

FairVote



Ranked Choice Voting **TOOLKIT**



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Why Ranked Choice Voting?

Americans may have different views on politics, but we share a desire for a fair and representative system for electing local, state, and national leaders. Across the country our government has become disconnected from the people it's supposed to represent and serve. Special interests, rigged districts, unaccountable politicians, and gridlock aren't the fault of one party or individual, but are all symptoms of a bigger problem: the way we vote.

Current methods of voting cause and exacerbate these problems. Voters feel powerless and elected officials govern out of political interests rather than for their constituents. Ranked choice voting is a simple change that addresses these glaring problems. Ranked choice voting allows more meaningful choice on the ballot, levels the electoral playing field, encourages civil issue-focused campaigning, and puts power back in the hands of voters.

This toolkit is designed to guide passionate supporters and give them the necessary tools to become leaders, activists, and organizers to adopt and implement ranked choice voting in their communities. Creating change at any level of government can be a challenge but with this toolkit you can prepare yourself and gain a clear understanding of how you can navigate the opportunities and challenges you will find along the way.



While you are more than welcome to download this toolkit and hit the ground running, we at FairVote want to provide support and guidance to all activists working to advance ranked choice voting in their communities. Throughout the toolkit there are times where we would love to hear from you, discuss what you've learned, and help you strategize moving forward. We appreciate your support and dedication and look forward to joining you on your journey.

Good luck and talk to you soon,

The FairVote Team

Testimonials

Our toolkit starts where most advocacy movements start: with a testimonial about why this reform matters to us personally, and why we're committed to improving democracy in this way. Molly Rockett, a member of our team, wrote the following testimonial:

"Growing up in a small town populated mostly by corn and tobacco farms, I always felt like my local government was a kind of second family. Politics to me was a way for the whole community to come together, and share a sense of pride in our community. From a young age, I thought of campaigning as a way of caring for the place I lived. Campaigns centered the people in my neighborhood, whether that was meeting my friends and neighbors at political house parties, holding signs on the sidewalks, marching in the Four Town Parade to hand out stickers, or setting up the hay bales near our fundraising booth at the local Fair.

It was really this really communal experience and sense of belonging that kept me involved in politics even as so many people my age got frustrated with the process and started to disengage. I know politics can be such a powerful tool for empowerment, engagement, and social reform - all the values that drive me to phone bank, canvass and volunteer every campaign season. But I also know that we won't see these amazing benefits of our democracy unless we have a system that actually works for voters.

To me, politics meant community, it meant a sense of place, voice and belonging. It was what connected me to the community that I came from. As a candidate myself for Board of Education, I saw a system that rewarded divisiveness not inclusiveness. And that's not the politics that I grew up with. Candidates should be rewarded for reaching out to all voters in town not just some."





Community Assessment

The community assessment portion of the toolkit will serve as a guide to better understand the local climate that you will need to navigate to enact ranked choice voting. There are several facets to consider, such as **political, legal, and administrative elements**. The following sections correspond with these elements and each ask a series of questions that should illustrate the ways in which RCV might impact your jurisdiction. The sections will not only evaluate potential impact, but also consider the avenues necessary to change laws and eventually ensure a smooth transition to RCV elections.

Take the time to answer these questions as comprehensively as possible using your own independent research. This will require reflection, brainstorming, and possibly a phone call or two to respond to administrative questions. Once you have completed all of the following sections, please contact us so we can review your responses in order to collaboratively craft an action plan that is relevant to your community. This will also provide an opportunity for FairVote to determine how we can best assist you with your efforts.

It's alright if you can't answer every question without more research, but each question will be important to answer before being able to begin a real campaign. If you don't understand a question, leave it blank and ask us about it after you feel like you've answered the others to the best of your ability.



Political Assessment

Structural: How are officials elected in your community?

It is important to determine how ranked choice voting would impact your community. There are a number of ways that governments can be structured. Mayors can either be separately elected or chosen by the city council. For city councils, councilmembers can represent individual districts or the entire city as

an “at-large” candidate, while some cities use a combination of the two methods. Similar variations exist for counties. State legislatures are usually elected in single-winner districts, though ten states also use multi-winner districts. Every state elects its governor, but states vary in how many other offices are elected statewide and whether those elections are exclusively single-winner or not.

Another important consideration relates to the type of election. For instance, mayoral and gubernatorial races are always a single-winner election because only one mayor can be elected. Conversely, council elections can either be single-winner or multi-winner depending on the government structure (individual districts or at-large). RCV operates quite differently in multi-winner elections than in single-winner elections, and it has a more significant impact on the representativeness of an election in a multi-winner contest that may be more positive for your community, but also result in more resistance.

A third point to consider is the election process. To narrow the field of candidates for the general election, some cities hold primaries, which can be either partisan or nonpartisan. Do you need to be affiliated with a party to vote in the primary? Other cities use runoff elections, where an additional election is needed when no candidate wins a majority of votes in the first election. When there isn't a majority requirement in an election, candidates are typically elected by a plurality of votes, meaning that winners received the most votes, but not necessarily a majority (over 50%). Furthermore, it is important to note how many officials are elected each year. Term lengths can differ between positions and elections can also be staggered across multiple years to ensure the entire council is not completely new after each election.

Whichever structure your community uses, is it working? How does voter turnout compare to other similar cities, counties and states? How do people feel about those who are elected in your community? Are there any important constituencies who feel unrepresented?



Key Questions to Ask:

1. What offices are elected in your community? When there is a vacancy, is it filled by election or appointment?
2. Are officials elected in single-seat or multi-seat elections?
3. How does your community vote? Are you allowed to vote absentee (early, by mail, etc)?
4. What is the electoral process (primaries, runoffs, etc)? If there are primaries, are they partisan or nonpartisan?
5. When are elections held? Do they coincide with federal elections?
6. List turnout in the last three municipal elections (including primaries, general elections, and/or runoffs).

Climate: Who has power and how is it used?

Beyond the specific structures, there are other subjective elements that also affect the political climate. Sometimes single-winner elections result in a candidate winning with less than majority support, meaning that most voters may have voted against the winner. Sometimes winner-take-all at-large elections mean that every member of the city or county council has the same political affiliation or the same background or live in the same part of town. Residents might not be able to point to a specific elected official who they feel represents their interests.

Political power dynamics also affect elections. Levels of competition can differ greatly depending on how parties select their preferred candidates. Furthermore, non-governmental stakeholders in the community (like nonprofits, businesses, or even prominent individuals) can significantly influence elections. Recognizing these dynamics is critical to fully understanding how RCV could shift power and whether or not such change would be beneficial to a community.



Finally, the political climate affects the types of campaigns that are run in terms of hostility. Do certain candidates, or types of candidates, consistently run negative campaigns? If so, do community residents perceive that to be an issue? Above all, it is important to note how the level of engagement in the local political system from a range of perspectives.

Key Questions to Ask:

1. Do community residents feel they can hold their elected officials accountable for actions with which they disagree? Do their voices matter in the electoral process?

2. Is there strong or weak competition? Do the same parties (or party) run candidates and consistently win?

3. Are there non-governmental organizations (nonprofits, businesses, etc.) that regularly influence the outcome of elections?

4. Are elections characterized by negative or positive campaigning?

5. Are community residents generally apathetic or engaged in local politics? Are these sentiments widespread or based on certain demographics (neighborhood, ideology, etc.)?

6. How are your elections and elected officials portrayed in the media? Please provide some examples.

7. Are there segments of the community or particular viewpoints that do not have representation?



Administrative Assessment

Who administers elections and how are they run?

From city, to county, to state levels there are numerous processes for administering elections. It is important to understand each step of the election administration in your community so you can assess what will change and what will remain the same when using RCV.

Administering elections can be extremely difficult and thankless work, so it is important to understand that the more you can address potential issues before implementing ranked choice voting, the easier it will be to work with election administrators. Election administrators pride themselves on precision, so introducing something unfamiliar may come with some resistance. If you have done your homework beforehand though, these conversations will foster positive dialogue about innovation rather than fear of change.

Organizers should therefore try to answer as many of these questions as possible independently before outreach planning begins and through working with partners as the organizing process continues.

Key questions to ask:

1. Who is in charge of election administration in your city? (City Clerk? Board of Elections? Registrar?)
2. What voting equipment does your city use? Who is the vendor (manufacturer)? Do you vote on paper ballots, on touchscreens, or something else?
3. Is voting equipment provided by the city, county, or state?
4. When was voting equipment purchased or leased? How much longer will that voting equipment be used?
5. How are requests for proposals issued and accepted if/when new equipment is required? (via council, mayor, administrator?)
6. Are polling places by precinct (most common)? Does your city use voting centers or even a 100% vote by mail process?
7. How are the votes counted? Does each precinct count votes and report them, or are votes counted centrally?



Legal Assessment

How are electoral procedures determined in your community?

One of the key steps in bringing ranked choice voting to your community is understanding what laws determine how your community conducts elections and how those laws are changed. In some places, state law controls how local elections are conducted. In other places, the locality itself can adopt a charter and/or ordinances that establish an election method for its offices. Bringing ranked choice voting to your community may be as easy as a vote of the city council or may require more effort depending on the process that is required to change election laws.

Here are the most common sources of law governing elections:

1. State constitutions: These typically establish the framework for state government, including elections. They usually do not regulate local elections, but they may include general provisions about voting that apply to local elections.
2. State statutes: These have the more detailed laws for the state, generally including the details for how state officers are elected. They also will classify and regulate counties and cities, often including detailed regulations for their elections.
3. County/city charters: A “charter” is like the constitution of a county or city. Not all counties and cities have them. Those that don’t usually must follow state statutes, while those that do have more freedom to decide how they will be structured.
4. County/city ordinances: Ordinances are like local statutes. They contain the more detailed laws for the county and city, sometimes including election laws.



There are two fundamental questions you need to answer to determine your path forward for bringing ranked choice voting to your community:

1. What offices should be elected with ranked choice voting?
2. What law establishes how those offices are elected?

Depending on the offices you are looking to elect using ranked choice voting there are a number of different ways to advance ranked choice voting.

