

Ranked Choice Voting for Richmond City Council Elections in 2024

What is Ranked Choice Voting?

Ranked choice voting (RCV) is a method for casting a vote that allows voters the ability to rank candidates in order of preference on the ballot. Instead of only being able to select one candidate in a race with more than two candidates, voters are empowered to rank as many candidates, in order of relative preference, as they would like.

What does ORD 2022-119 do?

[Ordinance 2022-119](#), patroned by Councilors Jordan, Addison, and Lynch, would implement ranked choice voting as the method for electing members of City Council in the 2024 Richmond City Council elections. The ordinance only applies to City Council elections in 2024. After 2024, if Richmonders want to continue to use ranked choice voting, Council can pass a subsequent ordinance for the 2028 elections.

Why Ranked Choice Voting?

1. It allows voters to make their voice fully heard, and it gives them more options

- a. Your vote is your voice. When voters are allowed only one opportunity to express their preference, no matter how many candidates are on the ballot, their voice is not being fully heard. Frequently, particularly in local non-partisan elections, voters may like multiple candidates. Ranked choice voting allows voters to show their support for as many candidates as they would like, and therefore their voice is more fully expressed.
- b. RCV allows more than two candidates to compete without fear of “splitting the vote” among like-minded individuals.

2. It ensures a majority mandate

- a. Under our current system of voting, when there are more than two candidates on the ballot, it's possible that the winning candidate is elected with just a plurality, and not a majority of the vote. For instance, in a three-way race, a candidate could win with 34% of the vote, while each of the other two candidates get 33% each. In this scenario, 66% of voters would have indicated their preference for someone other than who got elected. Ranked-choice voting ensures that whoever wins gets at least a majority of support in the district.

3. It increases and incentivizes voter participation and turnout

- a. [Studies have shown](#) that ranked choice voting has a positive impact on voter turnout and participation in local elections. It's simple: with a voting system that empowers more people to feel like their voice will be heard, more people come out to vote.
- b. The most recent high-profile use of RCV at a local level was in New York City. In their elections last year, more than 940,000 voters participated in the primaries, [the highest number since 1989](#). That high turnout occurred both at the top of the ballot and in down-ballot races; 93% of city council races had higher turnout than in the last cycle.

4. It improves representation of minority candidates

- a. [National data](#) shows that candidates of color benefit from the round-by-round counting process, voters of color tend to rank more candidates, and minority candidates pay no penalty when they run against opponents of the same race or ethnicity.
- b. Ranked choice voting [has also been shown](#) to increase the representation and success of female candidates.

5. It's easy, and voters like it

- a. More than 95% of voters in the local elections in New York City last year found the ballot "[simple to complete](#)", and [77% of voters](#) supported using RCV for future elections.
- b. [Over 60% of voters](#) nation-wide support using RCV for all elections.
- c. From 2016-2021, [there were 20 measures](#) to enact RCV on the ballot, including four statewide measures, and 16 measures in cities and counties. Voters chose to adopt ranked choice in 18 out of those 20. Among the last 13 cities to vote on RCV in 2019-2021, the average margin of victory has been 30 percentage points.

How does it actually work?

There are two ways to answer this question. First– what does this actually look like for a voter? That's very simple. Different ballot designs have been used, but voters are going to see something similar to the below:

City Council						
Rank up to 6 candidates. Mark no more than 1 oval in each column.	First choice	Second choice	Third choice	Fourth choice	Fifth choice	Sixth choice
	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th
Valarie Altman Orange Party	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
George Hovis Yellow Party	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Althea Sharp Purple Party	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Mary Tawa Lime Party	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Joe Li Tan Party	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Phil Wilkie Independent	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Just like under the current system, voters are able to bubble in the circle for their preferred candidate. The only difference is, voters can bubble in multiple candidates, and rank them according to their own relative preference. You don't have to select multiple candidates if you don't want to. Voters can select as many (up to 10) or as few (at least 1) candidates for a given office as they'd like.

A second important question is– after a voter casts their ballot, how does the tabulation process operate?

