NORTHERN TERRITORY ELECTORAL COMMISSION
EVERY vote counts!

INFORMATIONSHEET

Optional preferential voting (OPV)

Background

Optional preferential voting was introduced for the 2016 Territory Election. The voter must mark a '1' on the ballot paper next to their most preferred candidate and can then choose whether or not to mark further preferences for some or all of the other candidates.

Ballot paper marking

The voter:

- MUST place the number '1' in the square next to the candidate of their first choice

then

- MAY mark further preferences by placing the number '2' in the square next to the candidate of their second choice, the number '3' next to the candidate of their third choice and so on.

Ballot paper sorting

The ballot papers are sorted to the candidates according to the 1st preference marked on the ballot paper.

Any informal ballot papers (e.g. blank, no 1st preference or more than one 1st preference indicated) are set aside.

Ballot paper counting

To be elected, a candidate must receive a majority of the total formal votes in the count (i.e. 50% + 1 vote).

Example - If there are 4000 formal ballot papers in the count, the absolute majority of votes is calculated as: 4000 ÷ 2 = 2000 + 1 = **2001.**

If:

- A candidate has a majority of the votes, the candidate is elected and no further counting is necessary.
- No candidate receives a majority, the candidate with the least number of formal votes is 'excluded' and that candidate's ballot papers are re-sorted to the other candidates according to the 2nd preference shown on each ballot paper.
- A ballot paper fails to show a preference for a continuing candidate, the ballot paper is 'exhausted' and removed from the count. The majority required for election must then be recalculated minus any exhausted ballot papers.

The process of exclusions is repeated until one candidate gains more than half of the formal votes remaining in the count and is elected.

In an election with two candidates, the candidate who receives more than half of the formal 1st preference votes (50%+1) is elected and no further counting is necessary.

An election with three or more candidates (see example below)

A candidate can be elected at any count where a majority is reached, including at the count of 1st preferences.

Optional preferential count example for four candidates

Count		Candidates				Votes			
		A	**B**	**C**	**D**	**Formal in Count**	*Majority Required*	**Exhausted ***	**Total Formal**
1	**1st Preferences**	500	1600	1500	400	4000	*2001*	0	**4000**
2	**D Excluded** - 400	50	100	170	-400			80	
3	**Progressive Totals**	550	1700	1670	0	3920	*1961*	80	**4000**
4	**A Excluded** -550	-550	160	265				125	
5	**Progressive Totals**	**0**	**1860**	**1935**	**0**	**3795**	*1898*	**205**	**4000**
				ELECTED					

Count Explanation

Count 1 - The count of 1st preferences, 4000 formal ballot papers. The winning candidate needs a majority of votes to be elected: 4000 ÷ 2 = 2000 + 1 votes. No candidate has received that number of votes.

Count 2 - Candidate D with the least number of votes is excluded and their votes (400) are transferred to the other candidates remaining in the count according to the 2nd preference marked. 80 ballot papers show no 2nd preference and are exhausted.

Count 3 - The transferred votes are added to the progressive totals of the remaining three candidates. With 80 exhausted ballot papers, the new majority required is 3920 ÷ 2 = 1960 +1 votes. No candidate has received that number of votes.

Count 4 - Candidate A with the least number of votes is excluded and their votes (550) are transferred to the two other candidates remaining in the count according to the next available preference marked. 125 ballot papers show no further preference and are exhausted.

Count 5 - The transferred votes are added to the totals of the remaining candidates. With 205 exhausted ballot papers (80 +125), the new majority required is 3795 ÷ 2 = 1897 +1 votes. Candidate C has received that number of votes and is elected.

***** No ballot papers are exhausted at the count of 1st preferences. Ballot papers exhausted after that count are recorded on the count sheet to balance and check the number of formal votes in the count at the end of every exclusion.

NB. Federal and NT Local Government (Council) elections.

In federal or NT local government elections, a voter **MUST** still mark a number in every square on the ballot paper in their order of preference for their vote to be counted.