State Level

1. Would ranked choice voting require a statutory change or a constitutional change?
2. How is state legislation passed? How is a state constitutional amendment adopted? Does your state allow citizens to initiate legislation?

County Level

- 1) What law governs county elections?
 - a. State statutes?
 - b. County charter?
 - c. County ordinances?
- 2) How is your county classified?
 - a. Charter county?
- 3) What avenues are available for changing county elections?
 - a. Change to the law governing your county's elections?
 - b. Adoption of a charter in a non-charter county?

Municipal Level

- 1) What law governs city elections?
 - a. State statutes?



- b. County charter or ordinances?
 - c. City charter or ordinances?
- 2) How is your city classified?
- a. Charter city?
 - b. Other classification?
 - c. “Unincorporated area”?
- 3) What avenues are available for changing city elections?
- a. Change to the law governing your city’s elections?
 - b. Adoption of a charter in a non-charter city?

Legislative act

State statutes may be amended by the state legislature. County ordinances may be amended by a county council. City ordinances may be amended by the city council. These are examples of a legislative body passing ordinary legislation. When it comes to state constitutions and county or city charters, it may be more complicated. Some places allow the legislative body to amend the constitution or charter. Some allow the legislative body to start that process, but it must go to a vote of the people before adoption. Others require some special body to amend those governing documents, like a constitutional convention or a charter commission.



Citizen Initiative

In some places, citizens can bypass the legislature and “initiate” legislation on their own. This generally involves filing legislative language and then circulating a petition to have that legislative language voted on. Then, the proposal will appear on the ballot for voters to vote for or against. This is a very expensive and difficult process that should only be undertaken if the legislative approach has been attempted first. The National Conference of State Legislatures publishes a chart listing what states have a statewide initiative process. Whether there is something analogous in your county or city will require more individualized research.



Building a Communications Strategy

Building a movement around ranked choice voting in your community will take a comprehensive communications strategy and a dedicated member of your team to execute that strategy. Developing a message, working with the media, and bringing others into your movement are all important parts of that strategy. At the end of the day though, all of your communications work should in some way advance the political process you are using to adopt ranked choice voting in your community. If you are working on a ballot measure, your endgame is “yes” votes from voters. If you’re using the legislative process, your goal is to put pressure on legislators to act. Keep that in mind as you design your strategy and set communications goals.

Develop Your Message

The Perfect Elevator Pitch

As an active community member and agent of change, you’re probably meeting new people everyday, at events, on the sidewalk, or around town. Some of the people you meet care about making their local communities better just as much as you do and could be passionate future allies in your work for electoral reform. But how do you encourage more people to join your movement when many may have never even heard of ranked choice voting? How do you capture someone’s attention and make a pitch for why RCV is important in under 60 seconds?

The answer is using your own personal story to make the pitch. Go back to your “Story of Self” and pick out the two most important pieces: What you care about and how ranked choice voting can help. Narrow your “Story of Self” down to one or two issues that you really feel strongly about or that led you into electoral reform. Don’t worry about what sounds best or what would be most interesting. Pick the issue or problem that feels most genuine to you and your path to activism. Why is ranked choice voting the solution your community needs to solve the problems you care about? Why are you doing this



in the first place? Using your own story is the most powerful way to talk about ranked choice voting because it makes the reform personal. Your story gives others a chance to connect with the real impact of ranked choice voting.

Make it Personal

If one of your friends read your elevator speech, would they know it was you right away? Your pitch should be unique to things you care about. Don't be afraid to mention specific experiences or stories from your background that are particularly important to why you're doing this work now.

Keep it quick

Keep it quick! Try and get through your two-part elevator speech in under 30 seconds. Want some practice? Find a friend and an elevator and run through your pitch a few times! See if you can get through the whole thing by the time the elevator gets to the fourth floor.

Strong Finish: How Can They Learn More?

Wrap up your pitch by letting them know where they can go for more information. Can they like you on Facebook? Read the op-ed you wrote last week? Follow you on Twitter? Give your audience a path forward to stay involved and updated with your work.



A Tailored Pitch

Ranked choice voting is a simple reform that can go a long way to fixing many different problems we see in politics today. This means that when you know ahead of time what your audience cares about, you can really tailor your pitch to speak to those concerns. You can use the same structure for these that you used for your personal elevator speech. Start with the problem, and show how ranked choice voting could be the solution.

Here are a few examples that we at FairVote came up with that work for ranked choice voting to elect multiple seats (what we often call fair representation voting):

Gerrymandering...

"Whether you are electing representatives for Congress or your state legislature, most elections have no real competition. Currently, districts only allow for one politician to win and then preserve their seat by drawing the lines in their favor. Ranked choice voting opens up districts to more than one elected voice, so that as many voters as possible are able to help elect someone they support. A majority of voters can elect a majority of seats, but everyone's voice is heard. Ranked choice voting must be at the core of any real solution to gerrymandering."

More Opportunities for Third Parties...

"Democracy means having real choices, and American voters don't fit into two boxes. Being stuck with two choices in November simply isn't working, and there is only one realistic way to ensure real choice: ranked choice voting. If you believe it's valuable to have more than just the major party nominees and more than two candidates on the ballot, you are not alone. A growing chorus of concerned citizens are calling for ranked choice voting because it brings more voices to the political debate, while eliminating the drawbacks of vote-splitting. With ranked choice voting you get real, meaningful choices while remaining confident that the candidate with the strongest support will win."

Better Representation...

"We want our legislative bodies to represent the best and brightest leaders in our community. Too often winner-take-all elections create barriers for new and fresh ideas. Ranked choice voting opens up politics to more diverse voices, including women, people of color, and independents. When we have the power to rank candidates, and more of us can elect someone that speaks for us, all of democracy benefits from fresh conversations and new perspectives."



Connect Back

We used the examples of gerrymandering, political party diversity, and more reflective representation, but the benefits of ranked choice voting go beyond just those three issues. What are the three problems that ranked choice voting could uniquely address in your community?

The Problem:

How is RCV the Solution?

The Problem:

How is RCV the Solution?

The Problem:

How is RCV the Solution?



Understanding Your Audience

Who are you trying to reach?

In order to communicate effectively, you have to understand who your audience is. The reality is that not everyone in your community cares about improving democracy, and those that do will all have different reasons for wanting to affect change. It's important to think about which members of your community are good candidates to bring onto your team and what makes them tick. Take time to write down thoughtful answers to these questions:

- Who in my community is already civically engaged? Who would this matter to?
- What is their perception of local politics and governance?
- What issues are important to them?

Who are you trying to influence?

Understanding who your potential teammates are in your community is key, but it's also important to understand the people who you are trying to influence. You identified who these stakeholders are in your Community Assessment, but this is an opportunity to think about them as an audience for your communications strategy.

Policymakers inherently have priorities and concerns that are unique to your community and likely different than the average community member. Take time to write down thoughtful answers to these questions:

- What potential red-flags should be avoided when communicating with stakeholders?
- What priorities might stakeholders have that differ from my team of community members?
- What challenges are currently facing local stakeholders and how do those impact the way you frame ranked choice voting to them?



How are you going to reach them?

Finally, part of understanding your audience is knowing how to reach them. Different audiences prefer to communicate in different ways, and your strategy must take into consideration the best means of communication for your audience. Are your supporters on social media? Do most have an email address, or do some need to be reached by phone? These details impact the messaging you develop and the communications infrastructure you build. Take time to write down thoughtful answers to these questions:

- How does your audience primarily get its news and communicate with the rest of the world?
- How comfortable is your audience with email? Social media? Technology?
- What pros and cons exist for various forms of communication, and how does that affect how you develop your messaging?

Once you have answered these questions, start planning how you might tailor your communications strategy accordingly. Ranked choice voting has a variety of benefits, and you need to decide which ones will motivate engaged community members to join your team and take an active role, and which ones should be featured when communicating with stakeholders. Remember that not everyone needs to have the same reason for advancing ranked choice voting in their community, and it is your job to develop your messaging to fit various audiences along the way and find a means of communicating that will maximize your reach.



“Letter to the Editor” Kit

The following four pages provide a template for writing letters to the editor about ranked choice voting and logistical tips for doing so. Feel free to adapt this kit as needed to fit the context of your campaign or community or ask us to help you do so. You can print it out or download it to send to supporters who would like to get involved by writing a letter to their local newspaper.

Part 1: Introduce the issue to readers

Ranked Choice Voting

If writing to get majority results:

“I am writing in support of ranked choice voting, a simple, common sense reform to our voting system that puts power back in the hands of voters to restore majority rule and makes politicians more accountable to us.”

If writing to eliminate primary runoff elections:

“Despite the fact that runoff elections help to elect a majority winner, they almost always generate dismal turnout and cost taxpayers a lot of money. **[You can cite drops in turnout from years past Or ask us for help in finding that data]** Rather than doing away with consensus winners in primaries, we should adopt ranked choice voting.”

Fair Representation Voting

“Independent redistricting commissions are a good step, but as long as only one person is elected to represent everyone in a district, politicians will be able to manipulate the lines in their favor.”

Part 2: Explain the problem with our current voting system

Ranked Choice Voting

“When more than two candidates run in an election, someone can be elected without a majority of votes. This puts voters in a tough spot. Ranked choice voting promotes fair outcomes that are grounded in majority rule.”

Fair Representation Voting

“No matter who draws state or congressional districts, it is incredibly difficult to create competition within the confines of single-winner districts, in which 51 percent of the vote translates to 100 percent of the representation. When it’s “winner-take-all,” most voters lose.”

Part 3: Explain your solution

Ranked Choice Voting

- “Ranked choice voting allows voters to rank as many candidates as they want in order of choice--first, second, third, and so on. All first choices are counted, and if a candidate has a majority, then they win just like any other election. However if

nobody has a majority, the candidate with the fewest votes is eliminated, and those voters have their ballot instantly count for their next choice.”

- “If a voter’s favorite candidate can’t win their vote counts for the candidate they ranked next, so nobody feels like they wasted their vote on an underdog. This means that more people can run, including independent and third party candidates, without fear of splitting the vote. This encourages more voices in democracy, and more choices for voters.”

