



Voting Equipment and IRV Compatibility

Voting equipment that is not compatible with ranked ballots can pose an almost insurmountable obstacle to reform. Whenever new voting equipment needs to be purchased, the goal is to acquire equipment that is fully compatible with all ballot types currently used in the United States, which includes ranked voting. **It is critical to understand the current state of voting equipment in your area and, if possible, participate in the process of purchasing new equipment.**

Here are some important things to know:

- The *Help America Vote Act* (2002) gave federal grants to local and state governments to buy new voting equipment. As of today, many election officials have purchased new voting equipment *but many places have not* or are considering buying even more new equipment.
- Many systems in place today are IRV "compatible." Unfortunately, compatibility only means that more work can be done to make IRV work on the systems. They would require new software or need to be retrofitted, often at taxpayer expense.
- Voting equipment can be IRV-incompatible (like old lever machines), IRV-compatible (like optical scan and touch-screen machines) or **IRV-ready** (fully capable of a ranked election when purchased).
- Some equipment companies publicize their products as "IRV-compatible," but will charge local governments huge sums to **make them IRV-ready**. This occurred in San Francisco. However, the city *still* saved much more money by using IRV and paying the comparatively low cost for changes.
- Voting equipment only needs to be able to store individuals' votes, not necessarily perform the simulated runoffs.
- Small communities may hand-tabulate votes or use a combination of automated counting and hand counting. Burlington, VT and Takoma Park, MD perform their IRV elections this way.

First, contact a representative of your local election authority

- Agency Name _____ Phone number _____.
- Contact Name _____ Email _____.

Issues to ask them about

- What model of voting system is being used? _____.
- Is the voting equipment used compatible with ranking? _____.
- Are there current plans to purchase new equipment? _____.

Advocating for better voting equipment

- Educate election officials about compatibility for IRV and the advantages to having IRV-ready systems. Mention the likelihood that there will be a winning campaign for IRV in the future.
- Ensure that requests for new equipment include compatibility and IRV-readiness. An important point is that winning campaigns for IRV are taking place not only within jurisdictions, but might be used by parties for primary elections. **It is cheaper to ensure compatibility when companies are competing for a contract than once a contract has been locked in.**

Please let us know how your discussions with election officials go. If someone asks you a question about equipment that you can not answer, say, "I am not sure about that, but I'll get back to you," and contact us at IRV@FairVote.org or 301-270-4616.