

# FAIRVOTE

## Request for Proposal (RFP): Strategic Planning Consultant(s)

### Overview

FairVote (FV) is a rapidly growing organization that is seeking to scale its impact in the coming decade on a national level. It is undertaking its second deep strategy planning process similar to the one completed in 2020, which resulted in the current multi-year strategic plan 2020-2024. This second strategy planning process will begin in June 2023 and continue through February 2024 to develop a multi-year strategic plan to start in 2025 and beyond. The process will include working with our staff, board, and stakeholders to:

1. Review FairVote's existing strategy implementation to understand our successes and areas for improvement better. This review will inform the strategy design and re-examine our core competencies in relation to the broader reform ecosystem.
2. Revisit the timeline for our 'big reform goals' and determine what we can substantially contribute to over the strategy period that most strategically advances us towards those goals.
3. Identify scenarios and forks in strategy based on critical events and progress (timeline and process for learning and adapting throughout implementation).

The process is expected to be fully defined by mid-June 2023, with the analysis and formulation phase taking place from July 2023 to February 2024. The process will conclude with the Board's formal approval of the high-level strategy document by February 2024 after the deliberations and writing is effectively concluded in January. We seek a consultant with both evaluation and strategy skills or a team of consultants with complementary skills to undertake this process in close collaboration with FairVote's Planning, Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (PMEL) Team; act as the backbone of the process, and; guide FV to make right decisions. A consultant(s) with experience in major national change work is preferred.

### About FairVote

[FairVote](#) is a nonpartisan, non-profit organization that promotes electoral reform and seeks to improve the democratic processes in the United States. Its budget has tripled in recent years to \$10M this year between FairVote and its partner organization, FairVote Action. FairVote's long-term goals are to normalize ranked choice voting (RCV) as the most common

way of holding elections in the United States and have Congress enact the Fair Representation Act (FRA) to establish multi-member districts with ranked choice voting for U.S. House of Representatives elections. RCV provides voters with greater choice and a stronger voice and enables representative outcomes in crowded candidate fields. The FRA will make the electoral process more proportional and representative of the diversity of opinions within the electorate and create positive incentives for governance and constituent engagement.

FairVote's current strategy (2020-2024) creates conditions toward these goals through three complementary change pathways that are grounded in winning changes from within the system – typically defined by legislative adoption rather than ballot initiatives.

1. Normalize RCV through passing and catalyzing local, state, and federal legislation to implement forms of RCV. Promote the use of RCV in party primaries and conventions, earn support for RCV in party platforms, and build support among partners.
2. Build coalitions of various constituency groups, members of Congress, and NGOs that see RCV and, ultimately, the FRA in their self-interest. Organize thought leaders and influencers to make the case that RCV and the FRA are also in the public interest.
3. Contribute to enabling conditions by fostering cohesion in the RCV movement, increasing funding for the RCV movement, and earning positive media narratives.

The 2020-2024 plan is ambitious and was developed through extensive consultations with stakeholders, including the FairVote Board, in 2020. This plan was a major shift from FairVote's previous more diffuse strategies necessitating significant institutional strengthening for effective implementation. We are in the third year of implementation and have made significant progress in achieving our program and operational objectives. As we approach the conclusion of the current plan, we are initiating this strategy planning process to guide our work in 2025 and beyond.

## **Strategy Planning Process and Timeline**

Our reform work is complex and requires flexibility to adjust to contextual changes. While we have provided a detailed process below, we aim for adaptability to events and shifts in our operating environment during the planning process. Similarly, we aim to build adaptability into the strategic plan by including scenarios, forks, piloting needs, and moments to revisit after a year of implementation and periodically after that.

A leadership steering committee, inclusive of FV leadership and designated Board members, will provide guidance, oversight, and support, including building consensus on strategic options and advising the Board of Directors - the final decision-maker - on the strategic plan.

