV ballot look like and how does a voter mark it?

A copy of the ballot used in Cary follows. A voter simply fills in the first bubble next to his or her favorite candidate, the second bubble next to the voter's second choice candidate, and the third bubble for their third choice. A voter may rank only one or two candidates if they so choose. Ranking more candidates does not count against your first choice, but increases the chances that you will elect a preferred candidate or prevent the election of a disliked candidate.

How to Fill Out Cary's New Ballot: Mark a Different Candidate for Each Choice

| For TOWN COUNCIL AT LARGE - One Seat | | | | | |
|--------------------------------------|--|----------------------------------|-----------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------|
| Fill in one oval per choice | Your 2nd or 3rd choice will be considered if your 1st choice loses | | | | |
| VOTE for your 1st choice here | 1st ↓ | Mark your 2nd choice here | 2nd ↓ | Mark your 3rd choice here | 3rd ↓ |
| Benjamin Franklin | <input checked="" type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Thomas Jefferson | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Betsy Ross | <input type="radio"/> | <input checked="" type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Write-in: _____ | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |



For more information, see www.CaryVotes123.com or call Wake Co Board of Elections at 856-6240

Mark your 1st choice, then you may mark 2nd and 3rd choices as back-ups. Your back-up choices will never hurt your 1st choice. Back-up choices are only reviewed if an "instant runoff" occurs and your first-choice candidate gets eliminated and is not in the runoff.

4. How are IRV elections counted on North Carolina voting machines?

The State Board of Elections has developed secure, inexpensive means to count IRV ballots on all voting equipment used by North Carolina cities. Hendersonville's IvoTronic direct recording electronic system allows a final result on the night of the election. Cary's M100 optical scan system allows a determination of first choices on the night of the election counted at the polls, with a final result one or two days later at a central location where all counting will be done on machine.

5. Is IRV legal in North Carolina?

In 2006, North Carolina entered into a pilot program by adopting law allowing up to ten jurisdictions (each year) to try IRV for their local elections, including school board elections. In the summer of 2008, North Carolina extended the program for three years with passage of Elections Amendment Act (S-1263), authorizing continued use of the instant runoff voting for willing counties and municipalities.

6. Where has IRV been utilized in North Carolina?

Both Cary and Hendersonville utilized Instant Runoff Voting in 2007. Outside North Carolina, cities recently adopting IRV include Memphis (TN), Oakland (CA), Burlington (VT), and Minneapolis (MN) (host to the 2008 Republican National Convention). It is a common method for elections of organizations, including the president of American Political Science Association and of student leaders at nearly four dozen universities, including North Carolina State, Duke, and Wake Forest.

7. What expenses does IRV incur for a municipality that implements it for one year under the pilot program?

A jurisdiction participating in the IRV pilot program is responsible for the cost of educating voters, candidates, and election officials on the election method. These costs were minimal, however. With the use of a good tested ballot design, education costs can be pennies per registered voter. In addition, groups like the League of Women Voters can provide volunteer voter assistance. The State Board of Elections has developed inexpensive procedures for conducting the IRV count. Despite the minimal cost of voter education in Cary, the City saved \$28,000 with IRV.

8. What did the voter education programs consist of in Cary and Hendersonville?

In both Cary and Hendersonville a simple ballot design was the key to successful voter education. Cary city officials sent sample ballots in utility bills and issued a media advisory about the ballot change. Local newspapers, in both cities, ran articles about the new ballot design. Board of Elections staff visited civic organizations to inform them of the new method. Local radio stations ran 30-second Public Service Announcements. The North Carolina Center for Voter Education produced an informative video on IRV that ran on government access stations.

9. Did IRV save money in Cary and/or Hendersonville?

By avoiding a runoff in one of its districts, Cary saved \$28,000 in 2007. A citywide runoff would have cost more than \$100,000. Hendersonville did not need a runoff in 2007, but any runoff would have cost much more than IRV.

10. Were any surveys conducted of voters in Cary and/or Hendersonville and did voters understand IRV?

Dr. Michael Cobb, assistant professor of political science and survey researcher at North Carolina State University (NCSU), designed and analyzed the results of an exit poll survey on how voters in both Cary and Hendersonville felt about IRV. Karen Brinson of the NCSU Board of Elections managed the poll. The survey revealed that 68 percent of Cary voters preferred IRV, and 81% found it “very easy to understand.” It revealed that 71% of Hendersonville voters preferred IRV, and 86% found it “at least somewhat easy to understand.”

