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### **Appendix 3: Best practices from implementation of IRV in San Francisco and Burlington**

Three broad themes emerge from a study of the implementation of IRV in San Francisco and Burlington:

1. Early preparation with advocates, ranked-choice voting experts and the public is critical to success.
2. Transparent decisions and responsiveness to feedback improves outcomes and boosts public confidence in the elections.
3. Cost-effective voter education focuses on ballot design, poll worker training and good visuals for polling places and accompanying absentee ballots.

Early preparation with advocates and experts: Voters passed the IRV charter amendment in San Francisco in March 2002. The city did not sign a contract with its voting equipment vendor, Election Systems and Services, until June 2003. The vendor's equipment was not certified in time for the November 2003 election and the city failed to meet the statutory deadline for implementing IRV.

San Francisco's IRV implementation was a new experience for local election officials, state election officials, the vendor and federal and state voting system testers. This lack of experience contributed to the delay in implementing IRV.

Advocates ended up playing two especially key roles in the San Francisco implementation. They outlined all of the policy details and procedures not established in San Francisco's charter and state law. They also served as an information clearinghouse, keeping all the key entities, including the Board of Supervisors (which had to appropriate money for the contract and voter education) and the public informed about decisions and progress toward implementation.

Because of a lack of familiarity with ranked choice methods, both state officials and the vendor requested and incorporated advice from experts about designing procedures for pre-election logic and accuracy tests and mandatory post-election 1% manual recounts.

IRV advocates recommended to the vendor that they conduct a full-scale test of the IRV system before Election Day 2004. The vendor instead simulated a scale test. Election Day in San Francisco went very smoothly, but when city officials tried to perform the first unofficial IRV tally the next day, the tally failed. No votes were lost, and the only effect of this breakdown was to delay unofficial IRV results by two days, but this would have been avoided with more early preparation and coordination with experts experienced with IRV elections.

Burlington's implementation was simpler than San Francisco's because its vendor, LHS Associates, was already conducting ranked choice elections in Cambridge, Massachusetts, with the same equipment used in Burlington. Burlington hired the author of this report and a colleague, who was the leading advocate for IRV in Burlington, to design its voter education program, test its voting equipment and train poll workers.

Burlington's consultants suggested a public mock election that was conducted in City Hall with two voting machines and live ballots. In addition to educating voters and the media about the upcoming election, this served as a full end-to-end test of the system. Subsequent volume tests

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were conducted to ensure that the system had sufficient capacity for the actual election, which it did.

Transparency and responsiveness: Policy decisions regarding IRV greatly benefit from public input. As San Francisco was approaching its statutory deadline of November 2003 without certified voting equipment, it developed a partial hand count system as a back up. Because the author was in touch with city election officials, he had the opportunity to review the basic approach. He discovered that the city planned to exhaust ballots that skipped rankings. When the author pointed out that under the charter, ballots that skip rankings transfer to the next ranked candidate, the city revised its partial hand count system.

The voting equipment in San Francisco was programmed to eject ballots that did not use all three rankings. We do not know if the vendor decided to design the system this way or if the Director of Elections directed them to do so, but we do know that this decision was never discussed publicly, and that no mock elections were ever conducted to seek voter input on this matter. Because many voters deliberately ranked fewer than three candidates, this decision meant the voting equipment ejected many valid ballots cast exactly as the voter intended. This caused paper tapes on the machines to run out of paper frequently and many poll workers therefore got in the habit of overriding every error under the assumption it was a skipped ranking.

San Francisco and Burlington's ballots benefited from public input and from expert advice from graphic designers and election professionals. In San Francisco, state officials and members of the public prevailed upon the city to scrap a wrap-around ballot format for a side-by-side format and to incorporate shading and other graphical elements to highlight the first, second and third choices. Burlington's consultants started with LHS's original ballot design, modified it for usability, showed it to interested parties, revised it further and used it in a public mock election to get more feedback.

Lastly, in a spirit of openness, both Burlington and San Francisco released publicly on their websites raw first choice totals in IRV races, round-by-round IRV tally totals, and, significantly, the complete set of rankings for the entire election. These practices established a new standard of transparency: not only did the public have easy access to precinct-level vote totals, but election officials also had an electronic record of every vote cast, giving them the means to manually verify the official IRV tallies. Burlington went two steps further and posted the IRV tally software and the code used to create the software. This may be the first time that election tallying software used in a public election has ever been publicly disclosed.

By combining paper ballots with multiple electronic records posted on the Internet, these elections gave members of the public an unprecedented opportunity to scrutinize and confirm the results of the election. As a result, in both cases, there was no public doubt about the validity and accuracy of the results.

Cost-effective voter education: In terms of voter success and public opinion, Burlington and San Francisco conducted successful voter education programs.

On a per voter basis, Burlington spent approximately one-fourth of what San Francisco did. 99.9% of voters cast valid ballots in the IRV race and turnout in the mayoral race was substantially higher than in the previous five municipal elections. The Burlington Free Press headlined articles about the election "Voters ace instant runoff" and "Runoff voting ran smoothly."

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Emphasizing ballot design and graphical voter education materials in post cards to all voters, polling places, voting booths and absentee ballot mailings appears to be the most cost-effective way to inform voters about IRV and instruct them on how to fill out a valid ballot. Burlington's voter education cost approximately \$0.50 per registered voter. By borrowing from Burlington and San Francisco's materials and realizing economies of scale, a statewide IRV voter education program could be conducted for approximately \$0.25 per registered voter.