Fair Representation Voting

- “The best way to take politics out of redistricting and ensure competition is to open up our political system by replacing single-winner districts altogether.”
- “Instead, we could draw larger districts in which three or five members are elected proportionally to collectively represent an area. With multiple seats, voters could elect candidates in proportion to their preferred party’s strength in the electorate.
- “This would make the responsibility of drawing districts largely irrelevant, but make voters’ voices on Election Day much more important.”

Part 4: Explain why you support this

Ranked Choice Voting

To increase civility in campaigns:

“University studies show that ranked choice voting encourages candidates to run more positive campaigns, focus on the issues, and reach out beyond their base.”

To empower voters with a stronger voice:

“Ranked choice voting is a simple, yet powerful change we can make to give voters a stronger voice in our elections. It gives voters the freedom to rank candidates in order of choice--first, second, third, and so on--instead of just picking one. The more you rank, the stronger your voice is in democracy.”

To ensure fair outcomes:

“When more than two candidates run in an election, someone can be elected without a majority of votes. This puts voters in a tough spot. Ranked choice voting promotes fair outcomes that are grounded in majority rule.”

It is proven in practice:

“Ranked choice voting is used in communities across the country as a means to empower voters and foster better elections. The state of Maine will vote on a citizen-led ballot initiative in November to adopt ranked choice voting for all statewide elections.”

Fair Representation Voting

To ensure fair outcomes:

“No matter who draws state or congressional districts, it is incredibly difficult to create competition while also ensuring fair outcomes. Fair representation voting would ensure that representation in the legislature more accurately reflects the views of the people.”

To end gerrymandering:

“With multiple seats up for grabs in every district, every voter would be able to participate in a competitive election and be confident in fair results. Voters would finally choose their representatives, instead of representatives choosing their voters. Americans deserve districts that are free of manipulation and allow for more voices to be represented in a district.”

To break up polarization and gridlock:

“With multiple candidates elected to represent each district, almost every voter is represented by more than one political party. This encourages collaborative policymaking from politicians who share the same constituents and would certainly help to break up the gridlock that plagues our politics today.”

Part 5: Inspire and inform voters to get involved

Ranked Choice Voting

“Citizens across the country are coming together in support of ranked choice voting as a way to take back democracy and improve American politics. I encourage readers to educate friends and family about a better way of voting and learn more at www.fairvote.org.”

Fair Representation Voting

“If true competition and full representation is what we want out of our democracy, then we need to tackle the root of the problem: single-winner districts. I encourage readers to visit www.fairvote.org to learn more.”

Logistics

There are a couple of logistics to note as you begin this process. First, most newspapers impose a 250-300 word limit on letters to the editor. Second, most newspapers ask for writers to submit their letters via email or online form. And third, for confirmation purposes, newspapers ask that writers provide a name, telephone number, and address at the end of a letter. Please email **[insert your contact information here or direct supporters to a FairVote staff member]** if you have any questions about the content of your letter, or about the logistics of submitting your letter to your local paper. We're here and happy to help!

Frequently Asked Questions

Is there a drafting process for my letter?

While it is not required, we are happy to work with you throughout the process and would be happy to look at drafts of your letter. One of the most important elements of the drafting process is ensuring that writers correctly and effectively communicate how the counting process works in a ranked choice voting election. If you decide to discuss this element in your letter, we advise having a member of our team review it.

How do I submit my letter?

Newspaper websites will often have a directory that will point prospective writers to the information on how to submit a letter for the upcoming edition of the paper. Most newspapers have an email address or an electronic submission form established for this purpose. If you have trouble finding the relevant email address or electronic submission form, do not hesitate to contact our staff.

Can I send my letter to multiple newspapers?

The policy for multi-paper letters varies from place to place. Some newspapers are adamant about refraining from sending your letter to additional newspapers, while others have no policy on this matter. If you are interested in sending your letter to multiple outlets, ask the newspapers in question what their policy is.

How will I know that my letter has been printed?

Typically, a representative from the newspaper will call or email you shortly after your letter has been submitted to inform you about the status for publication. Sometimes, there is no notification and the letter is simply printed in a future edition of the newspaper. If you have not been notified by a newspaper representative, or have not seen your letter published within a 3-4 day span, please contact us, so that we can directly contact the paper or find another outlet for the letter.

Building Your Online Presence

Organizations can most effectively advance reforms by engaging in key conversations with thought leaders and influencers to win the arguments for why our reforms matter. Digital engagement is critical for building support for direct advocacy opportunities. Key conversations on redistricting, gerrymandering, and political disenfranchisement are all litigated in the public square of social media. Any new organization must invest in cultivating an engaged social media community.

Each social media platform has advantages and areas of specialization. Facebook and twitter remain cornerstones of every digital strategy, and every advocacy group should maintain a presence on both. What are the specific advantages and uses of each?

Twitter

- **Real-time Alerts:** Many users check twitter for real-time updates. Anything more than three days old is functionally ancient on Twitter. If you know something is about to happen, you can use your Twitter account like an alert system. Alerting your community to a new town council decision, for example, or alerting them to local election results. If they hear it from you first, you will further establish yourself as a leading and trustworthy voice in the electoral reform conversation and in the community news sphere. A big part of the reason people go to twitter is for breaking news.



FairVote @fairvote · Sep 16

READ: Britain's Labour Party elects Jeremy Corbyn using ranked choice voting ow.ly/Si9Wq @jeremycorbyn
pic.twitter.com/m3PwZs6lob

- **Trending Stories Engagement:** Twitter is the perfect place to tap into trending conversations in a variety of political and social topics. Trending stories are usually laden with emotion and users already feel very passionate about them, so as long as it's a relevant topic for us, we can tap into that depth of feeling by joining the hashtag on Twitter.



- **Rapid Response:** When something major happens in our cultural sphere, like the lights go out at the superbowl or Facebook goes down, most individuals turn to social media to find out what is going on. You can tap into that attention spike by engaging in a rapid response tweet, as long as it fits your narrative. It's a good way to show you are paying attention, and engage with new audience members who might not have known about you.



FairVote @fairvote · Sep 24

Facebook might be down, but our ranked choice polls are up and working! Cast your ballot here civonomics.com/gop2016 pic.twitter.com/zqy24D0qay

- **Town Halls:** Twitter town halls are live Q&A sessions hosted on Twitter that facilitate an exchange between you and your community. They rely on Twitter's real-time fluidity to simulate a town hall setting on a digital platform. Participants can watch questions and answers as they come in. Live digital events like this foster a real sense of participation and responsiveness.

Facebook

- **Longer Form Discussion:** Facebook is probably the most conducive social media platform for any denser discussions you might want to host, or any more detailed content you might have. For example, you might want to host a discussion the week before election day on what people are doing to get ready to vote. You have more room to do that on Facebook than anywhere else.
- **Nuanced Explanations:** Facebook can also accommodate an additional level of detail, compared to other social media networks. Facebook is still bound by the 10 second time limit of all other platforms, but it does offer a little more room for explanation, context, and information in each interaction. On Facebook, written content frames graphic and video content, offering a few more layers than Twitter or Instagram. If you had, for example, a three point action ask, or more complicated piece about multi-seat ranked choice voting, those are better housed on Facebook than on Twitter or Instagram.



- **Analysis:** Analyzing the news, current events, or any political developments, as big news stories unfold. For example, following the Arizona redistricting Supreme Court case, Facebook was the perfect place to put analysis of the decision.
- **Video:** Video is by far the fastest growing and most popular content hosted on Facebook today. Native Facebook video plays automatically and silently on newsfeeds of followers, so it can be very engaging even without being especially polished. Word overlays are particularly effective.
- **Questions:** Facebook is an ideal platform for questions. Your community can ask questions in the comment section, or through Facebook's private messaging feature. It is also a great place for you to ask questions of your audience and receive replies.
- **Conversations:** Back and forth exchanges with your audience, as long as they are civil, are key to building a more engaged community. They are best hosted on Facebook because of the linear "replies" system and comments section on each post. These conversations can be public and solicited, taking place on our dashboard with your public posts, or if someone has a more detailed question, they can message you privately.
- **Commentary:** Commenting on the work of other organizations or allies is one of the best ways to use Facebook's sharing function. When you share the posts of other organizations, especially your allies, you can add your agreement or support to their work at the top of the shared photo or video.
- **Event Planning:** A really comprehensive feature Facebook has is their "Event Pages." If you are hosting an event, like a press conference, a digital Q&A, or even just a simple meeting for supporters, Facebook event pages are a great way to track attendees and spread the word. Making a Facebook page for your cause is also a good substitute for a website until your movement is ready to build one.



Email Communications

The most valuable thing you can have from a supporter is their email address. Having a list of supporters' emails, and growing that list is an important piece of growing your movement from a communications perspective. Here are a few tips for emailing your supporters:

1. Keep it short

Most people get barraged with emails on a daily basis. If your fortunate enough to have supporters open your email, don't lose them by greeting them with huge blocks of text. Keep your email focused on getting across one or two main points, and keep those points short. Break up the text of your email with headers or bullet points so its easier for your reader to digest.

2. Understand what your audience cares about

It is important that you understand what your audience wants from you via email. Are you their source of news? Analysis? Are they looking for opportunities to get involved? Take time to understand what your audience is looking for, and be consistent in delivering that.

3. Be personal

Just because you are emailing a big list, doesn't mean your email communications need to feel formal or stuffy. Be yourself, and make it feel like your email is personal and from a friend.



Celebrate Wins

Whether its on social media or via email--celebrate wins big and small! Let your supporters know that progress is being made, and their contributions--be it their time, their canvassing, letters, or donations--are making things happen. If you haven't had a win in a while, find something to celebrate and use as an opportunity to send good news to your supporters.

Engaging Policymakers

Why Reach Out?

As a politically aware and engaged member of the community, your voice and your thoughts on voting should matter to your local elected officials, congresspersons and senators. Even policymakers who are not directly involved with advancing your reforms can be powerful ambassadors of your message.

