



Center for  
Civic Design

# Best Practices Displaying Ranked Choice Voting Election Results

Guidelines for Ranked Choice Voting election results that work for candidates and voters.

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# Introduction

Our research showed that *how* RCV election results are displayed is the crucial third element to making sure that both voters and candidates trust and understand the election. The goal is to make election results transparent with an overview of how the winner won, and a step by step of the RCV tabulation process.

Embedding an explanatory narrative about the counting process into the results display helps voters understand:

- How their ballot was counted.
- How every vote contributed to the final winning tally.

## Who are these guidelines for?

These guidelines are for election officials and news organizations creating RCV results displays on their websites.

## Why follow these guidelines?

Results displays that show the winner and tell a narrative story of the election:

- Increase trust for voters and candidates.
- Show how an individual voter's ballot was counted and contributes to the whole.

## What's included in these best practices?

- An explanation of CCD's best practices result display design.
- Vocabulary and data visualization techniques for explaining RCV results.

## What are these guidelines based on?

- Our research on what works for voters. (See [page 10](#) for more details)
- The experience of elections offices and other groups in their successful campaigns.

# Best Practices

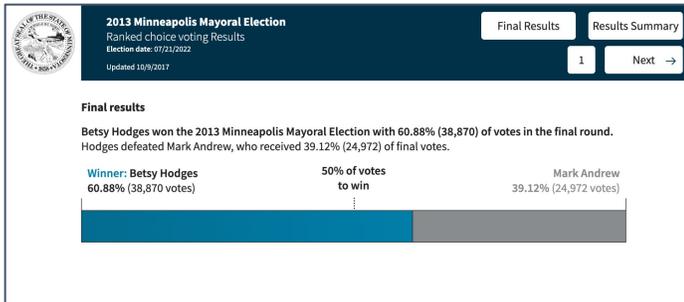
## Displaying RCV Election Results

- **Show who won before explaining the counting process.** Show the process of counting a ranked choice voting election when reporting election results. This will help voters understand how the winner is determined and build confidence in the voting system. [Page 5](#)
- **Show all rounds of counting with both verbal and visual explanations.** A clear explanation helps voters trust the ranking process. Showing what happened in each round with text and charts helps everyone understand - and makes the results pages more accessible. [Page 6](#)
- **Include a summary of how votes accumulated for the winner,** so the source of votes from rounds after the first round are transparent. [Page 9](#)
- **Make it clear that interim results are incomplete and not official.** Always pair interim results with a status of the counting, for example, the number of ballots still to be processed and tallied.

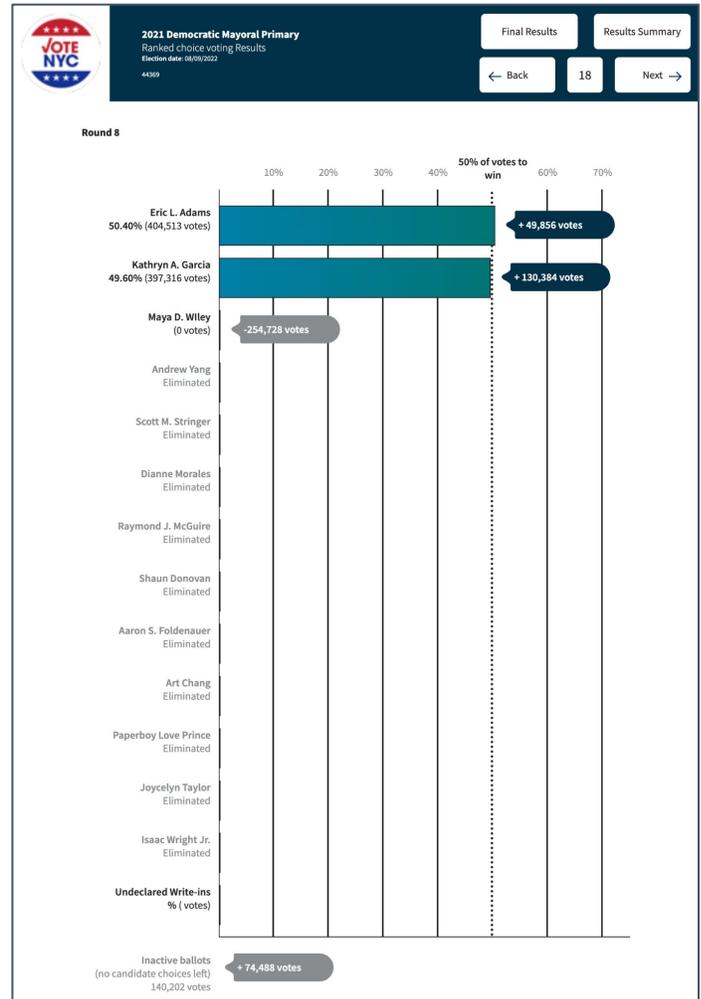
[Read more about our research and best practices for Ranked Choice Voting at \*\*civicdesign.org\*\*](#)

