

*From an Email from Christin Whittington, based on an email from Stven Carlburg*

Runoff and "instant" runoff voting:

The idea of a runoff election is that if it turns out there's not a single name that gets more than half the votes (a majority), there'll be a subsequent vote with the choices narrowed down.

The reason for a runoff election is because you want to choose a winner with more than 50% of the vote and not one that merely gets (as an example) 28% compared to some other choice that gets 26%. You want to give those other 46% of the voters a chance to vote on whether they prefer the 28% choice or the 26% choice.

What the term "instant" runoff means is that you have people fill out their ballots listing several choices. That way, if there's no majority on the first vote, instead of having to call everybody back to vote again, all you have to do is recheck their ballots to see "instantly" what their next choice would be.

For the voter, it's easy to make this process work. The voter simply lists his or her choices in order of preference. His or her completed ballot might look like this:

- #1 - ALLEMANDE
- #2 - Atlanta Dance Festival
- #3 - Atlanta Dance Weekend
- #4 - Autumn Bliss
- #5 - Chattahoochiecoochie
- #6 - Peaches & Cream
- #7 - TwirlyBirds

The process for COUNTING votes is not difficult, either. To begin with, you only count everybody's first choices -- the same as in a normal election. If there's a majority winner from this count, great! That's exactly what you wanted! Your job is done!

However, if this first count DOESN'T yield a winner with a clear majority, you'll want to conduct a RUNOFF. Look and see if the top TWO vote-getters from counting the first choices have (combined between them) more than 50% of the votes. If so, then they are the candidates in the RUNOFF.

The next step is to look at everybody's ballot again to see which candidate they liked better of the two candidates in the runoff. Count each ballot one way or another, and now

you have a winner with a majority of the votes. Great! That's exactly what you wanted!  
Your job is done!

(This is how it works in a nutshell, though you'd have an intermediate runoff round if it took more than the top two vote-getters to add up to more than half the votes on the first round. This would mean one more round of counting ballots for the vote-counters, but the VOTER is already finished.)

I've conducted this type of vote in the past, and I would be happy to help support the possibility of a runoff by being part of our ballot oversight committee. I feel that this process, for the sake of everyone understanding how the winner was chosen, should include tracking and publishing the numbers of votes and preferences in the first count as well as any runoff which turned out to be involved.

I do feel strongly that due to the numerous names which will be on the ballot, it's important we be prepared to conduct a runoff (preferably "instant," to save the trouble of conducting a second vote) in case there's not a majority on the first count.

Respectfully submitted,  
Stven Carlberg

[And from a follow-up email:]

About Keeping It Simple:

For the voter the only difference is that he or she picks choices in order of preferences instead of being limited to a single #1 vote. This is easy to understand and easy to encourage.

For the vote counters it's also simple. First count everybody's #1 choices. If one choice has more than 50%, you're done. If not, proceed to the runoff.