When you reach out to engage with your legislators directly, they have a chance to learn about these issues from the perspective of a voter and community member. Some members of congress might never even have heard of ranked choice voting. Others might not make the connection between the frustrations of their constituents and the way our votes are counted. As a passionate and knowledgeable advocate of electoral reform, you are the perfect person to make these connections for your elected officials. Bringing your stories, ideas, and perspectives to your representatives is an incredibly important step in getting your message out there, and gaining allies in elected office. They want to hear from you, and in turn, you've got a lot of important things to say.

A Plan for Successful Engagement

Most elected officials want to hear from their constituents, so they try and make getting in touch as easy as possible. The best way to be heard by your legislators is to launch a letter writing campaign, make calls into their office, or visit in person. Communicating your message will be different in each one of these settings, even though your audience will be the same. A strong communications plans adapt to the differences in these platforms to maximize the impact of your message. In this section, we'll go through each one, and give you the communications tools you need to successfully engage with your representative in writing, over the phone, and in person.



Write Letters

Define your issue: Kick off your letter with a strong and specific subject line, title or opening sentence. Policymakers get dozens,

sometimes hundreds, of letters a week so you should let them know what you're writing in about at the top of your letter. If there is any kind of bill relating to electoral reform issues, include the bill number or a reference to the specific legislation. If not, a general title like "Why I Support Ranked Choice Voting," is perfect.

Identify yourself as a constituent: List your return address on any letter or message as your home address in the district of the policymaker or congressmen you're writing too. Letting them know that you live in their district makes the issue local for them, emphasizes their responsibility to read your letter, consider what you are saying and thoughtfully respond.

Edit your letter carefully: Your note should be no more than a page, respectfully written, and include examples or concrete facts and figures. Stick to talking about just one issue in depth instead of trying to touch on several different issues. Most importantly, have a friend or team member read your letter over to check for grammar mistakes, spelling and clarity. You want to avoid any distracting elements that might take away from your key ideas.

Refer Back: Can't think of what to write? Refer back to your Story of Self and write a letter about why you got into electoral reform, and why these issues are personally important to you.

Expect Delays: Letters in particular need to go through several rounds of security before they get to policymakers. Allow for at least a month between when you send the letter and when you will receive a response.

Call

Introduce yourself and your issue: Start any call with a strong introduction that includes your name and your town of origin. Most staffers for elected officials are very familiar with the layout of their districts, so they'll recognize where you're from and know right away that you're a constituent.



Keep your message “type-able”: The staffer who picks up your call will want to get your message to your elected official as accurately as possible, but that can be tough when the conversation happens over the phone. As you are talking, the staff member will be trying to write down or type out your points. If you’re going too quickly, or your point is too complicated, your message core is going to get lost in the transaction. Speak slower than you normally would and in short sentences, so that your main points are easy to type out. That way, even if you get a chance to chat with the staffer more casually, you’ll know your core message was captured and passed along.

Example: “Ranked choice voting is important to me for two reasons. It gives me more choices on election day and encourages candidates to run positive campaigns.”

Recruit Your Friends to Practice: Talking on the phone is one of the most difficult ways to communicate with your elected official. You can’t pick up on body signals or non verbal cues like you can in a meeting, and you don’t have the time to prepare your words carefully like you can in a letter. The best way to adapt to the phone-call format is to practice with a friend. That way, you can practice keeping your pitch quick and simple, and get some idea of how easy you are to understand over the phone.



Meeting in Person

Schedule the meeting far in advance: Most local policy makers and all members of congress have standard meeting request forms online. These are available so constituents like you can give the lawmaker’s scheduler a heads-up that you would like a meeting to discuss issues. Submit an online request for a meeting first, and be sure to include a contact e-mail or phone number that you check regularly. If you have not heard from an office representative or schedule after two weeks, follow up on your scheduling request with a phone call.

Know your legislative history: Prepare for the meeting by doing some research on how your policy maker has dealt with or voted on

electoral issues in the past. What history does he or she have with reform movements, or voting issues? Understanding your policymaker's voting record will help you craft your messaging plan. For example, if your representative has yet to vote on any electoral laws or issues, they might benefit from an additional leaflet or longer explanation in the beginning. If they have an established record, you can spend less time talking about what RCV is and more time addressing their specific questions.

Keep the discussion local: The best thing you can do to make sure your message really resonates with a policy maker is to keep your discussion of the issues local. Instead of talking generally or theoretically about how RCV would change elections, mention specific benefits to your town, state or locality. Bring up examples of elections or campaigns that haven't lived up to your ideals of democracy. Reference other neighbors, friends or supporters in the area who are also eager to see reform.

Choosing talking points: highlight attention-grabbers: Depending on your policymaker's schedule or their staff's time, you may get as little as 15 minutes to discuss your issues. For this reason, make sure you decide ahead of time which attention-grabbing facts, thoughts or pieces of information you're planning to highlight. Choose the talking points that will really turn heads in the policymaker's office, raise their interest, and inspire them to continue engaging with these issues. The rest of the details can go into a fact-sheet or handout that you leave with the policy maker's staff for their perusal.

Make the Ask: Always go into a policymaker meeting with a specific ask or cause to action. Keeping this action ask at the center of your agenda for the meeting will provide a focal point for your messaging. Your message is most clear and direct when you focus it on a specific action step that your representative can take. Knowing exactly what your representative can do to contribute to your work.



Working With The Media

Media engagement must be at the center of any effective advocacy plan. Even the best events, strategies and articles will go unnoticed by your target audience without effective media engagement. This section focuses on traditional news and print media; to find our advice, tips and how-to's for social media, check back to the **Building Your Online Presence** section of the toolkit.

Three Myths About the Media

1. *Journalists and media outlets are biased.*

National news outlets (like Fox News Channel or MSNBC) often cover news to meet their particular audience. However, most journalist and news outlets are trying to cover the news from all points of view. When you reach out to a journalist or news outlet, it is important to understand their approach to covering news and pitch stories that would appeal to their audience and/or market. We all have a particular story and we need to help the media understand how a particular newsworthy item fits into their world.

2. *The media only cares about sensational news.*

The old adage is “If it bleeds, it leads” but that is not always the case. Reporters and news outlets are seeking to build a reputation as being on top of breaking news stories. These stories can vary in type depending on the individuals involved or communities impacted. You can get your story in the news by pitching events in advance and recognizing how the story might be seen to impact local or national news. You should also be prepared if your news is trumped by another event or activity. There are other organizations vying for news attention.

3. *If it doesn't make the news, it's not newsworthy.*

Sometimes a reporter or news outlet doesn't pick up that story -it happens. Your event or news is still very important to the supporters, activists, and community. Explore other tools for sharing your newsworthy story, including email blasts and social media.



Finding Your “Hook”

The most successful press events tap into larger conversations that are already generating energy and interest in the community. By framing ranked choice voting in the context of these conversations, you can access that excitement to build interest in your event among the public and the press. What local events, holidays, gatherings or celebrations are coming up in your community, and how could you leverage them to highlight ranked choice voting?

Events: _____

Example: If your County Fair has a Pie Baking contest, maybe write a letter suggesting that the winner be chosen using ranked choice voting, and use the event as a public education opportunity.

Civic Holidays: _____

Example: International Day of Democracy on September 22nd is a chance to celebrate the democratic ideals of our country. You could use this holiday talk about how first-past-the-post voting systems are letting those ideals down, and to have real democratic representation, your town needs ranked choice voting.

Celebrations: _____

Example: Use the anniversary of the 19th amendment or the Seneca Falls convention to draw attention to the underrepresentation of women in office, and tie that discussion into how ranked choice voting opens up elections to more women candidates.



Identify Key Reporters or News Outlets

When you are trying to get your message out to the press and draw media, the best thing you can do is identify the key reporters and media outlets who will be most interested in publicizing press conference. Who do you turn to?

Step One: Read the News

Your first step in identifying reporters and media outlets for your cause is easy, and best done with a cup of coffee on a Sunday morning. In fact, it's probably something you're already doing: reading the news, and exploring what reporters in the national media and state level papers are talking about. Try to go through the Politics section, the local news section, or the elections section to look for articles about voting, campaigns, or political accountability.

Step Two: Look Back and Keep Track

After reading a lot of different pieces and exploring the local and national coverage of voting issues in your area, it's time to start making lists. Pick out your favorite articles from your search, and note the reporters who wrote them. Choose the articles or stories that you felt really excited about, or thought were especially connected to your work. Then, write down the names of those reporters and look back at what they have written in the past few years. Do they write mostly opinion pieces? News stories? What are some common themes? If you're not seeing a pattern of stories about elections and voting, pick a new author from your list

Step Three: Bring Your Press Event to Them

After you've got a good group of reporters who might be interested in your reforms, bring your story to them by reaching out via phone or e-mail. Both local and national reporters have the same goals of publishing relevant, engaging, and attention-grabbing pieces. If you can select a few reporters central to conversations about democracy and voting, then you have a good chance of breaking into the news cycle.



Media Advisories

Unlike most of your published materials, media advisories have a very narrow and specific audience. They are specifically a letter of notice to the media with the details of an event, intended to alert news professionals of the event and, ultimately, attract press coverage.

Event title or headline

Each event you host should have one uniform, attention grabbing headline that you use across all announcements and platforms. The headline should be informative enough that reporters or press members who attend will not be surprised about the content or flow of the event, but also catchy enough that the title will attract attention.

One paragraph description of the reason for the event

Try to keep this paragraph tightly focused on what will happen at the event. It should be entirely informative, and structured to give any reporter reading it a detailed understanding of what the event will entail or announce. Do not incorporate heavy messaging or values laden language into this paragraph, as it will distract from the core logistical and informative points you are trying to convey.



What, Who, When, Where

These points should be listed in bullet point style so as to be easily readable by a member of the press who is skimming your Advisory. Each element should be addressed on a separate line, with just the bare minimum amount of information. The “What,” section should be no longer than a single sentence.

One sentence description of the hosting organization(s)

This sentence should include both your organization and any partner organizations hosting the event. Include the key points of what each organization does, but don't worry about adding any deeper information about leadership or organization.



Building a Movement

Professor Marshall Ganz, a senior lecturer in public policy at the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University, said “Organizers bring people together, challenging them to act on behalf of their shared values and interests.” This section will provide you with basic principles and skills of organizing so you can harness the energy and interests of your community and turn that into unified action to enact RCV.