**Principles:** The process will follow four guiding principles as below.

- **Participation and inclusion:** Even while recognizing that final strategic plan decisions must be made by the Board of Directors as advised by the leadership steering committee, engaging all staff levels and stakeholders in the strategy planning process is essential to ensure the inclusion of diverse perspectives, shared understanding, and ownership. This can be achieved through collective interpretation of evidence, using staff working groups, deliberations with stakeholders, and documenting the rationale when the steering committee deviates from or adopts the recommendations by working groups and stakeholders.
- **Collaboration, capacity, and continuity:** Close collaboration among the consultant(s), the PMEL Team, the FV CEO, and the steering committee is important to create capacity and ensure continuity. This will ensure the formulated strategy is widely understood, effectively operationalized, and implemented.
- **Evidence:** Evidence-based decisions are central to the process. Decisions informed by a range of evidence, such as current strategy implementation review, political economy analysis of various reforms, and field scan, will ensure the strategy is grounded in data and real-world context.
- **Accessibility:** Creating clear language and products is important to enable meaningful engagement of the stakeholders in the process but also to ensure easy understanding of the strategic plan by implementers and communicators.

**Phases:** The planning process includes five phases - Preparatory, Analysis, Formulation, Operational, and Implementation. The following outline presents each phase with a timeline, decision points, key questions, and the consultants' role. Note that this is based on our current understanding and may be adapted based on additional feedback and emerging needs:

1. **Preparatory phase (Now - June 2023)** This includes collectively defining the scope and process with staff and the Board, establishing a steering committee, hiring, and being on the same page with the consultant(s).
  - **Goal:** By the end of this phase, we will have
    - A clear plan in place with a shared understanding of the process, roles, and timeline among the consultant(s), FV leadership, staff, and the Board.
    - A clear plan for the analysis phase, including an analytical framework (focus, questions, hypotheses that need testing, data collection, and collective interpretation), timeline, and roles and responsibilities.
    - A communication plan for internal and external stakeholders, including cadence and content, to keep all stakeholders updated with key milestones.

- **Decision points:**
  - consultant(s) hiring in May in the wake of Board and staff feedback on the process in April
  - Formation of the Steering Committee in May
  - Process and timeline, including evidence needed and who and how of involving stakeholders, finalized by mid-June
  
- **Key questions to address in this phase:**
  - What is the optimal degree of involvement for each of FV's internal stakeholders (Board, leadership, and staff) to capitalize on their role, strengths, and foster stronger ownership? How will they be involved?
  - What is the optimal degree of involvement for each of FV's external stakeholders (Donors, close allies/partners, key actors in the field) to capitalize on their role, strengths, and future alliances for our vision? How will they be involved in the analysis and formulation phase? This can include exploring the potential for some degree of joint field-level strategy development with other key players in the field.
  - To what extent should the strategy planning process explicitly bring in diverse perspectives, including people from across the political spectrum, major political parties, people with experience in different regions of the country, gender, race, demographic, and education?
  
- **consultants' role:** Building on what has already been clarified, the consultant(s) will seek further input from staff and the Board and generate a detailed plan in close collaboration with the CEO and Director of Strategy and Learning (DSL).
  
- 2. **Analysis phase (July - Mid-October 2023):** This includes generating internal and external evidence, with internal including current strategy evaluation and external including strengthening the evidence on the politics of passing the Fair Representation Act nationally and winning RCV for state and local elections across both Republican and Democratic states, among other necessary analyses.

The strategy evaluation will focus on the criteria such as effectiveness, efficiency, impact, coherence, sustainability, and relevance to inform the strategy. The full scope of the evaluation will be fleshed out with the consultant(s), but for planning purposes, note the following:

- Most primary data on progress is already collected and analyzed. Lessons and challenges are documented and are largely based on internal perspectives.
- FV's existing data generally answers questions in the "Are we doing things right?" category and less so in the "Are we doing the right things?" category.

This means the consultant(s) will collect additional data to help form a complete picture and answer the questions on external coherence, sustainability, and relevance.

Concerning external evidence, some data and analyses already exist; the external evidence can include the following but is not limited to.

