RANKED VOTING METHODS

GENERAL INFORMATION FOR COUNTY & LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTION DIVISIONS

INTRODUCTION

On May 27, 2008, House Bill 08-1738 was signed into law. The Act established that a local government may conduct an election using a ranked voting method.

The Secretary of State has prepared this summary to provide general information relating to the ranked voting method election process. For more detailed information, please reference the Voter Choice Act [part 10 of article 7 of Title 1, C.R.S.]

REPORT TO THE COLORADO GENERAL ASSEMBLY

In accordance with the Act, the Secretary of State will submit a report to the Colorado General Assembly no later than February 15, 2011 that includes:

1. An assessment of all elections conducted using ranked voting methods by local governments from August 5, 2008, through the general election of November 2010;
2. Recommendations for changes to statutes, rules, and local voting procedures that would be required to implement ranked voting as a permanent alternative election method for state, federal, and local special and general elections;
3. An inventory of available election equipment necessary for conducting elections using ranked voting methods, including the costs associated with the equipment; and
4. Any recommendations made by the designated election officials of local governments that conducted an election using a ranked voting method.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

WHAT IS A RANKED VOTING METHOD?

"Ranked voting method" is defined as a voting method, including instant runoff voting, choice voting, or proportional voting, that allows a voter to rank candidates for an office in order of preference and uses these preferences to determine the winner of the election.

WHEN IS A RANKED VOTING METHOD USED?

Ranked voting is more typically used in the context of electing one person to an office. However, it can also be used to obtain proportional representation.

Most jurisdictions that implement ranked voting do so in an effort to elect officials by a majority vote without the need for a separate runoff election. Because ranked voting simulates a runoff process by collecting additional preference beyond an elector's first choice, it is more likely to find a majority than in a plurality election.
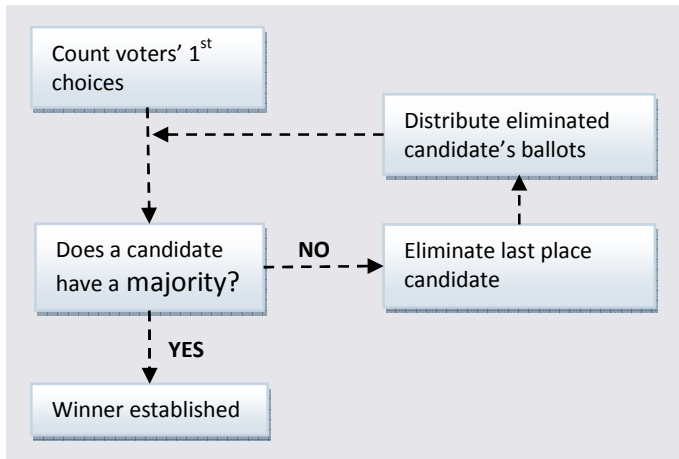
ARE THERE DIFFERENT KINDS OF RANKED VOTING METHODOLOGIES?

Depending on the number of candidates, office vacancies, and overall preference, an election may be conducted using one of several different ranked voting methodologies.

Overall, every ranked voting method requires voters to rank candidates in order of preference. Voters have the option to rank as many or as few candidates as they wish.

Arguably the most common form of ranked voting involves a sequential elimination method in which 1st choices are counted, and if a candidate receives a majority, he/she is elected. If, however, the 1st round of counting fails to produce a majority winner, the candidate who received the fewest

1st place choices is eliminated. All ballots are then re-tabulated. Voters who chose the now-eliminated candidate will now have their ballots counted for their 2nd ranked candidate while all other voters continue supporting their top candidate. The weakest candidates are successively eliminated and their voters' ballots are redistributed to next choices until a candidate crosses a majority of votes.

HOW DOES RANKED VOTING CHANGE THE MANNER OF CONDUCTING AN ELECTION?

There are unique factors involved with ranked voting elections. The Secretary of State has developed a ranked voting method sample planning checklist to outline the ranked voting method election process and requirements. If you are considering conducting an election using a ranked voting method, please visit the Secretary of State website to view a copy of this checklist online: www.sos.state.co.us/pubs/elections/rankedVoting.htm

WHERE CAN I FIND MORE INFORMATION ABOUT RANKED VOTING?

The following links provide information relating to some of the jurisdictions who have implemented ranked voting methods:

City of Aspen, Colorado: www.aspenpitkin.com

City and County of San Francisco, California: www.sfgov.org/site/elections_index.asp?id=60440

Pierce County, Washington: www.co.pierce.wa.us/pc/abtus/ourorg/aud/elections/RCV/ranked/rcv.htm

City of Minneapolis, Minnesota: www.ci.minneapolis.mn.us/elections

Additionally, the following organization is the nation's leading advocate of instant runoff voting and lobbied in support of the Voter Choice Act:

FairVote: www.fairvote.org

COMMENTS & RECOMMENDATIONS

If you have conducted an election using a ranked voting method, we would like to hear about your experience. Please submit any comments and or recommendations to our office via email at: State.ElectionDivision@sos.state.co.us.