



Voter Assist Terminal (VAT) & Accessibility Best Practices for Michigan Election Clerks

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What is a Voter Assist Terminal (VAT)?

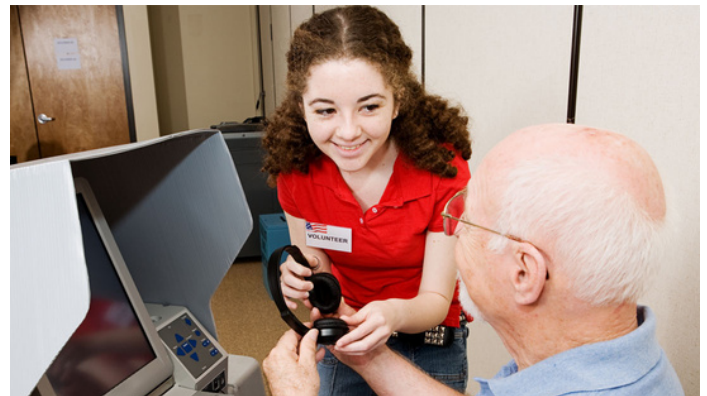
Every polling place in the United States is required to have an accessible voting machine. Here in Michigan, they are called Voter Assist Terminals, or VATs. A Voter Assist Terminal (VAT) is an accessible, touch-screen device available for voters to mark and print their ballots in Michigan elections.¹ The printed ballot is then fed into a tabulator to be counted. The Help America Vote Act (HAVA) of 2002 requires all polling places for federal elections to have an accessible voting system of this sort; Michigan also requires VAT availability in non-federal elections.²

Who can use the VAT?

The VAT is available for all voters, whether they identify as disabled or not. Voters who may benefit from viewing ballots with larger text, hearing their ballot options read out loud, tapping a touch screen versus manually coloring in a circle, accessing one question at a time, being alerted if they vote for too many or too few options, or who use an assistive device may find the VAT especially helpful.

Why is it important to have a VAT available?

In Michigan, over 2.3 million adults—29% of voting-age people—have a disability.³ The VAT is important to ensure that all voters have a private, independent, accessible option to mark their ballot in person. The VAT removes access barriers for voters with disabilities and allows all voters to participate in the democratic process.



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What can I do to feel more comfortable with VATs?

In partnership with [Detroit Disability Power](#), we conducted interviews with election clerks at five Michigan municipalities to compile a series of best practices for making sure you and your election workers feel confident assisting voters in using the VAT. Follow these simple tips to ensure your team is ready to conduct accessible elections!

What should poll workers say to voters about VATs?

“Do you want to vote using a hand-marked paper ballot or the voting machine? The voter assist terminal, or VAT, is like a fancy pen. It is an accessible ballot-marking and printing device with a touch screen. It has options to enlarge text, vote one question at a time, plug in an assistive device, or read the text out loud to you. The best part about the VAT is that it's nearly impossible to make a mistake!

For example, you can't select more options than you are supposed to for each section. Once you finish selecting your options, the VAT prints out your ballot, and you can check it for accuracy before you place it in the tabulator, just like a hand-marked paper ballot."

Best Practices from Michigan Election Clerks

Try the VAT before election day.

- **Election workers:** Allow election workers time to try the VAT under different conditions, such as with their eyes open and closed, using the touch screen, and using the handheld controller.
- **Voters:** Educate voters on what VATs are and who can/should use them, and provide opportunities for voters to gain hands-on experience. These could include:
 - **Social media:** Post infographics or short videos.
 - **Clerk's election website:** Display VAT option on a banner or other prominent location.
 - **Demonstrations:** Provide demos for voting and disability advocacy groups before elections.
 - **Opportunities for hands-on experience:** Have VATs available for voters to try at libraries, community centers and other public spaces.

Set up your VAT for success on election day.

- Add colored tape to differentiate cords for easy setup.
- Make sure the VAT is plugged in and set up before polls open on election day.
- Display the VAT more prominently (while still maintaining secrecy of voting, guidelines about space for wheelchairs, etc) on election day.
- Set defaults to large font size and high contrast.

Inform voters of the option to use the VAT.

- Inform voters of the option to use the VAT whether they appear to be disabled or not (not all disabilities are visible). This will help normalize the VAT and prevent concerns around voter anonymity (i.e., if only a few people use the VAT, then it's more obvious who voted with the VAT-generated ballots).
- Let people know that even though they are voting on a touchscreen, a ballot will be printed to check for accuracy before placing it in the tabulator.

Offer backup support for election workers on election day.

- Be physically present at the polling location to assist workers or voters with VAT issues.
- Ensure there are two election workers assisting someone with the VAT—ideally people from different parties.

Endnotes

1. "What Are Voter Assist Terminals? – Charter Township of Kalamazoo, MI," Charter Township of Kalamazoo, MI, March 11, 2022, <https://www.ktwp.org/question/what-are-voter-assist-terminals/#/city/answers/election-faqs/what-are-voter-assist-terminals>.
2. "Poll Audits | Ensure Voting Accessibility Today — Detroit Disability Power," Detroit Disability Power, April 9, 2026, <https://www.detroitdisabilitypower.org/pollaudits>.
3. Y. Tian, et al., "Disability and Race/Ethnicity among Michigan Adults," *Michigan BRFSS Surveillance Brief* 12, no. 1 (2021). https://www.michigan.gov/-/media/Project/Websites/mdhhs/Folder4/Folder30/Folder3/Folder130/Folder2/Folder230/Folder1/Folder330/MiBRFSS_Disability_Newsletter.pdf?rev=a7b76ab1ff60402fae6aef1f558aofd2