

Ranked Choice Voting

Rules for Implementation

Benton County, OR

Adopted February 21, 2023

Affected Contests

In order to qualify, as a Ranked Choice Voting (RCV) contest, a County Office must have a minimum of three candidates nominated for the General Election. Currently, only the partisan Benton County Commissioner positions have the potential to meet this qualification. The nonpartisan Benton County Sheriff contest nominates no more than two candidates in the Primary Election for the General Election ballot in accordance with ORS 249.091.

Number of Rankings per Qualified Contest

When a Benton County Commission contest qualifies for RCV, with three or more candidates nominated, the County Clerk shall print the contest on the General Election ballot in a manner that will allow voters to rank their top three candidate choices. Each voter shall have the opportunity to indicate their First, Second and Third choice candidates in the contest. Voters will also be provided an opportunity for one Write-In in the ranked contest.

Definitions for Ranked Choice Voting

Tallied Vote - When the voter selects a candidate that has not been eliminated, without over voting the ranking to be counted, the vote is cast and tallied for that candidate.

Remaining Candidate - A candidate that has NOT been defeated.

Defeated Candidate - A candidate that HAS been eliminated.

Skipped Ranking - When a voter chooses to NOT select a candidate whose name is printed on the ballot or write-in a candidate name in one or more of the available rankings.

Over Vote - When the voter selects more than one candidate as their first choice or any subsequent choice that is to be counted, the vote is nullified and tallied as an over vote.

Under Vote - When voter skips all rankings, with no first, second or third choice candidate or write-in selected, the vote is nullified and tallied as an under vote.

Exhausted Vote - When the first, second and third choice selections made by the voter in the RCV contest have been eliminated, the vote is nullified and tallied as exhausted.

Nullified Vote - Over Votes, Under Votes and Exhausted Votes are considered nullified RCV votes and are not utilized to determine the 50% plus one number of votes needed to win.

Continuing Ballots

These are ballots included in the tally for each round of RCV results equal to the total number of ballots cast minus the number of nullified ballots in the current round of RCV returns.

Round by Round RCV Returns

Round One returns will reflect First Choice rankings on ballots cast. The First Choice rankings will be posted with all Unofficial Election Returns until every ballot has been cast. Subsequent rounds of RCV returns will then be generated to reflect defeated candidates and the transfer of subsequent choice rankings on the defeated candidate ballots that have been redistributed to the remaining candidates. This process repeats until a winner is determined.

Batch Elimination

When it can be determined, that it is mathematically impossible for two or more candidates receiving the lowest number of votes cast to be elected, these candidates may be simultaneously defeated in a subsequent round of RCV returns.

Winning Threshold

The number of votes a candidate must receive to win an RCV contest. This number is equal to 50% the number of Continuing Ballots, plus one.

Tally of Votes for Ranked Choice Voting Contests

Initially, the first choice votes in the ranked choice contest are tallied. If a candidate receives more than half of the first-choice votes cast (50% plus one), that candidate wins. If no candidate receives more than 50% of the votes, the candidate with the fewest first choice votes is defeated. Next, the votes that had been cast for the defeated candidate are then recast for the next choice remaining candidate selected on those ballots; or until the vote is nullified, if no subsequent choice is for a remaining candidate.

This process continues until a candidate has received more than half of the votes cast or only two candidates remain. If two candidates remain, the candidate with the most votes is declared the winner.

Tally of Write-In Votes

As per ORS 254.500, Write-In votes will be tallied together as a single selection. After fully applying the RCV process, individual Write-In votes will only be tallied when the following requirements are met: (1) the Write-In selection receives the highest number of votes cast; or (2) no candidate whose name is printed on the ballot receives 50% plus one or the majority of votes cast.

After all Write-In votes are tallied individually, if a Write-In candidate receives more votes than the top candidate whose name is printed on the ballot, the Write-In candidate may accept the elected position in accordance with ORS 254.548.

If the top Write-In candidate receives less votes than the top candidate, but, more than the other candidate(s) whose names are printed on the ballot, the top candidate whose name is printed on the ballot shall be declared elected.

If the top Write-In candidate receives less votes than the top two candidates whose names are printed on the ballot, all RCV Write-In votes will be recast for the next choice remaining candidate or until the vote is nullified if no subsequent choice is for a remaining candidate.

Applying Automatic Recount to RCV Contest

A full recount shall be conducted, when the difference between the number of votes received by the apparently elected candidate and the closest candidate apparently defeated is not more than one-fifth of one percent of the total first choice vote rankings received by both candidates in the first round.

Applying RCV In the Event of a Tie Vote

If two or more remaining candidates, not including the Write-In selection, are tied with the lowest votes received, a tie-breaker tally shall be generated with scenarios where each tied candidate is individually considered as a remaining candidate. The scenarios will be used to determine which of the tied candidates would receive the most votes and which candidate(s) would receive the least votes when the other tie vote candidate(s) are eliminated and the next available ranking is applied for the tie-breaker tally. No votes will actually be cast during the tie-breaker tally.

After the tie-breaker process is complete, the tie vote candidate in the scenario that generates the most votes received for that candidate shall be retained for the next round of Ranked Choice Voting. The other tie vote candidate(s) shall be deemed defeated and the next available ranking from those ballots shall be applied to the remaining candidates.

If a tie vote remains amongst the originally tied candidates after the tie-breaker process, all tied candidates shall be eliminated and the next available ranking from those ballots shall be applied to the remaining candidates.

In the application of RCV, if two or more candidates are tied with the highest votes received after all other candidates have been eliminated, the elected candidate shall be determined in accordance with ORS 254.575.