# CCD's RCV Election Results Display

CCD developed this results display based on our research. The online demonstration shows real single-winner elections, and an example of a multi-winner election using demonstration data.



[Minneapolis Mayoral Election](#)  
(35 candidates, based on the 2013 election)



[NYC Democratic Mayoral Primary](#)  
(June 22, 2021 election – 13 candidates, 8 rounds)

See our RCV Election Results Display Demonstration in action, with results from real elections. [Go to election-results.civicdesign.org](http://election-results.civicdesign.org).

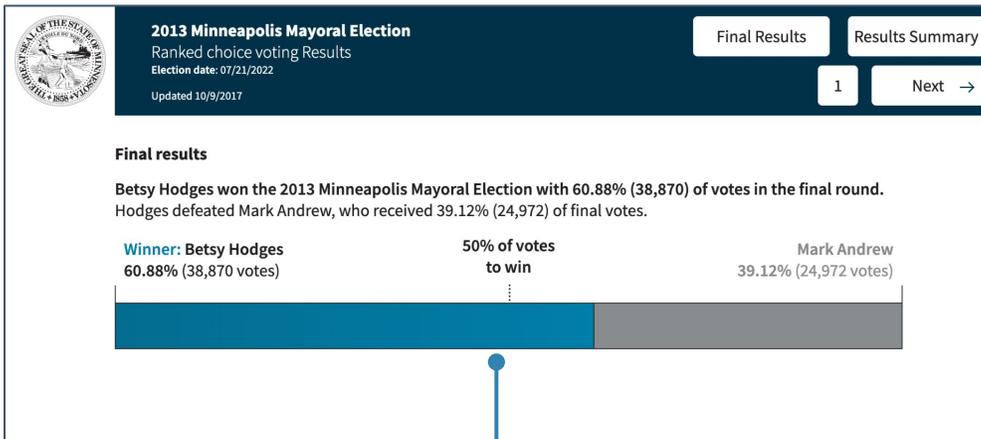
# Show who won before explaining the counting process

## Name the winner both in text and visually.

The first screen of the results display should name the winner, percentage of the total vote, and final votes. This supports voters who are only interested in the winner quickly see when a winner has been announced, and who it is.

Here, the final result is visualized using a stacked horizontal bar graph. Combining text and a chart:

- Makes the results display work for visual and verbal learners
- Supports accessibility
- Makes it easier to see the results even on a small screen



## CCD Tested Vocabulary

**Final votes** are ballots and voters contributing to the winner when counting stops.

# Show all rounds of counting with both verbal and visual explanations

## First, write a description of each round.

Starting each round with an explanation helps voters understand the counting process and visual display.

Tell voters:

- Which candidates were eliminated
- How many ballots were counted for their next choice.

In our results display demo, the explanation is on a separate page.

But there are other options that need testing including:

- Put the written description to the left of the visual description.
- Show the written description in a window, so the voter can read it and close it to see the visual description.

**2013 Minneapolis Mayoral Election**  
Ranked choice voting Results  
Election date: 07/21/2022  
Updated 10/9/2017

Final Results Results Summary

← Back 65 Next →

**Round 32**

**Two candidates were eliminated:**  
Bob Fine  
Jackie Cherryhomes

**Number of ballots counted for their next choice:**  
6629 votes

**Why are two candidates eliminated at the same time?**

Two or more candidates with the lowest number of votes can be eliminated in a single round if their total number of votes is less than the votes for the candidate immediately ahead of them. This means that, if all next choices went to one of them, they would still trail the next higher candidate, and the outcome will be the same whether they are eliminated one by one, or at the same time.

