

The Additional Costs of an Instant Runoff Voting Election

In an email from [Chris Walker, Jackson County Election Official, WalkerCD@jacksoncounty.org](#)

In November of 2006, the voters of Pierce County, Washington approved Charter Amendment No. 3 -Instant Runoff Voting, which provides that the election of all county officials, except judges and the Prosecuting Attorney be conducted using instant runoff voting. All qualifying county candidates appear directly on the general election ballot. This method of voting is also referred to as 'Ranked Choice Voting' or 'Preference Voting'. Pierce County held the first Ranked Choice Voting election November 4, 2008.

Pierce County's active voter registration is 375,589. The cost to implement IRV was \$2 million, with ongoing increase in costs for printing, postage, and voter education. Pierce County has provided some valuable insight into the obstacles and cost to implement this method of voting.

The following impact analysis is a combination of what Pierce County experienced and what applies to Oregon counties.

What are the keys issues to consider with IRV?

Costs

- IRV does not eliminate the Primary Election ballot as there are Federal, State, County and City nominating elections, as well as some offices determined at the Primary Election that do not go forth to the General.
- IRV requires a second ballot page for the General Election Ballot.
- Two ballot pages require redesign of secrecy, return identification, and outside mailing envelope for the General Election only.
- Two ballot pages increases postage costs.
- IRV slows ballot count results.
- Additional staffing requirements.
- Additional one time expenses.
- Public education imperative.
- Additional election costs absorbed within county General Fund.

Software and Hardware costs.

- Sequoia Voting Systems currently has software available that enables this method of voting. This software is currently being used in San Francisco and Pierce County, Washington.
- Lane County is the only [Oregon] county that currently has Sequoia Voting Systems hardware that could purchase a software upgrade. All other county could need to purchase both hardware and software.

- Sequoia Software Upgrade is \$750,000. Training is \$75,000 and there is a \$65,000 annual license fee. The software has to have both Federal and State certification and may take up to 4 years to complete full certification.
- Sequoia Ballot Counter Hardware can vary from \$125,000 for each ballot counter purchased and a \$10,000 annual maintenance fee. This would be necessary in the majority of situations with two ballot pages for the General (one Traditional ballot and one IRV).
- Additional ballot counters may require remodeling to existing election offices.
- Additional election staff will be required for ballot processing, whether or not additional ballot counters are purchased. IRV does not eliminate the Primary Election ballot.
- The Primary Election ballot would still be necessary for all federal, state, and city contests with a nominating process, as was determined in Pierce County and would also apply to Oregon counties. There are state and city offices that may be decided at the Primary Election, and not go forth to the General Election.
- The Oregon Primary Election ballot generally has less contests and measures than the General Election, so elimination of county contests has a minimal impact to the overall cost of the election.
- Most Oregon Primary Election ballots are generally only 14-15" long, and frequently do not include contests on the back of the ballot.
- Oregon always has statewide contests on the Primary ballot that require a ballot be sent to every county voter, so elimination of county contests does not reduce the numbers of ballots required to be printed.
- Minimal, or no primary cost reduction projected. IRV requires a second ballot page for the General Election Ballot increasing ballot print costs.
- The IRV ballot page is separate from the Traditional ballot page, doubling the amount of ballots for the General Election at a substantial cost increase to the county.
- Lane County's General Election ballot pages cost \$50,000 (260,000 printed) at the 2008 General, and costs are likely to increase due to vendor going out of business.
- Multnomah County's General Election ballot pages cost \$234,598 (499,175 printed) at the 2008 General.
- The above costs would be doubled with the addition of an IRV ballot page.
- The primary election ballot costs remain constant, or with minimal reductions. Two ballot pages require redesign of secrecy, return identification, and outside mailing envelopes for the General Election only.
- Larger, nonstandard envelope sizes are more costly to print.

- County election offices would need to maintain various size envelopes for both the General and other traditional ballot elections, increasing the space requirements to maintain varied stock.
- Larger, nonstandard envelope sizes can impact machine inserting, adding election costs.

Two ballot pages increases postage costs to mail out and return ballot.

- Larger, nonstandard envelope sizes can increase postage rates, adding election costs.
- Added ballot weight adds postage costs for both the county to mail out ballots and the voters to return the ballot pages by mail.

Additional staffing requirements.

- Pierce County hired a project coordinator to plan, prepare and implement IRV in their county. The position has evolved into a full time position with a different title.
- Additional pre-inspection board staff required to pre-inspect the higher number of ballot pages issued to voters.
- Additional enhancement and duplication board staff required to enhance and duplicate ballot pages incorrectly filled out by voters according to the Vote-by-Mail Procedures Manual.
- Additional ballot counting staff required to process the higher number of ballot pages issued and returned by voters.
- Additional full time staff hours required to implement additional reconciliation ballot procedures when both ballots are not returned by voter.

Additional remodeling expenses.

- Additional space to store and process the larger number of ballot pages per registered voter.
- Ballot preparation room for ballots on demand., such as replacements and reissued that continues through election day.
- Larger pre-inspection room to accommodate larger numbers of boards to process larger numbers of ballots.
- Larger ballot counting room to add additional ballot counters and staff operating the counters.
- Larger ballot security rooms to store the ballots for the required archival retention period.

IRV slows ballot count results.

- Each voter would need to receive both a traditional and IRV ballot, which potentially doubles the number of ballots a county has to pre-inspect and count.

- Each additional ballot page increases the number of ballots pre-inspected and the percentage of ballots that need to be enhanced or duplicated in the days following the election.
- Refer to attached articles on slow Pierce County ballot counting.

Public education imperative.

- Prepare voters to expect multiple ballot pages.
- Encourage voters to vote and return all ballot pages.
- Ensure all voters understand the differences on how to vote the traditional ballot page vs. the IRV ballot page(s).
- Promote ballot marking effectiveness and accuracy.
- Promote confidence in the process and minimize voter error to minimize slower ballot counting.
- Educate staff, public, candidates and media how IRV works.
- Prepare the public, candidates, and media for slower election results.
- Educate staff, public, candidates, and media how to understand and when to expect election results.

Additional election costs absorbed by county General Fund.

- There are costs for software and hardware.
- There are added printing costs.
- There are added postage costs.
- There are added costs for staffing.
- There are added costs for remodeling, expanding or rented/leased facilities.
- There are added voter education costs.

There is minimal, or no Primary election cost reductions. The added costs listed above are unfunded mandates, and directly impact county general fund expenses.

Pierce County Voter Survey

As indicated in the attached news article, Pierce County voters changed the county charter last year to allow the new voting method, but appeared to have changed their mind. 91,000 voters responded to a survey that accompanied their Pierce County mail-in ballot. Two out of three voters indicated they were now opposed to the IRV concept.