

MEMORANDUM TO CITY LEADERSHIP

TO: Salt Lake City Elected Leadership
Mayor Mendenhall and City Council Chair Petro

DATE: November 6, 2024

FROM: Cindy Lou Trishman, Acting City Recorder/Deputy Director of
Operations and Administration *CLT*

SUBJECT: Proposed Resolution 2025 Ranked Choice Voting Method and 2023
Municipal Election Method Report – Ranked Choice Voting

LEGISLATION: Resolution for Election Method

INTRODUCTION:

In February of 2023, the City Council opted to participate in the Municipal Alternate Voting Method Pilot Project, also known as Ranked Choice Voting (RCV) for the 2023 Municipal Election. In the determination to participate, the Council chose to forego a Primary Election, thereby moving the Declaration of Candidacy deadline to support the inclusion of all candidates interested in running have the time necessary to file personal campaign committees and declare candidacy.

On November 21, 2023, Salt Lake City held the 2023 Municipal General Election. The positions that were up for election were for Mayor, Salt Lake City Council District 2, Salt Lake City Council District 4, Salt Lake City Council District 6, and a two-year term for Salt Lake City Council District 7.

The total cost for the 2023 Municipal Election was \$308,348.35. This was \$80,348.35 more than the original estimate of \$228,000 from Salt Lake County. The reason for this may be attributed to the election date change, as the necessity to be compliant the County had a need for more poll workers. This higher cost could also be attributed to inflation or the addition of the District 7 race, which was added after the initial interlocal agreement and estimate.

State voter turnout for 2023 was 40%. For Salt Lake County, it was 36.3%, and for Salt Lake City, it was 46.5%, which is an increase from 2021 where turnout for Salt Lake City was 34.77%. One reason for this may be because there was a mayoral race this year, which often leads to higher voter turnout.

VOTER AWARENESS:

Municipal Elections regularly have a lower turnout than statewide elections. Typically, there is an increase in voter turnout in Mayoral years which can attribute to the data provided when comparing the 2019 information. Additionally, there is typically low turnout in elections that take place just after Presidential Elections due to voter fatigue.

Below is the overall Salt Lake City voter turnout for 2023 compared to prior election years, as well as the turnout by District.

Salt Lake City Turnout:

It should be noted that voter turnout may be lower in 2023 in comparison to 2019, which was also a mayoral year, where voter turnout is typically higher. This could be attributed to the election date change. Voter turnout, overall, appeared to be lower. For example, the voter turnout statewide for 2023 was 40%, in comparison to 2022, which was 64.2%.

The reason the numbers differ between votes cast vs the actual voter turnout can be attributed to many different reasons. These can include an individual's ballot being exhausted, an individual choosing not to vote in a race, and so on.

2019 Statistics			
	Percentage of Ballots Cast	Percentage of Actual Voter Turnout	Number of ballots exhausted
Mayoral	50.35%	50.23%	117
D2	38.86%	37.26%	121
D4	41.55%	39.20%	335
D6	59.98%	58.52%	227
Cost of Election Services	\$367,907.12		

2021 Statistics			
	Percentage of Ballots Cast	Percentage of Actual Voter Turnout	Number of ballots exhausted
D1	32.66%	32.56%	11
D2 (Two-year term)	29.49%	24.63%	19
D3	36.47%	36.36%	19
D5	37.94%	37.87%	11
D7	34.20%	34.10%	18
Cost of Election Services	\$94,973.73 *(although the cost was higher, the County held to the estimated cost)		

2023 Statistics			
	Percentage of Ballots Cast	Percentage of Actual Voter Turnout	Number of ballots exhausted
Mayoral	46.51%	46.11%	394
D2 (Ran unopposed)	32.12%	23.63	766
D4	38.12%	35.89%	296
D6	56.74%	54.59%	342
D7 (Two-year Term)	49.62%	46.11%	684
Cost of Election Services	\$308,348.35		

2023 RCV AWARENESS:

The City Council thoughtfully allocated funds for the awareness campaign, emphasizing the importance to distribute accurate and correct information, reach communities through various mediums and formats, and to elevate awareness of the changes this would impose on the ballot.