Include the round number to connect written and visual explanations.

When more than one candidate is eliminated in the round, include an explanation of the rules for why.

## CCD Tested Vocabulary

**Eliminated candidates** are candidates with the fewest results in each round.

**Ballots counted for their next choice** are ballots from eliminated candidates that are still active.

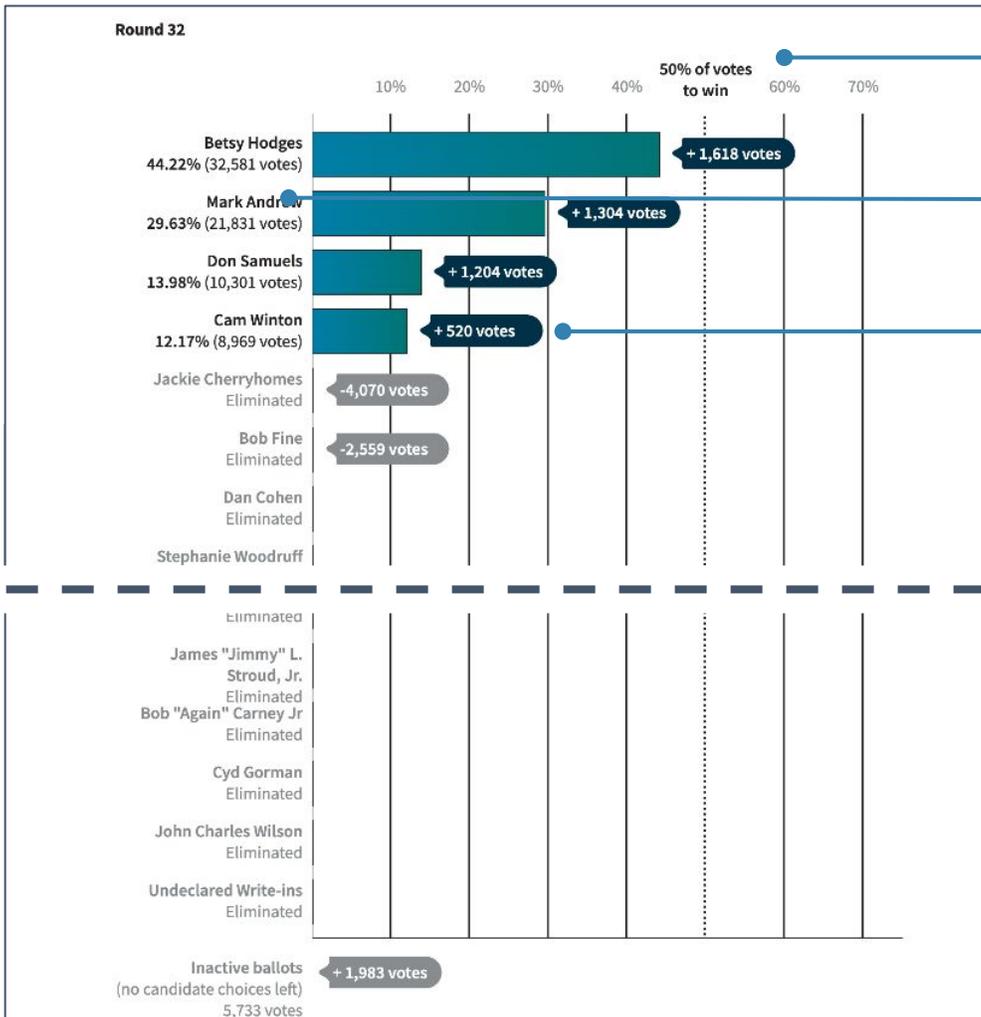
# Show all rounds of counting with both verbal and visual explanations

## Then, visualize the round using a graph.

Clearly explain what's happening in the graph to avoid confusion.

Display the candidates in the order of the number of votes from the first round. Even if candidates change positions during preliminary reports, being consistent about this makes it easier to see how the results are changing during early reports.

