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Hand-Counting a Ranked Choice Voting Election

Minneapolis MN

Submitted by:

**Judy Schwartau
Election Specialist
350 S. 5th Street
Minneapolis MN 55415
612-673-3858
judy.schwartau@ci.minneapolis.mn.us
www.ci.minneapolis.mn.us**

The Minneapolis Method – Hand Counting a Ranked Choice Election

As election administrators, we must stick to the facts. We left the debate about the voting method to the advocates and opponents.

From initial study through the completion of the 2009 municipal election, we published detailed information about the election on our Web site. Our motto during the 2009 election was “RCV – it is” and we focused our efforts on how to best conduct the election without certified voting equipment. In fact, the information is so complete, that people at home can “play the RCV data analysis game” using the “xls” documents that are the ballot summaries from each precinct for each office.

2009 Implementation

We officially adopted Ranked Choice Voting as the name of the voting method to more accurately reflect the process voters use to rank candidates and not imply “instant” results from the hand counting process. We determined the best method to count the multiple seat offices that would comply with Minnesota law was the **Weighted Inclusive Gregory Method (WIGM)**, which could produce the same election results in a recount. **Minneapolis is the first jurisdiction to hand count using this method.**

In May 2009, a “test election” was conducted to

- develop the first-draft ballot design
- work with different draft versions of materials to be used by election judges
- inviting voters to experience RCV Ranked & share their feedback
- develop the method for hand-counting the 20 single seat and 2 multiple seat offices to determine the winner(s). **Ballots were counted by combining all of the ballots for an office.** For a turnout of 70,000, it was estimated that the hand-count for the 22 offices could take between 24 and 129 8-hour shifts of 39 counters.

In August 2009, the hand-count process was redesigned.

A one-week “work-out” session developed the Minneapolis Method of hand-counting the ballots at the precinct level and using the precinct level data for analysis by office. **Based on the Minneapolis Method, with a 70,000 voter turnout, it was estimated hand-counting the 22 offices would take 37 8-hour shifts with 102 election judges serving as counters and data entry staff. This new method would assure seating elected candidates on time.**

Implementing the Minneapolis Method

The Minneapolis Method combines a hand-count with data analysis that avoids using an uncertified ballot counting program. In the future, if certified equipment is developed and implemented for Ranked Choice Voting, the Minneapolis Method would be an efficient method for conducting a recount. In Minnesota, a recount must be conducted by hand. Overall, determining winners based on precinct ballot data rather than sorting and re-sorting the actual ballots was easier and saved time.

Implementing the Minneapolis Method

Location: The Minneapolis Elections Warehouse was converted to a Tabulation Center for counting, data entry and data analysis.

Human Resources: Counters and Data Entry judges were selected from among Chair and Assistant Chair Judges as well as top performing Team Judges as recommended by Chair Judges. Daily judges signed in, picked up their color-coded nametags, and were seated next to a Counter with a different color-coded nametag.

Supply and Transport Crew: Responsible for ballot security and delivering color-coded supplies to each Precinct Pod. The supplies were color-coded to help with organization and visual management. Some highlights of color-coding of supplies and organization

- A different color was used for each of the five offices for both the name placards and also the Ballot Summaries
- The only white paper allowed at the Precinct Pod was the actual ballots
- Tables were taped off to create different spaces
- Three-letter abbreviations for each candidate was taken from the first three letters of a candidate's last name – it saved time with abbreviations built into the Data Entry documents
- Pods had two color-coded slips used to silently request assistance with supplies or process questions, which helped to reduce the background noise

Sorting and Counting at the Precinct Pods

Precinct pods for counting were designed using a combination of tables to hold the ballot length. Each pod was staffed with six Counters, three teams of two judges of different political parties. A crew of up to six roamed the floor to help with on-going training and to answer questions. Counters at each precinct pod

- Staged the ballots for the precinct (sorted them all the same direction)
- Inspected each ballot for voter errors specific to Ranked Choice Voting and accounted for these errors
- Sorted the ballots for each office down to the unique 3-choice combination (including all write-ins), counted the ballots with that combination and completed a Ballot Summary for each unique combination in the precinct
- The Supply and Transit Crew would review the Ballot Summaries for completeness and then deliver them to the Data Entry Teams.
- Counting each precinct took between 5.5 hours to 8.0 hours, depending on the number of ballots and ballots with voter errors. Counting began Wednesday November 4 and was completed Friday, November 13.

Data Entry

Data entry judges working at computers as a team of two judges of different parties, entered the precinct level data from the Ballot Summary sheets into the computer. The team also double-checked their work. A data analysis team then verified the data. Data entry of the ballot summaries for a precinct office took an average of one-half hour, depending on the number of ballot summaries.

Data Analysis

Data Analysis was conducted using a dual track system. Each of the two teams consisted of a lead analyst and an observer. Both teams did analysis on the same office, performing the exact same steps and calculations, and then verified their results with each other.

Data analysis of council offices (which have between 8 to 11 precincts) took between 50 minutes to 1 ½ hours. Analysis of the Park District offices (which have between 19 to 24 precincts) took 50 to 70 minutes. Determining the winning candidate for the city-wide office of Mayor (131 precincts) took 4 hours and 20 minutes for one round. Data analysis for the two city-wide multiple-seat offices with five or six rounds took over eight hours each.

Minneapolis Method for Hand-counting RCV – The Administrative Rules for Ballot Sorter & Counter, Voter Error Accountant & Write-in Ballot sorter & Counter, Voter Error Accounting Chart, Write-In Votes, Data Entry, Reconciliation and Verification, Data Analysis – Single Seat Elections, Data Analysis – Multiple Seat Elections are posted on our Web site.