This section will serve to help activists develop skills and techniques necessary to build up your effort. A common axiom in organizing is that “relationships are the currency of power.” To build that power in your effort we want to discuss the best practices for building up support at the grassroots and the grasstops.

Building relationships

Similar to the idea that it’s not what you know but who you know, activism is fueled by forming community. Organizing efforts can be long, uphill battles but at the end of the day they are founded on a shared vision. To build your effort, increase support, and maintain commitment, strong relationships are essential.



Self Interest

When making decisions all of us tend to ask ourselves, “how will this affect me/my family/my people/my community?” We are naturally guided by our own experience. This is not to suggest people are selfish or that you have to convince every single person that ranked choice voting is the solution to all of their problems, this simply means that it is only natural for us to consider how a change would affect us personally. When you are starting to form a relationship with a potential supporter, volunteer, community leader, elected official, etc. it is important to be aware of this thought process. For some, the value of ranked choice voting will be apparent immediately and directly align with their interests and values. For others, ranked

choice voting may not fall within their current priorities. In these situations it is best to spend time getting to know the person and learn more about their interests, values, and priorities. This understanding will better equip you to present your ideas in a way that will resonate. As an example, when you are speaking to an elected official about changing the way that they are elected it's only natural for them to consider how it would affect previous or future campaigns. Be aware of those realities and highlight the ways that this reform could benefit both their candidacy and their ability to govern more effectively.

One to Ones

A one to one is an introductory conversation with someone you believe could be an asset to your effort. The purpose of a one to one is to learn about this person's experiences, interests, and skills while also sharing information about ranked choice voting and your effort. It is important to remember that these conversations serve mainly to gain an understanding of the person you would like to bring into the effort, below are the Midwest Academy's 6 key steps for having a successful one to one:

Be Prepared: Make sure to review what you already know about the person that you're meeting with. Do some background research, find out what you can about work that they have done and come up with some idea for things you would like to know or questions you would like to ask. On the flip-side, you also need to prepare yourself. Make sure you can clearly articulate your goals and have an idea of what you would like to get out of the meeting.

Legitimize Yourself: Share points of connection between you and the person you're meeting with such as people, experiences, interests, etc. Share your group or organization's accomplishments and clearly articulate your goals.

Listen: The point of this conversation is to better understand the other person -their interests, their concerns, their priorities. To do that



effectively you have to actively listen to the person you're meeting with. If you are a numbers person you should spend 70% of the time listening and about 30% sharing. You will find more points of connection as well intersection of interests if you are focused on listening to the other person rather than sharing your goals and shaping an ask.

Agitate: To create energy around an issue there must be a sense of urgency. This is a key to organizing at any level and it falls directly into two key questions we must ask ourselves - if not me, then who? And, if not now, when? While there will always be competing interests that folks are pursuing as both activists and elected officials.

Get A Commitment: Leaving your one to one you should always have some sort of agreement for the future. These agreements can vary widely in their level of commitment or need for action. In some cases you can commit to checking in with one another in a few months in others it can be someone deciding to volunteer or even take on a leadership role in your effort. Regardless of the level of commitment be sure to leave the meeting with a verbal agreement for next steps.

Follow-Up: Here is the key; 90% of organizing is follow-up. No matter how big or small the commitments you made in your meeting follow-up as promptly as possible. Thank people for their time, recap the key takeaways from your conversation, and follow up on the commitments that you made as well as discussing next steps from the other person. Be polite, punctual, and diligent in your follow-up.



Strategic Planning and Decision Making

It's crucial that leadership, supporters, volunteers, and staff have a clear understanding of their ultimate objective and the path to reaching it. This information can be broken into four categories:

- Specific policy changes required to enact ranked choice voting from the short to long term of the campaign
- The resources required for success.
- Potential allies and opponents to RCV

- Policymakers responsible for enacting RCV

As you are building up your effort it is important to look at these different areas of consideration and include your team in the planning of the areas that affect them. Sometimes decisions will have to come from the top but integration of ideas and perspectives from your fellow activists and supporters can be invaluable to your planning process.

Recruitment

Have an “elevator pitch” ready for your recruitment conversations that briefly sums up your plan to advance RCV. Give prospective supporters a specific task or position you’d like them to take on. For most people these tasks should start small, slowly building their interest in the issue and as their engagement with the issue deepens they will often be willing to take on more. Do everything in your power to give volunteers meaningful roles, no matter how small that task or role may be, when volunteers or new supporters feel that the task or role they are given has value they are much more likely to come back or to further invest in your effort.

In trying to generate turnout for events and volunteer activities, it’s important to have a critical mass of attendance. A good rule of thumb is that of the people who confirm they will attend an event, only half will show up. This means you should aim to have twice as many “yeses” as you need at the event. You should also think about how many people you will need to contact to get a yes to figure out the total number of contacts you must make.



Coalition Building¹

Building a coalition is an important step to expanding the reach of your cause and the range of partners collaborating on it. There are tradeoffs, however, as this means more voices and interests to balance. You may have to compromise on certain issues to maintain a positive relationship with other members of the coalition. However, broadening your impact by simply increasing the number of people working on the issue is worth the effort. There are a number of stakeholders that are worth considering when building a coalition

¹Western Organization of Resource Councils

Leadership²

Leadership is the ability to motivate, energize, and motivate people within your effort culminating in collective action to achieve your shared goal. There are a number of different models for the best ways to lead a team and how to identify leadership, however, in your movement it may be too early to determine who would be best in a leadership role and how those structures should be developed. For now, you have the ability to get the ball rolling, this section will equip you with basic skills to guide and motivate your team.

Taking the Lead

Set An Example: It is important to demonstrate the kind of effort that you expect out of those around you. The best way to do this is to ensure that your work reflects your values. If one of your values is to be punctual, you should set the example by always being on time.

Delegate Authority and Responsibilities: A key to developing a strong movement is to give each member of your team a meaningful role. Many people have the tendency to take on everything themselves. This is problematic for two reasons. First, taking on that amount of work can easily overwhelm a person and could lead to a potentially successful leader burning out before they've had a chance to advance their movement. Second, the more meaningful roles that you are able to give supporters, the more invested they will be. Taking on too much will not only create a great deal of undue stress, it will also limit your team's ability to fill leadership roles and engage more closely with your effort.

Clearly Articulate Expectations and Importance: When you delegate authority or responsibilities be sure to be clear with what product, results, or progress you would like to see come from that task. Be sure to give necessary background information and ensure that any questions a supporter, volunteer, or staff member has when making an assignment. Also, clearly explain why this task is important to the larger effort. At times there will be things that have to get done that are not necessarily exciting or fun but by explaining their importance to the bigger vision you give meaning to the task.



are not necessarily exciting or fun but by explaining their importance to the bigger vision you give meaning to the task.

Give others credit for success, show appreciation for effort: When you are building up an effort there may be several challenges such as very little funding or experience. In these situations it is essential for a leader to keep morale high. The best way to do this is to celebrate the work of your team. Without encouragement it is easy to get disillusioned. Be sure to thank people for all of their efforts, give credit for successes, and stay positive through failures. Mistakes will be made but keeping the focus on the positive will keep supporters, volunteers, and staff invested.

Constructive feedback is critical: Again, keeping a positive attitude is essential for morale. A lot of practices and culture is defined at the beginning of a movement. This is particularly important when offering constructive feedback or troubleshooting. A technique that is often used to deliver constructive criticism is a “praise sandwich.” A praise sandwich frames a discussion meant to correct a behavior. Before beginning the conversation think about what has been going well and what has not gone well. To begin the discussion, lead with praise. Discuss what the person or group has been doing well and how that has positively affected the effort. Next, coach (don’t preach), discuss what hasn’t been going well, do your best to avoid using the word “but” because that is more likely to result in the other person feeling defensive. Rely on facts as much as possible and be sure to articulate how this is something that you can work through together and work to brainstorm solutions. After discussing how to move forward, encourage. Remind the person that they are essential to your effort and their work is appreciated. Remember to follow-up after the discussion.

Learn from your and others’ experience: When you are making decisions about how to move forward, use the experiences that you have as a guide but also make a concerted effort to listen to those around you. The collective knowledge within your group is likely much greater than just your experiences alone. Giving your group an opportunity to share their experiences and perspectives is valuable.



² <http://organizingforpower.org/leadership/>

Maintaining relationships

The most important factor in keeping volunteers and partners committed to your campaign is making sure that the time they devote to it is well spent. This principle demands well-run meetings, consistent follow-up, and having tasks for volunteers to complete and giving them an understanding of the task's importance.

Efficient and effective meetings are key to a winning campaign because they give the people working for it a say in the way the campaign is run. The primary purpose of meetings is to make decisions, and each meeting should be run with a focus on the specific plan to be made. Attendees should be given as much information about the relevant issues as possible before the meeting so everyone can provide input. Starting and ending on time and introducing and including everyone helps to make members feel engaged in the decision-making process and bolsters support for the plans adopted.

Finally, follow-up is the most important tool for maintaining relationships. Whether bringing in new supporters, sponsors, securing endorsements, or fundraising. Your initial interaction is important but your follow-up as well as continued and escalating engagement are crucial to growing your successful movement.



Ranked Choice Voting Activist Interviews

We've interviewed activists who have successfully advanced ranked choice voting in cities across the country. These interviews are provided with the hopes that you can learn from their experiences and apply some of the lessons they learned to your own campaign. For this section, visit the toolkit page on FairVote's website, where audio recordings of the interviews have been uploaded for you to listen to: http://www.fairvote.org/rcv_activist_interview

Activists who were interviewed:

Blair Bobier

Blair Bobier is a longtime ranked choice voting activist who is currently working on a campaign in Benton County, Oregon to get ranked choice voting on the ballot. Blair outlined the trajectory of his campaign to date and points out the importance of working with election officials to pass an RCV initiative. Bobier is working with a core team of five people to promote this initiative. In addition, he is working closely with county officials from both the Democratic and Green parties to extend his reach. Bobier offers advice on effective campaign management pulling from his twenty years of experience advocating for RCV.