Use a horizontal bar graph to accommodate more candidates.



“Goal line” for number of votes needed to win.

**Vote totals and percentages** for each active candidate.

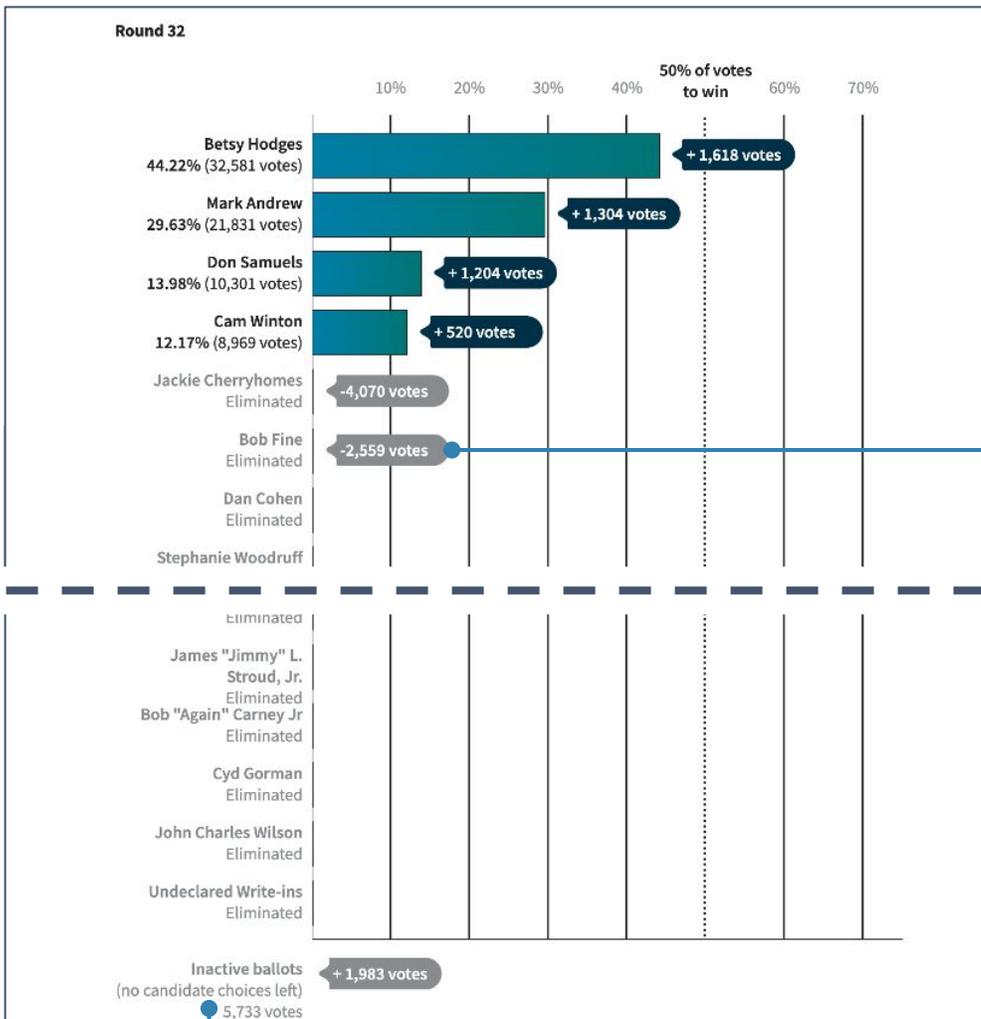
**Number of votes added** to each active candidate during the round.

Aligning numbers next to each bar to make them easier to read. Voters can even add them up to check that they balance.

# Show all rounds of counting with both verbal and visual explanations

## Include inactive ballots in the results list.

Clearly differentiate inactive ballots from active candidates with color, the weight of the typography, and placement.



### CCD Tested Vocabulary

**Active ballots** are those being counted.

**Inactive ballots** have no further candidates.

Use color to differentiate votes from losing candidates being counted for the voter's next next choice vs. votes added to each candidate.

In CCD's display:

- Added votes are dark blue
- Votes from losing (or eliminated) candidates and inactive ballots are medium gray

**Running total of inactive ballots** at the end of the list. Do not include a totals bar or a percentage for inactive ballots.

