



Voting Equipment Replacement Overview 2025

Summary

Dakota County’s voting equipment is quickly becoming outdated, leading to challenges in reliability and efficiency. As election standards evolve and voter expectations increase, upgrading to the next generation of voting equipment is critical to ensure trust in the electoral process, compliance with regulations, ease of use, and accessibility for all voters.

Background

Current State of Equipment

The County’s voting equipment was deployed in 2015. With proactive care and preventive maintenance, ballot tabulators have been successfully used in over 40 elections. Users are seeing slower processing times and a higher level of ongoing maintenance. Additionally, the accessible voting hardware has already reached the end of its life and does not efficiently or dependably support voters with disabilities.

Growth in Population and Equipment Use

Dakota County’s current voting equipment was originally deployed in 2015 and the number of eligible voters in our county has increased over 10 percent since that time. Equipment was projected to be used 2-3 times each year but at least 4 elections have been conducted each year since 2019. Rigorous testing requirements demand that each ballot is scanned multiple times to check for accuracy and reliability, both in preliminary and public accuracy testing.

Proposed Solution

Invest in new, state-of-the-art voting equipment that:

1. **Enhances Security:** Incorporates advanced encryption and other features to prevent tampering.
 2. **Improves Accessibility:** Meets ADA standards and provides equitable access for voters with disabilities.
 3. **Increases Efficiency and Voter Trust:** Reduces wait times, streamlines ballot processing, and minimizes potential for errors. Enhances overall trust in the electoral process.
 4. **Supports Scalability:** Accommodates future growth in voter participation.
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Risks of Inaction

Outdated voting equipment poses risks to the integrity and efficiency of our elections. Delays and equipment malfunctions frustrate voters and can lead to longer lines, potentially disenfranchising voters. Repairing outdated equipment is increasingly expensive, laborious, and less cost-effective over time. Costs are increasing as maintenance and repairs will continue to rise as equipment ages. Additionally, security vulnerabilities and inefficiencies may erode public confidence in elections.

Equipment Certification Process

Voting equipment certification begins with the U.S. Election Assistance Commission (EAC), through a painstaking application, testing, and review process. In Minnesota, pursuant to Minn. Stat. § 206.57, an electronic voting system must be certified by the Minnesota Secretary of State and tested by a testing authority accredited by the EAC or tested by a federal agency (i.e. the EAC) pursuant to the Voluntary Voting Systems Guidelines (VVSG). This limits the equipment that is available for use to those that have been tested and/or certified by the State.

As of April 2025, there are three vendors which have equipment approved for use in Minnesota: Dominion Voting Systems, Hart InterCivic, and Election Systems & Software (ES&S). The breakdown of usage among counties is listed below:

- ❖ Dominion Voting Systems: Aitkin, Crow Wing, Dakota, Mahnomen, Scott, and Sherburne
 - ❖ Hart InterCivic: Big Stone, Chisago, and Ramsey
 - ❖ ES&S: Anoka, Blue Earth, Hennepin, Olmsted, Rice, Washington, and all other MN Counties
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Cost-Share Plan

This project is estimated to cost \$5 million, which will include the initial equipment purchase (e.g., tabulators, software, peripherals) and training for staff. In previous voting equipment purchases, Dakota County assumed 50% of the cost, while city and township partners assumed the remaining 50%. Recent cost share agreements for services and poll pad equipment have included school districts in the cost share. This cost-share agreement shall be structured so that Dakota County would assume 65% of the cost, city and township partners would assume 30% of the costs, and school districts would assume 5% of the costs.

In previous election cost-share agreements, Dakota County has allowed partners to split up-front costs into multiple years to reduce the immediate budget impact. We will allow our municipal partners the same flexibility in this agreement, instituting a five-year payment structure with payments beginning in 2027.

Timeline

1. Create cost-share agreement with municipal partners (April-May 2025)
 2. Conduct transparent, collaborative RFP process (April – October 2025)
 3. Deploy/ implement equipment and train County staff, clerks, and election judges (Jan – July 2026)
 4. Utilize equipment for August 11, 2026 State Primary Election
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Conclusion

Investing in modern voting equipment is not just a financial decision but a commitment to maintaining the integrity and trustworthiness of our democratic process. This project will help ensure secure, efficient, and accessible elections for all voters in our jurisdiction.