- The politics of passing the Fair Representation Act: Recent analysis exists but can be updated further.
- Updating our understanding of the politics of ranked choice voting
- Overall political environment and implications of rising partisan polarization
- FairVote's core competencies, role, vis-a-vis other actors' roles and competencies
- Additional entry points, policies, problems, and stakeholders
- Relevant existing evidence from the field

This phase will draw on participatory approaches, including generating and interpreting data, evidence, and implications. It will include in-person deliberations with two external groups: i) Groups and individuals important for the RCV movement and FRA, including donors, ii) FV partners and close allies. Data collection can occur in July through September, and interpreting evidence, implications, and deliberations can occur through September and mid-October.

- **Goal:** By the end of this phase, FV's internal stakeholders will have a comprehensive understanding of where we are vis-a-vis where we want to go, challenges, opportunities, and implications.
- **Decision points:**
  - Implications of evidence on current strategy implementation
  - Confirmation of the definition of our long-term goals and realistic timelines for achieving them
  - Implications of evidence on the reforms and processes through which we are seeking reforms
  - Scenarios and options to bring into the formulation stage
- **Questions to address:**
  - Should we plan as if resources will be available no matter what level of growth that might entail?
  - Should our strategy include scenarios and potential forks to guide adjustments based on political events and progress during the implementation?

- What does evidence suggest about the appropriate level of incorporation of diversity across the political spectrum, major political parties, geographical regions, gender, race, education, and other demographics in our strategy?
  - What does the evidence and our learning to date suggest about where FV can play an effective direct role in advancing strategic goals vs. where it makes sense to defer to or support the work of others indirectly and/or via regranting?
- **Consultants' role:** Building on the data and analysis done by the PMEL team, undertake the participatory strategy evaluation. Fill in evidence gaps for existing political economy analysis for our relevant reforms. Undertake additional evidence gathering through constructive processes as necessary. Facilitate i) Deliberations with allies, partners, and key actors in the field; ii) Participatory evidence interpretation and implications with staff, leadership, and the board.
- 3. **Formulation Phase (Mid-October 2023 - January/February 2024):** This is projected to be a particularly time-intensive period in the process that will include revising of the time frame for FV's goals, articulation of conditions (outcomes) that we will contribute to during the strategy period, and determining high-level assumptions. Again, this will be done through participatory processes and may include partners and allies. With the support from the consultant(s), the steering committee will build consensus and draft the proposal for the full Board to discuss in January/February 2024. Upon the Board's deliberations, revisions will be made in February 2024.
- **Goal:** Formulate a high-level strategy including scenarios and forks (Theory of Change) and the opportunity to revisit the strategy after the first year of implementation and periodically across the strategy timeline. Ensure shared understanding of the ToC among all leadership levels, staff, and core partners.
- **Decision points:**
  - Evaluate options/scenarios
  - Evaluate the scale needed for impact
  - Choose best option(s)
- **Questions to address:**
  - Should we aim to clarify the scale of efforts needed by FV to achieve its long-term goals?
  - How might we engage critical external stakeholders (e.g., key allies, partners, donors) in the formulation stage to ensure cohesion?

- **Consultants' role:** Facilitate the process in a way that reconciles differing opinions, promotes evidence-based decision-making, and fosters shared understanding. Ensure the process incorporates meaningful feedback from people associated with both major political parties. Prepare materials for discussion, extract insights from conversations, participate in drafting strategic plan language, and guide FairVote's internal stakeholders and external stakeholders as appropriate toward consensus on the final strategy.
4. **Operationalization phase (February - August 2024):** The operational phase will include the following with decision points with an asterisk.
- Board approval (Feb. 2024)\*
  - Socialization of the strategy with donors and other stakeholders by April 2024
  - Seeking initial funding commitments, with the greatest focus on funding, starting in June 2024 and accelerating in the fall of 2024 after operationalizing plans are complete
  - Develop program-specific theories of action, operational planning, and budgeting consistent with the new strategy between February and July 2024)\*
  - Budgeting for 2025 based on plans (August - October 2024)
  - Preparing and shifting our structure and processes as necessary

The **consultants' role** will be limited to preparing input for presentations to the Board and producing final documents for audiences including donors, FV staff, partners/allies. **FV's PMEL team, in collaboration with program and operation leads,** will take forward the program and operational planning component, whereas the **CEO and Development lead** will begin socialization of the strategy.