This process is best explained with visuals. You can view a quick explainer video [here](#). For a written explanation, see below:

Voters rank as many (up to 10), or as few (at least one) candidates on the ballot as they'd like, in order of preference. Ballots are automatically tabulated by software in the voting machines. If a candidate wins a majority of first-preference votes, they are declared the winner. If no candidate wins a majority of first-preference votes, the candidate with the fewest first-preference votes is eliminated, and the second preference votes of those ballots cast for the eliminated candidate are reallocated to the respective second-preference candidates indicated by those voters. A new count is automatically tabulated to determine whether any candidate has won a majority of the adjusted votes. This process is repeated, with the candidate with the fewest first-preference votes being eliminated, and the second preference votes from those candidates being reallocated, until a candidate wins an outright majority.

What does ranked choice voting look like in a Richmond-specific context?

If City Council passes [Ordinance 2022-119](#), Richmond will implement ranked choice voting (RCV) for City Council elections in the 2024 election cycle. The Mayor and School Board will still be elected using traditional plurality voting. The legislation that allowed localities like Richmond to adopt RCV (HB1103) only allows localities to use RCV for City Council or County Board of Supervisor elections.

Under Ordinance 2022-119, RCV would only be implemented for 2024. Richmond residents, and City Council would have the opportunity to assess the success of RCV, and choose whether or not to re-enact its use for future elections. Right now, under state law, the ability for localities to adopt RCV sunsets in 2031.

Richmond City's General Registrar would lead up voter education efforts prior to 2024, and would be responsible for administering the election. The current registrar, Keith Balmer, has [stated that he personally supports RCV](#), and believes that his office and the City are prepared to do the voter education and outreach necessary to ensure voters understand RCV. In 2024, City Council elections conducted by RCV would be listed on by themselves, on a separate page of the ballot.

Why now?

There are two answers to this question. One is procedural—localities just got the authority to use ranked choice voting from the General Assembly starting last year. The second reason is that [more candidates are running for local office in Richmond](#).

Four out of nine Richmond City Council races in the most [recent Council election](#) cycle had more than two candidates on the ballot and, therefore, could have benefited from the use of ranked choice voting. In 2019, a [special election for the 5th District](#) had *eight* candidates on the ballot, and Councilor Lynch won with just 27% of the vote.

More Richmonders stepping up to run and represent their communities isn't the problem, the problem is that our current, outdated system of voting does not reflect the reality of today's local elections.

Other FAQs

Who supports ranked choice voting?

Ranked choice voting has earned the support of voters, community groups, and leaders across the country, and here in Richmond. [Over 60% of voters](#) nation-wide support using RCV for all elections, and from 2016-2021, [there were 20 measures](#) to enact RCV on the ballot, including four statewide measures, and 16 measures in cities and counties. Voters chose to adopt ranked choice in 18 out of those 20. Among the last 13 cities to vote on RCV in 2019-2021, the average margin of victory has been 30 percentage points.

Here in Virginia, RCV was used by the Republican Party for its gubernatorial nominating convention in 2021, and it is used by local Democratic committees in various localities. RCV earned unanimous support from the Black Caucus in the General Assembly, and near unanimous support within the Democratic caucuses when [HB 1103](#) was passed to allow localities to use RCV. State Senator Jennifer McClellan, who represents a large portion of Richmond and was the champion of the Virginia Voting Rights Act, included RCV as a major component of her [voting rights platform](#) in her 2021 run for Governor.

Locally, the [Richmond Crusade for Voters](#), [Metro Richmond Area League of Women Voters](#), and Richmond City Democratic Committee have all formally endorsed ranked choice voting.

OFFICIAL BALLOT - BOLETA OFICIAL
REGULAR MUNICIPAL ELECTION - ELECCIÓN MUNICIPAL ORDINARIA

City of Santa Fe, New Mexico - Municipalidad de Santa Fe, Nuevo México
March 6, 2018 - 6 de marzo 2018

DISTRICT 4 - ELECTION DAY
DISTRITO 4 - DÍA DE ELECCIÓN

MAYOR - RANKED CHOICE VOTING INSTRUCTIONS:

- Rank your 1st - 5th choice in the columns below.
- Vote from left to right in order of your preference.
- To vote, completely fill in the oval next to your choice, like this: ●

ALCALDE - INSTRUCCIONES PARA LA VOTACIÓN POR ORDEN DE PREFERENCIA:

