



Full representation systems: electing a board of directors

What full representation system would work best in an NGO?

If a board of directors or council consists of a number of at-large seats, or a group of seats elected by a particular constituency, the best system is Full Choice Voting (the technical name is the single transferrable vote or STV).¹

Full Choice Voting is as easy as 1-2-3.

The ballot lists all candidates competing for the seats and voters simply rank their choices. Based on the number of votes cast and seats available, a quota is established. Each candidate who reaches the quota of votes wins a seat.

If there are unfilled seats and no candidate has passed the quota, the least popular candidate in each round is

¹ There are many other fair voting systems used in democracies around the world. However, STV is the only one suitable for elections without parties, which makes it particularly appropriate in civil society.

BC-STV BALLOT

- Three members to be elected
- Number the boxes in the order of your choice
- Write the number "1" in one of the boxes and then show as many other preferences as you wish.

Smith, Freda	APPLE PARTY	4
Gill, Steven	APPLE PARTY	1
Howard, Brenda	APPLE PARTY	2
Roberts, Saul	INDEPENDENT	3
Jansen, Doug	PEAR PARTY	6
Wong, Lisa	PEAR PARTY	
Lewis, Peter	PEAR PARTY	
Savoie, Christine	MANGO PARTY	5

eliminated, and those votes are transferred to the next candidate on the ballot. Similarly, if a candidate receives more votes than their quota, the extra votes are transferred as well.²

² There are alternative approaches on how the vote transfers work. Fortunately, software programs are available for the most popular options, which make vote tallying quick and easy.

Each seat is won by a person receiving the same number of votes, and each voter is able to express a rich picture of who they want representing them.

How does this produce fair results?

For example, if 10 seats are being filled and ten per cent of the voters support a particular candidate, those voters will elect someone to their board.

If 30 per cent of voters support a group of candidates, they will likely elect three people.

Neither of these outcomes would be likely or even possible with a winner-take-all system.

What are the benefits of using this system?

Full Choice Voting provides more than just fair representation for voters. For an organization Full Choice Voting:

- proportionally represents the views and interests of all voters
- boosts turnout, because every vote counts
- improves voter ownership of the governing body, because everyone's voice is represented
- reduces unfair entrenchment of directors
- can attract and elect diverse candidates, because all groups (whether by political leaning, interests or demographics) can elect representatives

- improves civility of a board, since candidates are rewarded for reaching beyond their core supporters
- rewards leaders who excel at dialogue, inclusion and compromise, rather than those best at polarizing voters

Full representation voting allows governance to evolve and reflect changing interests

In the long-term Full Choice Voting allows for the democratic evolution of the organization's political culture. It allows voters to *self-define* their representation preferences.

For example, in one election, voters may feel strongly about electing more women or seeing more diversity in their governing body, and use their high rankings to elect candidates accordingly. The election outcome will reflect those preferences.

In another election, voters may be more concerned with electing candidates who take a stand on a particular issue. In that case, voters can use their high rankings for those candidates. Again, the election results will clearly reflect those preferences.

This does not tilt the playing field toward the interests of any group or predetermine the outcomes. Voters may feel skills, ideology, diversity, geographic representation or any other principle is key to their representation. With Full Choice Voting, it's their choice.

That's good for your board, your members and your community.