5. **Implementation Phase (2025):** We will be in a new strategy phase come January 2025.

## Scope of Work

In close collaboration with the FV CEO, Strategy and Learning Director, and steering committee, the consultant(s) will do the following.

- Refine the strategy planning process, including key moments, stakeholders, deliverables, and timetables for various phases.
- Ensure that the revised process is evidence-based, participatory, and inclusive. Clearly articulate how staff, leadership, and relevant stakeholders will be involved.
- Undertake a participatory forward-looking evaluation of the current strategy.
- Undertake evidence review; update political economy analysis for various reforms.
- Facilitate virtual and in-person deliberations with external and internal stakeholders

during the analysis and formulation phase.

- Facilitate the formulation of a high-level strategy that reflects FairVote's mission and values, a realistic timeframe for our long-term goals, measurable outcomes and conditions that our current strategy will put in place, key assumptions, and change pathways with potential forks and our role (Overall Theory of Change).
- Write up the strategy document for different audiences: i) FV - to guide FV's planning and implementation, ii) donors, and iii) partners for greater collaboration

In addition, we expect the consultant(s) to push FV to think 'outside the box' by helping us explore bold changes in what and how we do things.

#### **The consultants' main deliverables include:**

- Refine the strategy planning process with additional staff, leadership, and the Board input by mid-June 2023.
- Develop an analytical framework including data gathering, analysis, collective interpretation, and deliberation plan by June 2023.
- Interpret evidence and implications through participatory and inclusive processes by mid-October 2023.
- Facilitate the formulation stage of the strategy with the articulation of the overall strategy and Theory of Change by January/February 2024.
- Produce write-ups of the strategy document by January/February 2024.
- Engage in adjustments after full Board involvement in January/February 2024.

### **Role, Support, and Oversight**

- The consultants' role is to act as the backbone of the process enabling FairVote to make the right decisions. The consultant(s) will closely collaborate with the CEO (FV principal strategist) and Strategy and Learning Director on the overall process. Also, note that the CEO will be on sabbatical from June 15 to November 1 and his availability is limited to a few days in July and August. During this period, the acting CEO will provide oversight, support, and guidance as necessary.
- FV Strategy and Learning Director will coordinate the overall process with oversight by the CEO and the steering committee and ensure that the process adheres to key principles and timelines and generates the outcomes it is designed to.
- The steering committee will provide regular oversight, support, and guidance to ensure the success of the strategy process.

### **Budget and Relative Levels of Efforts**

- \$75,000 - \$110,000 consultant(s) compensation. Note that there is some room to adjust the compensation for a convincing rationale.
- Cost for Travel and in-person gatherings will be covered by FV.
- The consultants' work will be targeted and relatively less intensive between June and September as compared to October through January. The work will also be very light touch in February 2024.



## Minimum Qualification and Application Process

A consultant(s) with the following qualification can apply.

- Demonstrated experience undertaking strategy evaluation and strategy development for nationally ambitious change work
- Demonstrated experience in integrating diverse perspectives and participatory processes
- Strong facilitation skills, including consensus building and the ability to navigate group dynamics
- Familiarity with political economy analysis or “Thinking and Working Politically” approaches

Your application should consist of a resume and cover letter and should not be more than three to five pages (excluding attachments). The application should:

- Demonstrate how you meet the qualifications
- Suggest an alternative process to strategy planning based on what you understood from above or suggest considerations to improve the above-proposed approach
- Suggest the need for a larger budget than proposed if you see it as essential to FV’s success
- Explain the consultants’ time allocation to various phases of the process
- Attach examples of previous evaluation and strategy work

You may request a copy of FV’s strategic plan if useful. **Email your application to Suvarna Hulawale at [shulawale@fairvote.org](mailto:shulawale@fairvote.org) by May 16, 2023.** Applications will be reviewed on a rolling basis with the goal of making decisions within two weeks of the closing date.