- Marque en orden de preferencia usando las columnas del 1 al 5 abajo.
- Vote de izquierda a derecha en orden de preferencia.
- Para votar, llene completamente el óvalo correspondiente a su preferencia, de esta manera: ●

FOR MAYOR PARA ALCALDE Four (4) Year Term Plazo de Cuatro (4) Años	1st Choice 1ª Opción	2nd Choice 2ª Opción	3rd Choice 3ª Opción	4th Choice 4ª Opción	5th Choice 5ª Opción
Peter N. Ives	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Alan Webber	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Kate I. Noble	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Joseph M. Maestas	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ronald S. Trujillo	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

COUNCILOR - RANKED CHOICE VOTING INSTRUCTIONS:

- Rank your 1st - 3rd choice in the columns below.
- Vote from left to right in order of your preference.
- To vote, completely fill in the oval next to your choice, like this: ●

CONCEJAL- INSTRUCCIONES PARA LA VOTACIÓN POR ORDEN DE PREFERENCIA:

- Marque en orden de preferencia usando las columnas del 1 al 3 abajo.
- Vote de izquierda a derecha en orden de preferencia.
- Para votar, llene completamente el óvalo correspondiente a su preferencia, de esta manera: ●

FOR COUNCILOR PARA CONCEJAL DISTRICT 4 - DISTRITO 4 Four (4) Year Term Plazo de Cuatro (4) Años	1st Choice 1ª Opción	2nd Choice 2ª Opción	3rd Choice 3ª Opción
Eric John Holmes	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Greg Scargall	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
JoAnne Vigil Coppler	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

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Virginia Administrative Code

Chapter 100. Ranked Choice Voting

1VAC20-100-10. Definitions.

The following words and terms when used in this chapter shall have the following meanings unless the context clearly indicates otherwise:

"Active ballot" means a ballot that counts toward an active candidate in the current round of counting.

"Active candidate" means a candidate or person who has not been defeated during a round-by-round vote count. In a count that lasts multiple rounds, the number of active candidates will decrease with each round.

"Duplicate ranking" means a voter has assigned one candidate multiple rankings.

"Election threshold" means the number of votes sufficient for a candidate to be elected in a multi-winner, single transferable vote contest. The election threshold equals the total votes counted for active candidates in the first round of tabulation, divided by the sum of one plus the number of offices to be filled, then adding one, disregarding any fractions. Election threshold = $((\text{Total votes cast})/(\text{Seats to be elected}+1))+1$, with any fraction disregarded.

"Highest-ranked active candidate" means the active candidate assigned to a higher ranking than any other active candidates.

"Inactive ballot " means a ballot that can no longer be counted due to the ballot having no active candidates in the round.

"Instant runoff voting" means no more than one seat in the office must be filled by the election.

"Ranked choice overvote" means a voter assigned more than one candidate the same ranking.

"Ranked choice voting" means a method of casting and tabulating votes in which (i) voters rank candidates in order of preference, (ii) tabulation proceeds in rounds such that in each round either a candidate or candidates are elected or the last-place candidate is defeated, (iii) votes for voters' next-ranked candidates are transferred from elected or defeated candidates, and (iv) tabulation ends when the number of candidates elected equals the number of offices to be filled. Ranked choice voting is known as "instant runoff voting" when electing a single office and "single transferable vote" when electing multiple offices.

"Ranking" means the ordinal number assigned on a ballot to a candidate to express the voter's preference for that candidate. Ranking number one is the highest ranking, ranking number two is the next-highest ranking, and so on, consecutively, up to the number of candidates indicated on the ballot.

"Round" means a stage of the vote tabulation in which a person may be elected or the last ranked person is defeated.

"Single transferable vote" means more than one seat in the office must be filled by the election.

"Skipped ranking" means a voter has left a ranking unassigned but ranks a candidate at a subsequent ranking.

"Surplus fraction" is a number equal to the quotient of the difference between an elected candidate's vote total and the election threshold, divided by the candidate's vote total, (or $(V-T)/V$, in which "V" is the elected candidate's vote total and "T" is the election threshold), truncated after four decimal places.

"Surplus vote" means the number of votes a candidate receives beyond the election threshold set for a transferable vote race.