# Include a summary of how votes accumulated for the winner

The screen should summarize each round of tabulation.

In a table show each round of counting starting from Round 1. Each round includes:

- The candidate(s) eliminated in the round
- The number of votes added from their supporters ballots
- The running total of votes at the end of the round
- The percentage of votes at the end of the round

**2013 Minneapolis Mayoral Election**  
 Ranked choice voting Results  
 Election date: 07/21/2022  
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Final Results Results Summary Back

**How the winner won**

Betsy Hodges 60.88% (38,870 votes)

10% 20% 30% 40% 50% of votes to win 60% 70%

**Votes for Betsy Hodges**

Round	Votes added in this round	Total votes	Percent of votes in this round
Initial Count	28,962 votes in the first round	28,962	36.47 %
Round 2	+21 votes from Undeclared Write-Ins	28,983	36.51 %
Round 3	+1 votes from John Charles Wilson	28,984	36.52 %
Round 4	+4 votes from Cyd Gorman	28,988	36.52 %
Round 5	+6 votes from Bob "Again" Carney	28,994	36.54 %
Round 30	Woodruff	30,672	40.15 %
Round 31	+291 votes from Dan Cohen	30,963	40.92 %
Round 32	+1,618 votes from Bob Fine and Jackie Cherryhomes	32,581	44.22 %
Round 33	+6,289 votes from Cam Winton and Don Samuels	38,870	60.88 %

Download full results as CSV  
 Download full results as PDF

Visualize again using a stacked horizontal bar graph.

Round

Number of votes added during the round

Total votes at the end of the round

Percentage of total votes at the end of the round

Buttons to download results as CSV or PDF.

# Checklist

## Designing RCV Election Results

### **Name the winner before explaining the counting process.**

- Does your results display begin by naming the winner with words and with a chart?

### **Show all rounds of counting with both verbal and visual explanations.**

- Do you explain each round in writing and with a visual chart?
- Does your results display define vocabulary?
- Does the display include inactive ballots?

### **Include a summary of how votes accumulated for the winner.**

- Does your results display summarize each round of tabulation?
- Is the summary both written and visual?

### **Make it clear that interim results are incomplete and not official.**

- Do your interim results clearly explain why they aren't official yet?
- Do your interim results include the number of ballots still to be processed and tallied?

# The research behind these best practices

## 2017 Research for Best Practices for RCV ballots and materials

In this project with Fair Vote and the Ranked Choice Voting Resource Center, we tested in locations with and without RCV including Southern California, NJ, Minneapolis, San Francisco/Oakland, Denver, and Maine. We worked with almost 200 people who identified as first-time voters, experienced voters, and a few non-voters.

Most of the studies were qualitative interviews with a few people, but we also ran a large-scale study in which voters tried voting on three different ballot styles.

In another, we talked to voters immediately after voting in an RCV election in Maine to learn how they approached the challenge of ranking.

Our goal was to learn what helped voters understand and use RCV successfully. Participants used a simple voter education flyer, marked ballots, and answered questions about their reactions to RCV as a concept based on the materials used in the test. We updated the instructions and education flyer between studies, refining the approach.

## RCV Election Results Display Demonstrations

This interactive demonstration of our design was tested and developed during the original best practices research and displays results from real RCV elections.

Find it at [election-results.civicdesign.org](https://election-results.civicdesign.org)

[Read more about our research for Ranked Choice Voting at civicdesign.org](https://civicdesign.org)

# Additional Resources

Learn from our Civic Design Skill resources at [civicdesign.org](https://civicdesign.org)

## Plain Language

Field Guide Vol 1 [Writing instructions voters understand](#)

Field Guide Vol 4 [Effective poll worker materials](#)

## Information Design

Workbook [Designing a voter guide to an election](#)

- [Using colors effectively](#)
- [Planning for multiple languages](#)

Toolkit [Civic icons and images](#)

Toolkit [Election materials color palette](#) (accessible colors in 4 shades)

## Usability Testing

Field Guide Vol 3 [Testing ballots for usability](#)

Toolkit [Usability testing kit](#)

## Language Access

Workbook [Planning Language Access](#)



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