Salt Lake City focused efforts on voter outreach to increase awareness of the change in vote method and how the method would ultimately work from the perspective of the voter. Education assistance provided from outside of the City was minimal, and the City focused significant effort to provide information by the Recorder's Office, SLC candidates, and officeholders.

The Recorder's Office approached awareness in the following ways:

- Multimedia
 - Media ads and interviews (radio)
 - SLC Weekly Interview
 - Public Service Announcements on the SLCTV channel
 - Social Media Live Events with Utah RCV
 - Webpage updates
 - Social Media Activity (SLCElections Twitter and Facebook)
- Print
 - Public utility bill message
 - Newspaper Ads
 - Billboards
- Tabling or In-Person Opportunities:
 - City Events
 - Community Organizations

As a high priority, the City departments of IMS/Civic Engagement, Mayor's Office and Council Office assisted with distribution and outreach. Feedback from the community was generally supportive, interested, engaged, and desiring of more information about their specific race.

2025 RCV AWARENESS:

If the City Council determines they would like to participate in Ranked Choice Voting for the 2025 election, the following outreach methods would be purposed, in addition to the methods used for the 2023 election.

- Evaluate all the precinct data and determine what areas need more outreach. In these areas, provide additional resources.
- Provide more in depth RCV training to candidates.

CONCLUSION:

The determination of the Council to participate in the Ranked Choice Voting Method without a Primary was a new opportunity and activated interest in the election process.

Salt Lake City's Ranked Choice Voting experience went smoothly, and turnout was similar to prior elections.

It's important to highlight that the Municipal Alternate Voting Method Pilot Project is scheduled to conclude on January 1, 2026. Consequently, this marks the final opportunity for Salt Lake City to elect to partake in the Pilot Project. Should Salt Lake City choose to participate, it presents an opportunity to analyze the data alongside that of the 2021 election, which also utilized Ranked Choice Voting. This comparison would enable an assessment of the impact on voter education and determine whether there was an increase in voter turnout.

POINTS OF DISCUSSION

- Provided the concern expressed in 2023 discussions of deciding an election method the year of the election, would the Council consider taking action to declare intention prior to the start of the 2025 calendar year?

RESOLUTION __ OF 2024

Requesting inclusion of Salt Lake City, Utah in the Municipal Alternative Voting Methods Pilot Project.

WHEREAS, the State of Utah, by its State Legislature, has made available a pilot project for participation in the alternate voting methods for municipal elections beginning January 1, 2019 and ending on January 1, 2026; and

WHEREAS, House Bill 35 as passed during the 2018 General Session allows municipalities to conduct nonpartisan races using instant runoff voting in accordance with the requirements of Utah Code Title 20A, Chapter 4, Part 6 and all other applicable provisions of the law, during any odd-numbered year that the pilot project is in effect; and

WHEREAS, the Salt Lake City Council, before May 1 of the odd-numbered year, must provide written notice to the Lieutenant Governor and the Salt Lake County Clerk stating that Salt Lake City intends to participate in the pilot project for the year specified in the notice; and

WHEREAS, Salt Lake City intends to contract with Salt Lake County to conduct municipal elections and has the resources and capability necessary to participate in the pilot project; and

WHEREAS, the Salt Lake City Council finds that it will be in the best interest of Salt Lake City and of its citizens to hold its 2025 municipal election by instant runoff voting;

NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Salt Lake City Council adopts instant runoff voting for the 2025 municipal election and that by this resolution, gives notice to the Lieutenant Governor and the Salt Lake County Clerk that Salt Lake City intends to enter the pilot project by use of instant runoff voting for its 2025 municipal election; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the City Recorder and City Attorney are hereby authorized and directed to do all things necessary to cause the 2025 Salt Lake City municipal election to be held in accordance with the instant runoff voting process.

Adopted this ____ day of _____, 2024.

Victoria Petro, City Council Chair

Approved as to Form:

/s/ David M. Quealy
Senior City Attorney

Attest: _____

City Recorder