"Transfer value" means the proportion of a vote that a ballot will contribute to its highest-ranked active candidate. Each ballot begins with a transfer value of one. If a ballot contributes to the election of a candidate under [1VAC20-100-50 B](#), it receives a new transfer value.

Statutory Authority

§ [24.2-673.1](#) of the Code of Virginia.

Historical Notes

Derived from Virginia Register [Volume 38, Issue 9](#), eff. December 3, 2021.

1VAC20-100-20. Administration.

The Department of Elections shall publish on the department website, <https://www.elections.virginia.gov>, instructions on the administration of ranked choice voting elections.

Statutory Authority

§ [24.2-673.1](#) of the Code of Virginia.

Historical Notes

Derived from Virginia Register [Volume 38, Issue 9](#), eff. December 3, 2021.

1VAC20-100-30. Ranked choice voting.

As prescribed by § [24.2-673.1](#) of the Code of Virginia, a county board of supervisors or city council may elect by majority to conduct an election for its members by ranked choice voting. The adoption for ranked choice voting shall only be valid for the election specified in the ordinance adopted by the governing body.

1. Adoption to conduct an election by ranked choice voting must be enacted no later than 90 days prior to the date of the specified election.
2. Any locality that adopts to conduct an election by ranked choice voting must electronically transfer the signed ordinance to the Department of Elections promptly.
3. No ranked choice voting may be conducted for a primary with fewer than three candidates.
4. Notwithstanding § [24.2-613 E](#) of the Code of Virginia, all ballot forms for an election conducted by ranked choice voting shall comply with the standards prescribed by the State Board of Elections.

Statutory Authority

§ [24.2-673.1](#) of the Code of Virginia.

Historical Notes

Derived from Virginia Register [Volume 38, Issue 9](#), eff. December 3, 2021.

1VAC20-100-40. Ballot treatment.

As prescribed by § [24.2-673.1](#) of the Code of Virginia, ballots shall be tabulated in the following manner:

1. Ranked choice overvote.

a. A ballot with a ranked choice overvote shall be counted in the initial round if voter intent can be determined. The ballot shall not be counted in any round in which the ballot has a ranked choice overvote.

b. A ballot with a duplicate ranking shall be counted unless the voter's choice was defeated in a previous round.

2. Skipped ranking.

a. In the event of a ballot with a skipped ranking, the next valid ranking shall be counted.

b. In the event the ballot reaches two consecutive skipped rankings, the ballot will be considered an inactive ballot.

3. Tie breaking.

a. In the event two persons have an equal number of votes for a seat and a higher number than any other person in the last round of an election conducted by ranked choice voting, the candidate or person to be elected shall be determined by lot as prescribed by § [24.2-674](#) of the Code of Virginia.

b. In the event two or more persons have an equal number of votes for a seat and the fewest number of votes in a round of an election conducted by ranked choice voting, tabulation cannot be continued until one of the persons is defeated. The person to continue as an active candidate shall be determined by lot as prescribed by § [24.2-674](#) of the Code of Virginia.

Statutory Authority

§ [24.2-673.1](#) of the Code of Virginia.

Historical Notes

Derived from Virginia Register [Volume 38, Issue 9](#), eff. December 3, 2021.

1VAC20-100-50. Ranked choice voting tabulation.

A. Instant runoff voting. For any election for one office conducted by ranked choice voting, each ballot shall count as one vote for the highest-ranked active candidate on that ballot. Tabulation shall proceed in rounds with each round proceeding sequentially as follows:

1. If two or fewer active candidates remain, the candidate with the greatest number of votes is elected and tabulation is complete.

2. If more than two active candidates remain, the active candidate with the fewest votes is defeated, votes for the defeated candidate are transferred to each ballot's next-ranked active candidate, and a new round begins with subdivision 1 of this subsection.