Steven Hill

Steven Hill is a California-based activist who has been an instrumental player in ranked choice voting campaigns across the state. In 1996, Hill launched an initiative to elect the San Francisco council with ranked choice voting instead of switching to districts. Though the voters narrowly decided to return to single winner districts rather than implement RCV, the groundwork for a future campaign had been laid. In 2000, after a mayoral election left San Francisco voters dissatisfied with the two-round runoff system, Hill reintroduced the idea of preferential voting. He went on to lead a successful ballot initiative that established ranked choice voting for the city. In his interview, he highlights the important role played by strategic alliances and endorsements targeting key voting blocs.



Implementation Plan

Implementing ranked choice voting can be an intimidating prospect for some election officials. That's why it is important to be communicating with the folks that administer elections in your community early on in your campaign. Before you approach them, please be in touch with someone at FairVote, as we have resources and solutions that we can provide. We can also help you connect election officials with folks who have administered ranked choice voting elections in other communities.

Before speaking with election officials about the prospect of ranked choice voting, it is important to anticipate some of their concerns. We can assist with that process, but it is good to get as much information as possible up front. Call your city or county clerk and ask the following questions:

- What type of voting equipment is used for your city or county?
- Are paper ballots used? Or do voters cast a ballot on a touch screen?
- When was the voting equipment purchased? Is there a likelihood that the city or county will be purchasing new voting equipment in the near future?
- Who makes decisions about voting equipment purchases?
- Does your city or county hold elections at the same time as state and federal elections, or are local elections held at a different time?

It will be important to have the election officials in your community on your team, so be understanding of their concerns, and be ready to work with them to find solutions to administrative issues that might crop up. When you have answers to some of the questions above, let us know, and we'll help you come up with a plan for implementation.





Resources and Handouts

The following documents are one-page literature pieces and education resources that you can use or adapt for holding meetings, attending conferences, or hosting events. These resources are meant to communicate the basics. They introduce the benefits of ranked choice voting as the solution to specific problems, tailor to specific audiences, or highlight research on a specific topic. **The following resources are intentionally general, but can easily be adapted to include information or statistics specific to your community.**

This toolkit includes handouts on the following topics:

- General ranked choice voting introduction
- Where ranked choice voting is used
- Research summary of voters' understanding of RCV
- Republican Party support for ranked choice voting
- Replacing runoff elections with ranked choice voting
- Replacing primary elections with ranked choice voting
- Frequently asked questions
- Ranked choice voting “mock election” kit



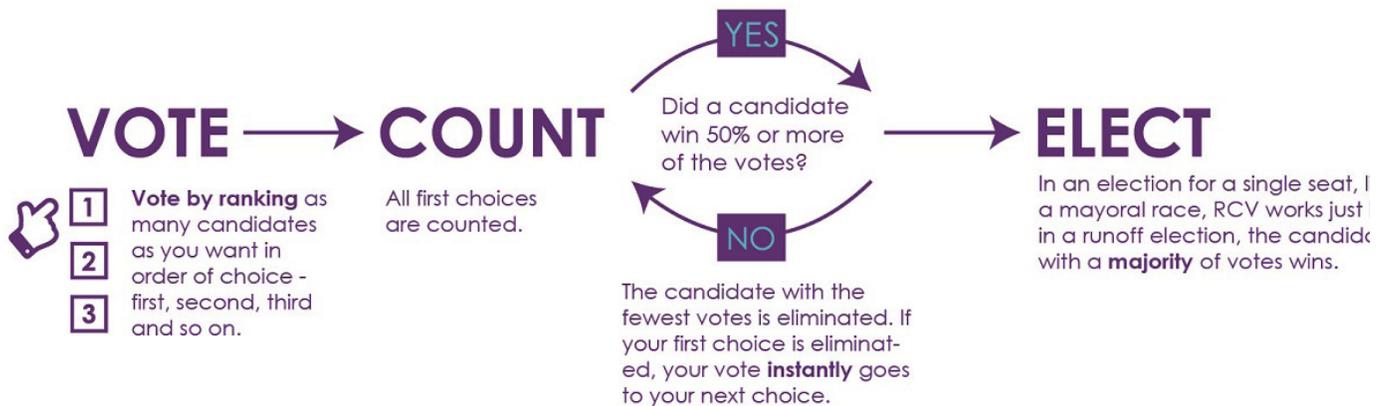
If you'd like help in adapting one of these pieces, email Grace Ramsey at gramsey@fairvote.org. Please let us know if you think there is a handout or educational resource that would be helpful that isn't currently included as part of the toolkit.

Improving Local Elections with Ranked Choice Voting

American communities regularly see dynamic and competitive local elections, with no shortage of motivated candidates seeking office. But the rules governing these elections do not reflect political realities. Under current systems, the candidate with the most votes wins, but in a crowded field the most votes might not be very many at all. When there are three or more strong candidates, supporters of candidates with similar views can “split the vote” rather than unifying behind one candidate. This means that voters have to be strategic—often settling for the lesser of two evils, rather than voting for their favorite candidate.

Ranked Choice Voting

In a ranked choice voting election, voters can rank as many or as few candidates as they want in order of choice. All 1st choices are counted, and the candidate with the fewest votes is eliminated. If a voter’s 1st choice candidate is eliminated, their vote instantly goes to their next choice. Candidates with the fewest votes are eliminated until there are two candidates left. Just like in a runoff election, the candidate with a majority of votes in the final round wins.



Eliminates Strategic Voting: Because you can rank your choices, you can vote for your favorite candidate without fear of splitting the vote. If your favorite candidate can’t win, your vote goes to the candidate you ranked second, so you don’t feel like your vote is “wasted.”

Increases Voter Choice: Ranked choice voting opens up politics to more diverse voices, including women, people of color, and independents. When we have the power to rank candidates, new and diverse voices can run without worrying about splitting the vote and playing the role of “spoiler”. With more choices, voters can vote for someone they truly believe in, rather than settling for the lesser of two evils.

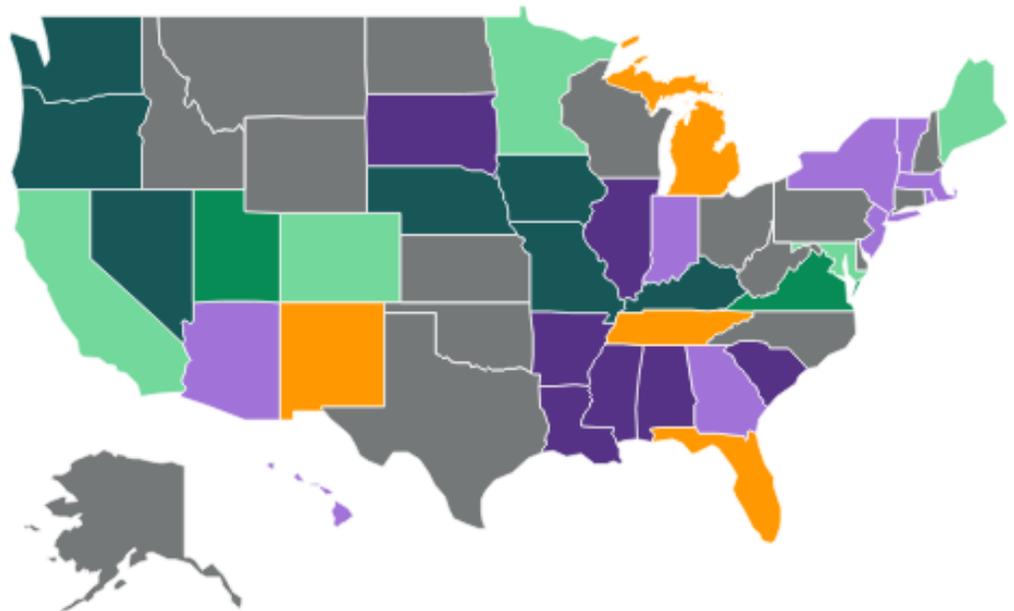
Preserves Majority Rule: A democracy should reflect the will of the people. Our current voting system rewards whichever candidate has the most votes, even if a majority of voters prefer someone else. With ranked choice voting, only candidates who can garner at least 50% of voter support will win.

Friendlier Elections: University studies show that ranked choice voting encourages candidates to run more positive campaigns, focus on the issues, and reach out beyond their base.

Where is Ranked Choice Voting Used?

The map below shows the dozens of American communities that have already chosen ranked choice voting as a way to ensure that every voter has a meaningful choice and a strong voice in every election. In addition to the cities and states that already use ranked choice voting or will soon, the map displays the growing number of states where lawmakers have introduced bills to expand its use.

- In **California**, Berkeley, Oakland, San Francisco, and San Leandro all use RCV to elect all city officials.
- Portland, **Maine** has used RCV to elect its Mayor since 2011. In 2016 there will be a statewide ballot measure in Maine to adopt RCV for all state and congressional elections.
- RCV has been used in **Minnesota's** two largest cities, Minneapolis and St. Paul, since 2009 and 2011, respectively. There is also a bill in the Minnesota House of Representatives that would allow non-charter cities to use RCV in local elections.
- **Alabama, Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, South Carolina**, and Springfield, **Illinois** have all provided ranked ballots to military and overseas voter in runoff elections. Legislators in **Georgia** and **Vermont** introduced bills this year to begin doing the same.
- Cambridge, **Massachusetts** has used the at-large form of ranked choice voting, an American form of proportional representation, to elect its City Council and School Committee since 1941. Cambridge uses no wards or districts, and it is spared the expense of administering primary or runoff elections, as the entire election happens on a single ballot.



● Military & Overseas
 ● Current Legislation*
 ● Currently Using RCV
● Locality Awaiting Implementation
 ● Past Legislation**
 ● Party Use

Research Summary: Voter Understanding of Ranked Choice Voting

The Rutgers-Eagleton Poll, with Professors Caroline J. Tolbert and Todd Donovan, conducted two rigorous independent opinion polls exploring voters' experiences in local campaigns and elections in 2013 and 2014. Voters in the four cities using ranked choice voting and in seven plurality voting cities were contacted and asked questions about their experience with local voting systems.

