



# Demonstration Elections

Instant runoff voting is a new idea to most people. Perhaps the easiest way to explain instant runoff voting is to conduct a demonstration in which people either fill out paper ballots and watch and listen to someone count them or actually become the ballot and vote with their bodies.

## Demonstrations with Paper Ballots

- **Paper ballot demonstrations are easy.** Conduct them at schools, organizations, county fairs, conferences and so on.
- **Create a ballot.** Choose four candidates and print up ballots. Use this one as an example.
- **Distribute the ballots** and tell voters to follow the instructions.
- **Collect the ballots.** Point out how easy it was for people to fill out the ballots. This is the easiest way to refute the silly notion that this is too hard for voters.
- **Explain that instant runoff voting produces a majority winner in a single election.** Say that ballots are counted in rounds, winning requires a majority of votes in a round, in each round, your ballot counts as one vote for your favorite candidate still in the race, and if no one receives a majority of votes in a round, you eliminate the weakest candidate and conduct another round.
- **Count the ballots.** Depending on the number of ballots you are counting, you might want to solicit an assistant who can help sort the ballots into piles. Then count the ballots in each pile, write the totals on a board if possible so everyone can see, and determine if there's a winner. If not, pick up the all the ballots in the smallest pile, and place each one in the pile corresponding to the voter's second choices. Repeat the process until a winner emerges.

### Official Ballot

Instructions: Write the name of your first choice, second choice, third choice and so on. You may vote for as many or as few choices as you like.

1st Choice: \_\_\_\_\_  
 2nd Choice: \_\_\_\_\_  
 3rd Choice: \_\_\_\_\_  
 4th Choice: \_\_\_\_\_

## Be The Ballot – A Live IRV Demonstration

- **Know when to use it.** These types of demonstrations work best with an audience willing to stand up and move around the room. Live demonstrations work best with class-sized groups (20-40).
- **Choose a topic.** Innocuous topics such as favorite ice cream flavor, favorite pizza topping or favorite 80's band tend to work well. With more politically charged topics, participants may focus on who is voting for whom rather than how the system works.
- **Select candidates or nominees.** You can either pick them yourself or ask the group to nominate them. Four nominees are ideal – a majority is unlikely, but the demonstration can move quickly, with only two eliminations. Also, the demonstration works best if all the nominees have a reasonable level of support and none is the overwhelming favorite of most of the group.
- **Move to vote.** Designate the 4 corners of the room as the gathering places for each of the nominees. Voters are instructed to join the group representing their favorite nominee.
- **Count the votes.** Have each group count its vote total, and inquire if any group has a majority. If so, that group wins the election. If not, thank the members of the smallest group for raising important issues (such as "mushroom" or "rocky road"), and direct them to join their next favorite group. Have the groups call out their vote totals and determine if any group has won. Continue until one group has a majority.

## Solutions to Common Problems and Questions

- **Tied votes** are common in small groups. Inform them that they are handled the same way as ties in their current election system.
- **Sitting out.** Some people may not wish to support a second choice candidate after their first choice is eliminated. This is fine. It is much like voting in a first round election and then deciding that you don't like either candidate in the runoff and choosing not to vote.