

Services and Resources for Students

The Center assists student IRV activists. We also assist student governments in administration and advice. Our services and resources include the following:

Website

We strive to make all of our resources available on our website, www.fairvote.org. This includes an extensive library of articles, as well as educational materials, original research, election data and analysis, and organizing materials.

Listservs

We support many listservs that offer resources and discussion groups for the electoral reform activist.

- instantrunoffStudents@yahoogroups.com
- instantrunoff@yahoogroups.com

To subscribe, insert “-subscribe” before the “@” and send an e-mail to that address.

Additional Materials

The Center also has many additional materials including the *Student Activist Starter Kit* that are valuable to the student and citizen activist. E-mail studentgov@fairvote.org or call us for these materials.

Speakers, workshops, and administration

Using our nationwide network of staff, board, allies and members, we provide speakers, conduct trainings and hold regional and national conferences for citizens, students, elected official and election administrators. The Center can host any of these forums on national election reform efforts as well as for election reform in student governments. The Center is also interested in offering advice and assistance on election administration. The Center would love to assist you with any of these, especially speakers and election administration.

The Center for Voting and Democracy



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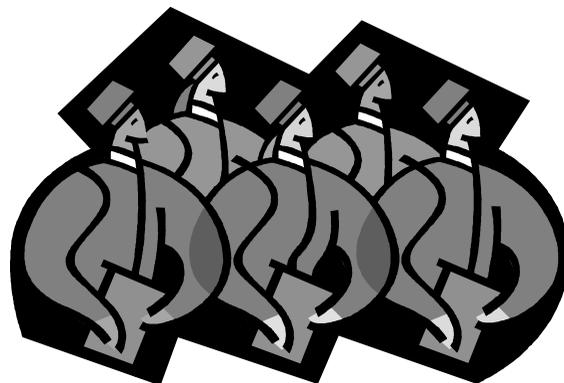
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**Making Your
Vote Count!**

How Instant Runoff Voting Improves Your Student Government



- Majority Rule
&
• No Delayed Runoffs

Presented by:
The Center for Voting and Democracy

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Why Instant Runoff Voting?

Student Government Questionnaire

1. Does your student government elect its officers through a “winner-take-all” system (a system where there is only one winner in each race)?

If so, then your winner-take-all system needs to be as fair and representative as possible. Consider the following questions to analyze the weaknesses of winner-take-all systems.

2. Do your elections sometimes experience **more than two candidates** running for any one position (i.e. a three- or four-way race)?

If so, how do you guarantee that the winning candidate is the candidate supported by the most students. The only way to guarantee that the candidate is supported by the most students is if s/he receives more than 50% of the votes. In a race with more than two candidates it is very difficult for one candidate to garner that many votes.

3. Have candidates ever been declared the winner without receiving a **majority** of the votes in the election (a majority is considered to be more than 50%)?

If so, then your student government is vulnerable to spoiled elections where a candidate can win with no minimum amount of votes. On some campuses candidates have been declared the winner with as little as 27% of the votes. This is not the best winner-take-all system as that leaves 73% of the students disenfranchised who opposed the winning candidate.

4. Does your government require a second delayed election, also known as a **runoff election**, for some races in certain circumstances?

If so, your government must accept the fact your closest elections will be determined by elections where far fewer students turnout to vote. Delayed runoff elections on campuses around the country are plagued by remarkably low student participation.

5. Do your elections **cost** the student government any **money**? Are they difficult or **time consuming** to administer?

If so, then a second delayed runoff election is not the answer for your campus. Although delayed runoffs guarantee that the winning candidate is the most broadly accepted candidate, there is another alternative that achieves the same goal without the costs.

Two Promises

Instant runoff voting is the best winner-take-all voting system. In every case, where only one official is elected (i.e. President) IRV should be the voting system in use because of instant runoff voting’s two promises: majority rule and no delayed runoffs.

• IRV Promises Majority Rule

Every student government strives to determine the will of their students and to act upon it. The votes cast by the students are possibly the most important determinant. Your government’s voting system is its tool to measure the will and intent of the students. It is vital that the voting system provides the most accurate and realistic account of voter intent. Instant runoff voting is that tool. By guaranteeing majority rule, instant runoff voting guarantees that the will of the students is clearly determined and the right person is elected. Instant runoff voting is the clearest determinant of voter intent because it allows voters to indicate their preferences rather than just one choice.

• IRV Promises No Delayed Runoffs

Instant runoff voting does not just protect the vital democratic principle: majority rule. It does so in just a single election, meaning no delayed runoffs. Without delayed runoffs, your student government saves money and time. More importantly all your elections will be determined by your best voter participation. No more close elections determined by a miniscule percent of the student body. No more costs of running a second election that is largely left ignored by the student body.

Where else is IRV used?

On campuses such as:

- Harvard
- MIT
- U. Maryland
- U. Illinois
- Stanford
- and more...

And off campus in:

- Ireland
- Australia
- San Francisco
- London
- Louisiana
- overseas ballots

What is Instant Runoff Voting? Get Instant Runoff Voting!

What is Instant Runoff Voting?

Instant runoff voting (IRV) is a system of runoff election that happens simultaneously to the regular election. IRV guarantees that the winner receives support from a majority of voters in just one election.

