



Frequently Asked Questions about Instant Runoff Voting

What is instant runoff voting?

Instant runoff voting (IRV, also called “ranked choice voting”) is a method of voting allowing voters to rank multiple candidates in order of choice. IRV was passed by the city council as an amendment to the City Charter in 2006 after an 83% vote of approval by voters in 2005 in an advisory ballot question. IRV was first used in the city in 2007, and has been used for every city election since that time

What offices are elected with instant runoff voting?

Instant runoff voting is used for Takoma Park elections for mayor and city council, both in regularly scheduled elections and in special elections to fill vacancies.

How do voters vote with instant runoff voting?

Takoma Park voters may rank the candidates running for a given office, including a write-in candidate, in order of choice. Each ballot will have columns. For each office, voters will complete the ballot from left to right, indicating their first choice in the first column by filling in the oval next to the selected candidate's name. If voters wish to rank different additional choices, they will select them in the next columns on the ballot.

How are instant runoff voting ballots counted?

All ballots are counted for each voter’s first choice. If any candidate secures a majority (more than 50%) of first choices, then that candidate wins, just like with any election. But if no candidate secures a majority, the last-place candidate is eliminated. That candidate’s ballots are then added to the totals of the next choice indicated on each ballot

Why should I consider ranking more than one candidates?

Instant runoff voting is designed to give voters more power. Ranking additional candidates will never hurt a voter’s first choice, but it may help that voter’s second choice defeat the voter’s last choice.

Does my vote still count if I vote for the same candidate three times?

Yes, but your vote will count only once for that candidate. If you rank one candidate as your first, second, and third choice, it is the same as if you left the second and third choices blank. A candidate's chances of winning are not improved by selecting that candidate at more than one ranking on a ballot.

Does my vote still count if I only select one choice?

Yes, but your vote will count for your one choice. You may - but are not required to - rank different candidates for each office. Your vote for a candidate stays with that candidate through all rounds of counting until that candidate is defeated, and only then is your vote added to the totals of your next ranked candidate.

Can I give multiple candidates the same ranking?

No. Ranking more than one candidate in a column is an overvote, and your ballot will be set aside and no longer count in the election for that office once an overvote on your ballot has been reached.

What if only one or two candidates are running for a given office?

The ballot will provide you with a chance to rank candidates even if only one or two candidates are running. It is mathematically possible that votes for write-in candidates could affect the outcome and lead to more than one round of counting.

Will voting equipment tell me if I've made an error specific to IRV?

No. In the polling place, voters should pay special attention to avoid making mistakes specific to IRV, such as

- Marking the same candidate in more than one column of an office
- Skipping a column between ranked candidates

More Questions?

Contact the City Clerk at Clerk@takomaparkmd.gov or 301-891-7267.

For more general information about Ranked Choice Voting / Instant Runoff Voting, see the Ranked Choice Voting Resource Center: <http://www.rankedchoicevoting.org/>.