B. Single transferable vote. For any election for more than one office conducted by ranked choice voting, each ballot shall count, at its current transfer value, for the highest-ranked active candidate on that ballot. Tabulation

shall proceed in rounds. Each round proceeds sequentially, until tabulation is complete, as follows:

1. If the sum of the number of elected persons and the number of active candidates is less than or equal to the number of office seats to be filled, then all active candidates are designated as elected, and tabulation is complete. Otherwise, the tabulation proceeds pursuant to subdivision 2 of this subsection.
2. If any active candidate has a number of votes greater than or equal to the election threshold for the contest, that person shall be designated as elected. Each ballot counting for an elected person is assigned a new transfer value by multiplying the ballot's current transfer value by the surplus fraction for the elected person, truncated after the fourth decimal place. The transfer value of each ballot cast for an elected candidate must be transferred to the highest-ranked active candidate on that ballot. Each person elected under this subdivision is deemed to have a number of votes equal to the election threshold for the contest in all future rounds and a new round begins pursuant to subdivision 1 of this subsection.

If no candidate or person is elected pursuant to subdivision 2 of this subsection, the candidate with the fewest votes is defeated and votes for the defeated candidates shall be transferred at their current transfer value to each ballot's next-ranked active candidate and a new round begins pursuant to subdivision 1 of this subsection.

C. Surplus transfer. If in a round of counting conducted under subsection B of this section, two or more active candidates have a number of surplus votes greater than the election threshold for the contest, the surpluses shall be distributed in rounds in which the largest surplus is distributed first, with any ties resolved by lot as required by § [24.2-674](#) of the Code of Virginia.

Statutory Authority

§ [24.2-673.1](#) of the Code of Virginia.

Historical Notes

Derived from Virginia Register [Volume 38, Issue 9](#), eff. December 3, 2021.

1VAC20-100-60. Unreadable ballots.

In the event the general registrar receives a ballot that cannot be read by the ballot scanner machine, the general registrar or election official shall transpose the voter's intent to a machine readable ballot.

Statutory Authority

§ [24.2-673.1](#) of the Code of Virginia.

Historical Notes

Derived from Virginia Register [Volume 38, Issue 9](#), eff. December 3, 2021.

1VAC20-100-65. Write-Ins.

Pursuant to § [24.2-644](#) C of the Code of Virginia, at all elections conducted by ranked choice voting except primary elections, any voter may vote for any person other than the listed candidates for the office by writing or hand printing the person's name on the official ballot.

Statutory Authority

§ [24.2-673.1](#) of the Code of Virginia.

Historical Notes

Derived from Virginia Register [Volume 38, Issue 9](#), eff. December 3, 2021.

1VAC20-100-70. Election results.

Results for all rounds must be publicly posted on the Department of Elections website at <https://www.elections.virginia.gov>.

Statutory Authority

§ [24.2-673.1](#) of the Code of Virginia.

Historical Notes

Derived from Virginia Register [Volume 38, Issue 9](#), eff. December 3, 2021.

1VAC20-100-80. Outreach.

For the purposes of this section, "educational information" means nonpartisan information that in plain language informs the public on the adoption of ranked choice voting for an election, a description of ranked choice voting, an unmarked official sample ranked choice voting ballot, and instructions on how to read and mark the ballot.

1. The Department of Elections shall be required to post educational information about ranked choice voting on its website at <https://www.elections.virginia.gov> for the public.
2. Any county board of supervisors or city council that adopts to conduct an election by ranked choice voting shall develop and distribute educational information about ranked choice voting no later than 60 days before the specified election.
 - a. Educational information must be disseminated to the public through circulation in the local newspaper, posted on the locality's website, or mailed to active and inactive voters eligible to vote in the specified election.
 - b. Educational information must be posted in the office of the general registrar no later than 60 days before the specific election and made available for distribution if requested by the public.
 - c. Educational information about ranked choice voting shall be posted in each satellite office and polling place operating for the election.

Statutory Authority

§ [24.2-673.1](#) of the Code of Virginia.

Historical Notes

Derived from Virginia Register [Volume 38, Issue 9](#), eff. December 3, 2021.

Website addresses provided in the Virginia Administrative Code to documents incorporated by reference are for the reader's convenience only, may not necessarily be active or current, and should not be relied upon. To ensure the information incorporated by reference is accurate, the reader is encouraged to use the source document described in the regulation.

As a service to the public, the Virginia Administrative Code is provided online by the Virginia General Assembly. We are unable to answer legal questions or respond to requests for legal advice, including application of law to specific fact. To understand and protect your legal rights, you should consult an attorney.