84% of RCV voters understand their system

Respondents in RCV cities were asked, "Overall, how well do you think you understand ranked-choice voting?", 84% reported they understood RCV "extremely", "very" or "somewhat" well. While respondents in plurality cities were asked, "Overall, how well do you think you understand plurality voting?" In plurality cities, 83% of respondents reported they understood plurality "extremely", "very" or "somewhat" well. Levels of understanding of the electoral system used in RCV and plurality cities were comparable.

Voters understand RCV better than plurality voting

If we consider the comprehensiveness of respondents' reported understanding of voting systems, we find that understanding of RCV is actually higher than understanding of winner take all elections in plurality cities. In both RCV cities and plurality cities, 49% of voters reported understanding their local voting systems "extremely well" or "very well." However, in RCV cities, 22% of respondents reported they understood RCV extremely well, while only 12% of respondents in plurality cities reported understanding plurality extremely well.

Voters understand RCV better than the Top-Two Primary

In addition to their understanding of their city's voting ballots and electoral system, respondents were asked about their understanding of the Top-Two Primary system. The Top-Two Primary was adopted by voters in California in 2010 for all state and congressional offices and used in 2012 and 2014. Levels of understanding of RCV and the Top-Two Primary were relatively even at the broadest level, but respondents in RCV cities had a more comprehensive knowledge of RCV.

While only 41% of respondents in plurality cities and 40% of respondents in RCV cities understood Top-Two at least very well in RCV cities, significantly more (49%) respondents in RCV cities understood RCV very well or better. Similarly, in RCV cities, 22% of respondents reported understanding RCV extremely well, while 18% reported understanding Top-Two extremely well.

Source: Sarah John and Caroline J. Tolbert (2015) Socioeconomic and Demographic Perspectives on Ranked Choice Voting in the Bay Area (FairVote, Takoma Park, Maryland).

Republican Party Support for Ranked Choice Voting

Adopting ranked choice voting is not about changing who wins, but how they win. That's why Americans from every part of the political spectrum have recognized ranked choice voting as a fairer way to elect our political leaders.

Giving voters meaningful choice, ensuring majority rule and fair representation, encouraging more civil campaigns, and eliminating costly, low-turnout runoff elections simply aren't partisan goals. Better elections are something we can all get behind, which is why Republicans across the country, such as Senator John McCain, have supported ranked choice voting-also known as "instant runoff voting" or "preferential voting"-for years.

"Instant runoff voting will lead to good government because voters will elect leaders who have the support of a majority. Elected leaders will be more likely to listen to all and cities will be able to enjoy big tax savings and keep majority rule."

~Senator John McCain

Current state legislation

Legislatures in four states considered GOP-sponsored bills that would expand ranked choice voting in 2016. Five Republican senators in Georgia co-sponsored a bill that would make Georgia the sixth state, after Alabama, Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, and South Carolina, to offer ranked ballots to overseas voters in federal primary runoff elections.

In Minnesota, Rep. Tim Sanders co-sponsored legislation that would enable local governments to adopt ranked choice voting. A bill to enact ranked choice voting in New York City's citywide primaries was sponsored by Andrew Lanza in the Senate and Fred Theile in the Assembly. The 2015 version passed in the Republican-controlled Senate 61-2. Two Rhode Island Republicans co-sponsored a constitutional amendment that would enact ranked choice voting in elections for the state's general officers.

The Utah Republican Party

The Utah GOP allows caucuses and conventions to use ranked choice voting for nominations. Ranked choice voting has been used to nominate candidates to Congress, the state legislature, internal party offices, and governor. John Huntsman won a ranked choice voting election for governor at the state convention in 2004. Officers of the Utah Republican Party have also advocated for extending RCV to public elections in the state.

Maine

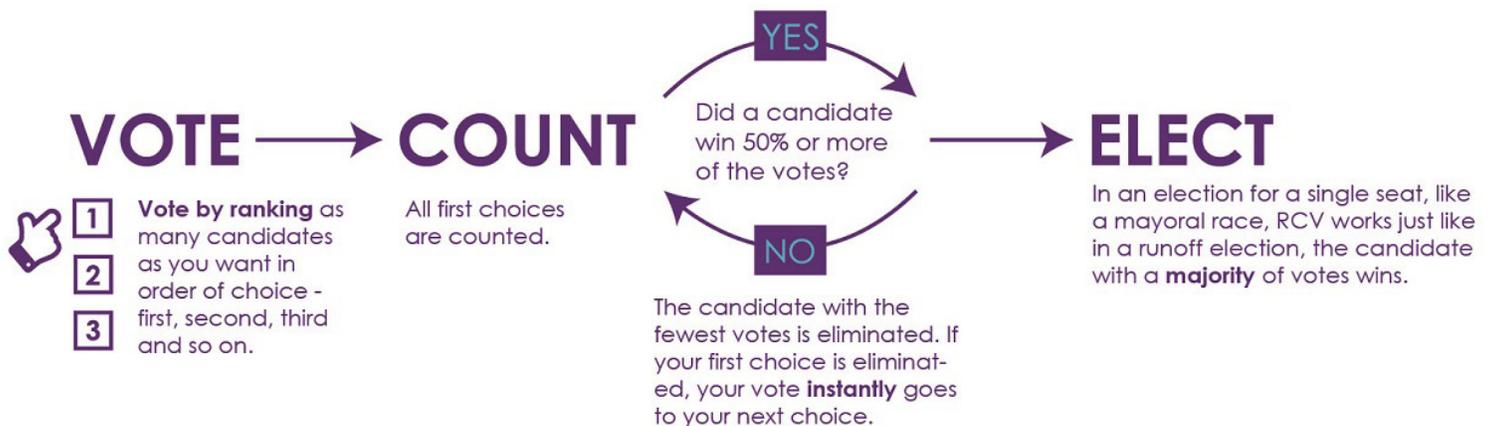
In Maine, local activists have led the campaign in favor of a 2016 ballot measure to use ranked choice voting to elect all state and federal offices. The initiative has been formally endorsed by over 30 current and former state and local elected officials and civic leaders.

Ensuring Majority Rule without Runoff Elections

Many American communities are home to dynamic and competitive local elections, with no shortage of motivated candidates seeking office. In races with more than two strong candidates though, it is common for no candidate to receive more than 50% of the vote. To ensure that winning candidates are elected by a more than half of voters, some of these communities hold a second election called a “runoff election” if no candidate receives a majority of the vote. In this case, the two candidates with the highest vote totals face each other in a runoff election.

These runoffs come at a cost, however, and not just the cost billed to taxpayers in order to hold a second election. Voter participation almost always declines in a runoff election. Furthermore, when several strong candidates run, supporters of candidates with similar views can “split the vote” rather than unifying behind one candidate. This can create scenarios in which the top two candidates who make it into the runoff aren’t actually the most popular. However, there is a way to avoid these costly, low-turnout runoff elections altogether: ranked choice voting.

Ranked choice voting--also known as “instant-runoff voting”--allows voters to rank as many candidates as they want in order of choice. First, second, third, and so on. All first choices are counted, and if a candidate has a majority, then they win just like any other election. However if nobody has a majority, the candidate with the fewest votes is eliminated, and those voters have their ballot instantly count for their next choice. This process continues until a candidate receives a majority of votes, and is declared the winner.



Eliminates Strategic Voting

By allowing voters to rank their choices, ranked choice voting allows us to vote for our favorite candidate without fear of splitting the vote.

Saves Money

Ranked choice voting achieves the goals of a runoff, but does so in a single, decisive election. Municipalities across the country have adopted ranked choice voting to avoid paying for costly runoff elections.

Increases Voter Participation

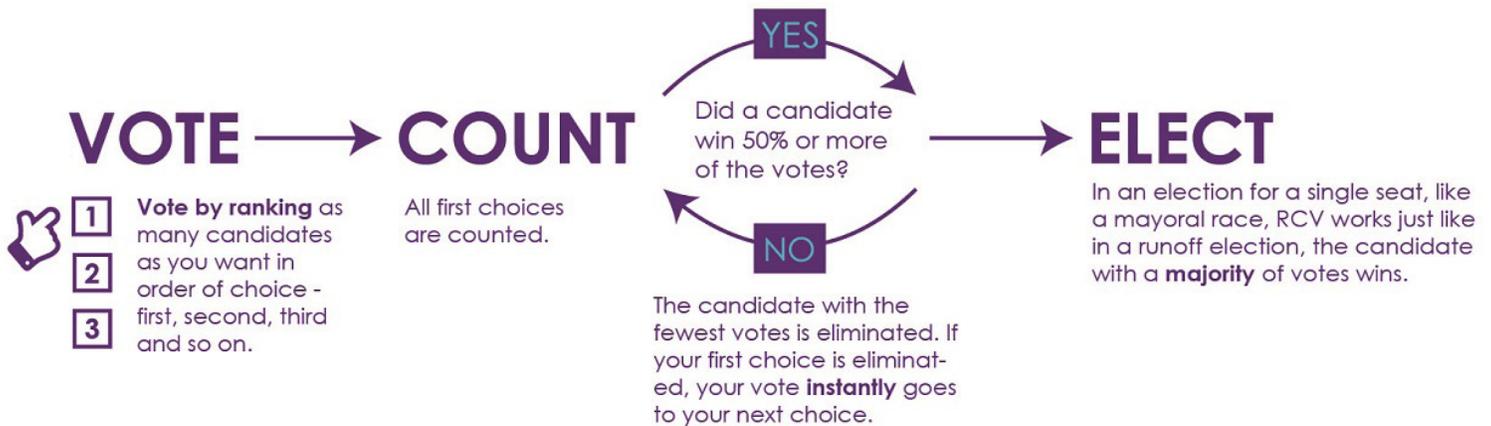
By only holding one election, ranked choice voting allows communities to avoid the steep drop in turnout that so often plagues runoff elections. Voters only have to show up to the polls once.

Replacing Primary Elections with Ranked Choice Voting

In places where one party dominates local politics, primary elections are the most dynamic and competitive, with no shortage of motivated candidates seeking that party's nomination. The winners of these races are then all but guaranteed to win in the general election—even if they did not receive majority support within their own party. This means most voters don't have a meaningful choice in the higher turnout general election and a very small number of primary voters can end up deciding who governs.