11. Did either Cary or Hendersonville opt for utilizing the pilot program in 2009?

Based on its administrative ease and strong public support for IRV, Hendersonville’s city council has approved implementing IRV in this year’s November elections. Likewise, Cary is considering whether to utilize IRV in its upcoming election. At a March 12th public hearing, supporters of IRV heavily outnumbered opponents, while the city’s

recently administered survey revealed that a majority of Cary voters understood and preferred IRV. The council has formally voted to do away with its traditional runoff, and is currently considering whether to use IRV in 2009. It delayed a decision while awaiting more information about the State Board of Elections' new procedures for counting ballots on optical scan voting. Those procedures are now public and in April the council likely will return to the issue of whether to use IRV this fall.

12. Does IRV make it harder for racial minorities (groups who have been historically disenfranchised and denied equal access to formal education) to vote, dissuade them from voting, or dilute the impact of their collective votes?

African American endorsers of IRV include President Barack Obama, U.S. Rep. Jesse Jackson, Jr., and election law scholar and Department of Justice official Spencer Overton. Surveys in both Cary and Hendersonville (as well as those in more diverse cities throughout the U.S.) show that voters of all racial groups understand IRV equally well. In most cases, IRV protects the strength of racial minority groups by preventing the need for a separate runoff for which racial minority voters have traditionally been the least likely to return, and by avoiding the possibility that racial minority voters will split their votes between opposing racial minority candidates of choice.

Racial minorities have been strong backers of IRV when it has appeared on the ballot, including super-majority support in landslide victories in cities like Oakland, Minneapolis and Memphis (TN), all of which passed IRV by margins of two-to-one or more in recent years. Voters of color also have been strongly supportive of the system in exit polls, and in the City with the most IRV elections, San Francisco, the Board of Supervisors has become more diverse during the five years the system has been adopted. In San Francisco turnout among racial minority voters increased under IRV in the decisive runoff round, and prevented the "splitting" of Asian votes among four strong candidates of choice in a district race for election to the Board of Supervisors in 2006.

13. What steps does a municipality take to enter the IRV pilot program for 2009, 2010 and/or 2011?

Each local governing board participating in the pilot (after receiving written instructions from the State Board of Elections on implementation) must approve participation in the pilot program, and agree to cooperate with local board of elections in a voter education program. The local board of elections must also approve participation. If a jurisdiction is in more than one county, all county boards of election must approve it. For more information please see *Instant Runoff Voting: Goals, Standards, and Criteria for Implementation and Evaluation* (presented to the North Carolina State Board of Elections on December 11, 2008 by the University of North Carolina School of Government). The report can be found at www.ncvotes123.com

14. How are IRV ballots exactly tallied to determine a winner?

First, all ballots are counted toward their first choice. If a candidate receives a majority of first choice rankings, the candidate wins the election. If no candidate receives a majority of votes, then all candidates are eliminated except for the top two vote getters. In the runoff round, each ballot is counted for the runoff candidate ranked ahead of the other runoff candidate on the ballot. Any ballot listing one of those candidates first is counted for that candidate. Among the remaining ballots, any ballots listing one of those candidates second is counted for that candidate. Any ballots without a first or second choice ranking for a runoff candidate are counted for whichever runoff candidate is ranked third. The winner is the candidate with a majority of the total votes.

In all jurisdictions, the first round of tallying is conducted using the jurisdiction's current tallying procedure. For subsequent rounds of counting (if necessary) in jurisdictions in counties using direct-record electronic ("DRE") machines, vote information is transferred to an Excel spreadsheet, validated for transfer accuracy, and then sorted and counted, either through the regular Excel functions or by hand-to-eye from the Excel spreadsheet. For jurisdictions located in counties using optical scan (OS) machines, subsequent rounds of counting take place centrally, using a methodology developed by the State Board of Elections that allows the count to be conducted entirely on OS machines.

15 Are these tallying methods certified and constitutional?

All of the above methods are certified and constitutional.

16. Who endorses IRV?

Such public interest organizations as Democracy NC, Common Sense Foundation, Common Cause, North Carolina League of Women Voters, FairVote, North Carolina Fair Share, Southern Coalition for Social Justice, NC Public Interest Research Group, Martin Luther King Jr. Coalition, Independent Progressive Politics Network, Southerners on New Ground, North Carolina Green Party, and Traction support IRV. Individuals backing the North Carolina IRV pilot include House Speaker Joe Hackney, House Minority Leader Paul Stam, and John Hood of the John Locke Institute. Nationally, President Barack Obama and Senator John McCain have expressed support for the method.

For more information and videos on IRV please visit:

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| www.ncvotes123.com | - NC Votes 123 Coalition |
| www.democracy-nc.org | - Democracy North Carolina |
| www.fairvote.org/irv | - FairVote's IRV program, including link to videos |
| ncvoterred.com/cary/ | - NC Center for Voter Education video for Cary in 2007 |