How Instant Runoff Voting Works:

1 The Voting

You, the voter, rank the candidates in the order of your preferences using a *ranked ballot*. By using a ranked ballot rather than a traditional ballot, you are able to indicate both your favorite choice and your runoff choices. If your first choice is eliminated, your vote counts for your runoff choice.

VOTE!	
3	Smith
2	Garcia
1	Adams

2 The First Count

If a candidate is the first choice of more than 50% of the voters, he or she wins. However, in this example, no candidate receives 50% of the first choice votes. In plurality elections (where a candidate can win with less than a majority), Smith would be declared the winner even though 59% of the voters voted against this candidate. In a delayed runoff, voters would have to return to the polls to cast their vote again for either Smith or Garcia but in an instant runoff system this isn't necessary. Voters will have already indicated their runoff choices on their ranked ballot.

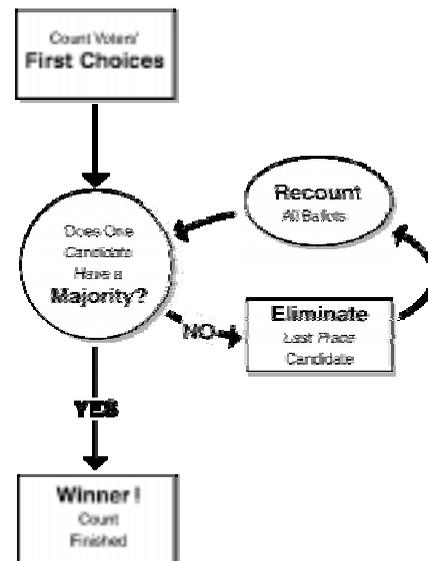
RESULT	
41%	Smith
40%	Garcia
19%	Adams

3 The Instant Runoff

In our example, Adams is eliminated from the race for finishing last and in the second round all votes are recounted towards their favorite candidate that is still available. Most of the voters who favored Adams — 16% of all voters — favored Garcia as their second choice. The rest of Adams's support — 3% of all voters — favored Smith as their second choice. Therefore, Garcia is declared the winner in the instant runoff since 56% of the voters prefer Garcia over Smith.

RUNOFF	
44%	Smith
56%	Garcia
19%	Adams

Instant Runoff Voting Ballot Count Flow Chart



This flow chart graphically demonstrates the counting process. The loop on the right represents the instantaneous runoff that happens if no candidate garners more than 50% of the votes.

Step-by-Step Guide to Implementation

This guide provides a good beginning to any student electoral reform activist. Let us know if you find an additional step that would be useful to add.

1. **Research** your constitution and by-laws to understand any particulars to implement IRV at your school.
2. **Introduce the idea** to elected officials in the legislature and the executive cabinet or any additional relevant person. Present pertinent materials and seek their feedback. Their feedback is important to gain their interest and involvement in the proposal's success.
3. **Host a forum** with a CVD speaker explaining the voting systems and seeking input from audience. Convince elected officials to attend. Take notes of opposing arguments and concerns in order to refute them.
4. **Follow up** with those who are concerned and present well phrased refutation to their concerns. You can collect e-mails at the forum and respond en masse or write a letter to your newspaper. Education is important. The largest obstacle to reform is ignorance.
5. **Meet with Elections Chair(s)**, election coordinator and/or relevant officials. Discuss practicality and implementation. Solicit their support.
6. **Draft a resolution or amendment** to implement IRV. Circulate drafts to all the relevant officials and legislators. Seek their feedback on the language so that the resolution will gain their support.
7. **Introduce the resolution** to the legislature or relevant subcommittee; utilize CVD materials in this packet and on the website in presentation (Newspaper articles, sample ballots, this brochure, etc.)
8. **Lobby the government** as the resolution comes up for a vote. You should also be educating the student body, which will put more pressure on the government.
9. **Meet with Elections Chair(s)** again, once the resolution is passed, to follow up and ensure that IRV can be implemented as soon as possible. This may mean writing necessary computer programming and/or running a practice election.

In the Meantime...

These projects can help you advance your step-by-step progress. You can choose which one best suits your campus. The Center is available to assist you with all of these projects.

- **Distribute** more copies of **this brochure**. The Center can provide you with more copies. It is especially beneficial to provide elected officials a copy of this brochure. There may be nominal costs to producing more copies, which we hope you would be able to share with us.
- Hold a **mock election** in your campus center to demonstrate how instant runoff voting works. The Center has sample ballots, tally sheets and instructions which will help administer the election.
- Write a **letter to the editor** for your school newspaper that explains the benefits of instant runoff voting to your campus. The Center has both sample letters and a letter template that can help you write your letter to the editor.
- **Start a student organization** to lobby your government on behalf of implementing instant runoff voting. The Electoral Reform Committee of Vassar College is one such example. You may review their website at <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/VC-ElectoralReform>.
- **Host a CVD speaker** for a workshop on instant runoff voting and invite the campus to learn of its benefits. The Center can help you schedule and plan the workshop from its experience of doing the same. E-mail us — we would love to come.
- **Talk to your representative(s)** or any other elected official about instant runoff voting. Gain allies in your government that can also fight for IRV.

In the National Political Landscape

Implementing IRV in your student government educates the future leaders of America. The more graduating students that leave school understanding alternative voting methods, the easier it becomes to implement these same reforms in the national political landscape. The network of electoral reform activists thanks you for your help.