Instead of holding a primary and then a general election, local governments could adopt ranked choice voting to hold one, decisive general election in which all candidates run.

Ranked choice voting -also known as “instant-runoff voting” -allows voters to rank as many candidates as they want in order of choice. First, second, third, and so on. All first choices are counted, and if a candidate has a majority, then they win just like any other election. However if nobody has a majority, the candidate with the fewest votes is eliminated, and those voters have their ballot instantly count for their next choice. This process continues until a candidate receives a majority of votes, and is declared the winner.



Proven in Practice:

A dozen cities around the country across six states use RCV for their elections, including Minneapolis, MN, San Francisco, CA, and Portland, ME. The Arlington County Democratic Party uses ranked choice voting regularly for their firehouse primaries.

Saves Money

Ranked choice voting achieves the goals of holding a primary and general election, but does so in a single, decisive election. Municipalities across the country have adopted ranked choice voting to avoid paying for two elections.

Increases Voter Participation

By only holding one election, ranked choice voting allows communities to avoid low turnout that so often plagues primary elections. Voters only have to show up to the polls once.

More Choices for Voters

By allowing voters to rank their choices, ranked choice voting allows us to vote for our favorite candidate without fear of splitting the vote. Voters also are guaranteed more choices on election day, and can vote for the candidate they truly believe in, rather than picking the lesser of two evils.

What is ranked choice voting?

Ranked choice voting is an increasingly common election method that allows voters to rank candidates in order of choice. Those rankings ensure that as many voters as possible will help elect a candidate they support.

Ranked choice voting has a long history of use in U.S. elections. It has been used to elect city councils in more than two dozen cities, including New York City, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Boulder, and Sacramento. It is used to elect multiple offices in Cambridge, MA and in Minneapolis, MN, and it is used to elect single-winner offices in four cities in the Bay Area in California, the two largest cities in Minnesota, and other cities in Colorado, Maine, Minnesota, and Maryland. Five states have used ranked choice ballots to ensure that overseas and military voters can fully express their choices in elections that may go to a runoff.

Ranked choice voting is widely used in the English-speaking world. It is used in at least one election by every voter in Australia, Ireland, New Zealand, Northern Ireland, and Scotland. Its single-winner method is recommended by Robert's Rules of Order for elections of officers when repeated voting is impractical and, as a result, is widely used in non-governmental elections.

Is ranked choice voting the same as instant runoff voting, single transferable vote, preference voting, and the alternative vote?

Yes. The terms “instant runoff voting,” “single transferable vote,” “preference voting,” “the alternative vote,” all refer to ranked choice voting. Usually, the term “instant runoff voting” or “IRV” only refers to electing a single-winner office like mayor or governor, because when used to elect one candidate, RCV allows a jurisdiction to have the benefits of multiple runoff elections, but voters only need to vote a single time.

Also, the term “single transferable vote” or “STV” usually refers to electing a multi-winner office, like a city council or legislature. It is a “single” vote, because every voter has one vote, as compared to block voting, in which voters may vote for more than one candidate if more than one will be elected; and it is a “transferable” vote, because it uses round-by-round tabulation in which votes may “transfer” from candidates who are elected or who are defeated in the prior round.

Why is ranked choice voting better?

Ranked choice voting has a number of benefits, including promoting majority support, minimizing negative campaigning, and providing voters with more choices. In multi-winner districts, it can promote fairer and more inclusive representation than winner-take-all methods. For example, the Fair Representation Act for Congress (which uses ranked choice voting to elect multi-winner districts) would help ensure that Representatives to Congress would better represent the full spectrum of voter opinion in the United States and have more incentive to work across party lines in the interest of their constituents.

How does ranked choice voting work?

Ranked choice voting is simple for voters: rank candidates in order of choice. Voters can rank as many or as few candidates as they want to. The votes are counted to ensure that as many voters as possible help to elect a candidate they support. In a single-winner election like for mayor or governor, that means that ranked choice voting helps to elect a candidate with majority support. In a multi-winner election, it means that ranked choice voting helps a supermajority of voters elect a candidate they support, by allowing smaller groups of voters to each elect one of the winners.

Where is ranked choice voting used?

Ranked choice voting has been adopted in U.S. cities in ten states. It is used by overseas and military voters to vote in places with runoff elections in five other states. Over 50 U.S. colleges and universities use ranked choice voting to elect student government officers. Internationally, it is used by every voter in six countries and in local elections in many more. Ranked choice voting is recommended for private organizations by Roberts Rules of Order, and many private organizations use it, including the Academy Awards in both nominating and selecting the winner for its prestigious awards.

What do voters think of ranked choice voting in the places where it is used?

The Eagleton Poll at Rutgers University and a core team of four academics led by Professor Caroline Tolbert of the University of Iowa analyzed the views and experiences of Bay Area voters in large independent public opinion surveys, and explored the tone of newspaper coverage and candidates' social media activity.

In each city that was studied, ranked choice voting received a majority of support from voters. Likely voters in cities that used RCV in their local elections in 2013 and 2014 were more satisfied with the conduct of candidate campaigns, and perceived less candidate criticism and negative campaigning in the lead up to their local elections. With ranked choice voting, candidates refrain from negative attacks that serve to alienate voters who might rank them second or third. Instead, candidates know that positive, issue focused campaigns give them the best chance to win under ranked choice voting.

What about other “alternative” voting reforms, like Top Two, party list proportional representation, cumulative voting, approval voting, or others?

There are many ways to elect officers. Although they all have some benefits and they all have some flaws, FairVote has identified ranked choice voting as the most empowering and effective voting method for use in United States elections, from city councils to Congress.

Ranked Choice Voting Mock Election

Exercise 1

This exercise is best when used in smaller presentations. The ballots and results are predetermined so this exercise doesn't require the presenter to take time and count ballots. They already have an understanding of how the election plays out so the explanation can move more quickly. This mock election exercise consists of 23 ballots that can be distributed among the audience. This document will serve as a step-by-step guide for running this exercise. If possible, it is best to write out the distribution as you go through the exercise.

	Round 1			Round 2			Round 3
Candidate	Votes	Eliminate	Add To	Votes	Eliminate	Add To	Votes
Emma	8		+2	10		+4	14
John	3	-3					
Maria	4		+1	5	-5		
Robert	8			8		+1	9

1. Establish that in this exercise a candidate needs to get more than 50% to be elected. In this exercise a candidate needs 12 votes to be elected.
2. Once the ballots are distributed call out the name of each candidate and as you do have the audience members raise their hands when you call the name of the candidate ranked 1st on their ballot.
3. Ask the audience if any candidate received a majority. Since no candidate has a majority, we eliminate the candidate with the fewest 1st choices. In this election John had the fewest first choice votes with 3.
4. For the people that had John as the first choice on their ballot, ask them who is the 2nd choice on their ballot. Two of them will say Emma and the other will say Maria.
5. Now Emma has 10 votes, Maria has 5 votes and Robert has 8 votes. You can point out that more of John's voters went to Emma which may suggest that they may have had similar stances on issues and Emma's campaign reached out to John's supporters and asked them to rank Emma as their 2nd choice.
6. Ask the audience if anyone has reached 12 votes. Since no one has then reached the threshold we would eliminate the person with the fewest votes, which is Maria with 5.
7. Ask the audience who voted for Maria and have them say who is the 2nd choice on their ballot. 1 will say Robert and 4 will say Emma.
8. Now Emma has 14 votes and Robert has 9. Emma is the winner. You can point out that each time a candidate was eliminated, most voters chose Emma as a 2nd choice, so even though she and Robert started out at the same place, Emma was able to build consensus support and won the election with a strong mandate.

Exercise 2

This exercise provides you with blank ballots that you can edit so that you can use alternate candidates and allow your audience to rank them. This exercise can be especially helpful if you are at a community event where you either have a table or you are able to distribute and collect ballots throughout the event. This exercise can be used during presentations but exercise 1 would be easier and will take less time. Below are steps to counting and tips to make sure the election goes well.

Counting

1. Distribute ballots to the audience or attendees. Save one blank ballot for yourself to describe how folks with rank on the ballot. Do not fill in this ballot.
2. Count all of the ballots and determine the threshold to win the election. Take the total number of ballots and divide it by 2 to give you 50% then add 1 to establish how many votes are needed to win
3. Sort the ballots into piles by 1st choices. Only look at the first choices and count the piles again to prevent errors and to make sure every ballot is accounted for.
4. Does one candidate have a majority? If yes, they win. If no, the candidate with the fewest votes is eliminated. Pick up that pile and begin adding those ballots to the piles of the 2nd choice on the ballot.
5. Once again, check if there is a majority. Continue this process until there are 2 candidates left. Whichever candidate has a majority between the 2 is the winner.
6. In some very rare cases (in small groups this can happen more easily) you may end up with a tie, or there may be a tie in determining which candidate to eliminate. If that does happen, fill out your blank ballot to break the tie.

Tips for Mock Elections

1. When going through the counting process with a group it can be helpful to contextualize the mock election in something other than politics. For instance, a mock election with ice cream flavors. This can help voters understand that we use this thought process all the time in our day to day lives. If you were going to buy ice cream and the ice cream shop didn't have your favorite flavor you would look at the choices and determine which flavor is your 2nd choice. Using real political figures can be polarizing but if after consideration using real names seems to be the best way to help voters understand then absolutely do so.
2. If a tie does happen, explain that in the real world the chances of that happening are extremely slim and that ties in RCV are as likely as ties under a plurality system. Governments typically already have rules in place for how to settle a tie in an election but, once again, this happens extremely rarely.
3. When going through the counting process you can speculate on how candidates were campaigning. If you were ranking candy and jelly beans were eliminated and most of their voters ranked starburst as their 2nd choice you could infer that those voters prefer fruity candies and when their first choice was eliminated their 2nd choice was based on what other candies were fruity flavors. You can compare this to ideologies. For instance in an election where there was a green party candidate, if that green party candidate is eliminated it is very likely their supporters 2nd choice would be a Democrat rather than a Republican candidate because those ideologies are more closely aligned.