

Better Ballot Campaign for Instant Runoff Voting in Minneapolis

A better way to vote

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What is the Better Ballot Campaign?

The Better Ballot Campaign is a non-partisan, broad-based charter amendment initiative to bring Instant Runoff Voting (IRV) to Minneapolis. To advance the Instant Runoff Voting charter amendment to the November ballot, the campaign has...

- created a coalition of over 40 organizations that support Instant Runoff Voting
- gathered 5,000 petition signatures to help put Instant Runoff Voting on the ballot
- gained the backing of the Minneapolis Democratic-Farmer-Labor, Independence, Green and Libertarian parties; the Minneapolis Mayor and a majority of the City Council; over 30 other local and state elected officials; and several candidates running for school board and state office in 2006

On August 4th, the Minneapolis City Council gave final approval by a 12-1 vote to put the Instant Runoff Voting charter amendment on the November ballot.

What is Instant Runoff Voting?

Instant Runoff Voting is a ranked-ballot voting method – it simulates a series of runoff elections on a single ballot. Everyone has one vote only, but voters have the option to rank candidates in preferential order – 1, 2, 3, etc.

In the single-seat races for mayor, city council, and park district commissioners, the share of votes needed to win is 50 percent of the total votes cast plus one vote. If there is no candidate with a majority of first choices, the candidate with the fewest votes is defeated and those votes then go to the second choices on each ballot. The votes are recounted, and the process continues until one candidate achieves the required majority.

Candidates	1st choice	2nd choice	3rd choice	4th choice
George Washington				
John Adams				
Thomas Jefferson				
James Madison				

The proportion of votes needed to win goes down for those offices where more than one person is being elected. These offices include at large park board commissioners, library board trustees and estimate and taxation board members. The “instant runoff” process is the same as for single-seat offices, except that if a candidate receives more votes than needed to win, the “surplus” portion of each vote goes to the next choice on each ballot. This is called proportional voting because it allows more voters to help elect a winner and be represented by someone they voted for.

Where is Instant Runoff Voting used?

Instant Runoff Voting is a long-standing and proven voting method that is used in Australia, Ireland, and London and is gaining popularity in the United States. It is used in Cambridge (MA), San Francisco (CA), Burlington (VT), and, for overseas ballots in Arkansas, Louisiana and South Carolina. It is pending implementation in eight U.S. cities and there are ballot measures underway in several other jurisdictions.

Why in Minneapolis?

Minneapolis uses a nonpartisan two-round voting system to elect city officials to winnow the candidate field in the general election. The problem is few voters show up for Round One, the Primary - only 15% of registered voters turned out in 2005. Instant Runoff Voting eliminates low-turnout primaries and seeks to:

- **More accurately represent the voters**

Instant Runoff Voting allows more voters to help elect a winner and be represented by someone they voted for. It also empowers voters to vote sincerely without being concerned about wasting their vote, eliminating the problem of like-minded voters splitting their vote and, in turn, allowing candidates to run on their issues and gaining an accurate tally of support.

- **Foster more positive, issue-based campaigns**

Instant Runoff Voting invigorates campaigns and reduces polarization by bringing multiple viewpoints into the debate and it promotes positive, issue based campaigns.

- **Increase voter participation and choice of candidates on the ballot**

Instant Runoff Voting brings the most voters together with the most candidates to choose from at the same election. It also ensures that candidates will not be disqualified in primary elections who may otherwise win in a high turnout general election, which are larger, more diverse and more representative than primary elections.

Most frequently asked questions about Instant Runoff Voting

Q. Will voters be confused with so many candidates on the ballot or by a new voting method?

A. A new voting method may be unfamiliar to some voters. However, that need not translate into confusion. An assessment of Instant Runoff Voting in San Francisco following implementation in 2004 showed 87% of the voters surveyed indicated that they understood Instant Runoff Voting either "perfectly well" or "fairly well." Any change in voting method requires adequate voter education, and there are now model voter education programs for cities adopting Instant Runoff Voting. The Instant Runoff Voting general election ballot will look more like the current primary election ballot with regard to the number of candidates appearing on it. The election officials are charged with creating a ballot format that is clear and helps the voter to cast an effective vote.

Q. Does the current voting equipment allow for Instant Runoff Voting?

A. The current equipment used in Minneapolis does not count ranked-choice ballots, but such equipment is available and in use in San Francisco CA, Cambridge MA and Burlington VT. Voting equipment technology continues to evolve and by the time Instant Runoff Voting is implemented in Minneapolis – in 2009 at the earliest – a greater choice of advanced equipment is likely to be available than what exists today. The City Council's decision to put Instant Runoff Voting on the ballot provided for flexibility in the implementation timeline – delaying adoption until 2013, if necessary – so that the purchase of new equipment may coincide with the scheduled replacement of existing equipment and minimize replacement costs.

How you can help Instant Runoff Voting win in November

There are several ways you can help the campaign:

- Host an Instant Runoff Voting house party
- Table at neighborhood and city festivals
- Join a door knocking or lit dropping team for an evening
- Write a letter to the editor in your neighborhood paper
- Tell your neighbors and friends about Instant Runoff Voting

To volunteer, contact info@betterballotcampaign.org FFI: www.betterballotcampaign.org

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