

Merced County is home to a community of voters with specific needs, some of whom are deaf and hard of hearing, like many other areas of the United States. In an effort to make the voting process accessible and inclusive to all of our voters, Merced County researched and purchased a system to allow American Sign Language interpreters to be called on demand at polling places. We fondly refer to our new system as the “MVP.” MVP is short for Multilingual Virtual Poll Worker. The system is an app based program that is downloaded on an iPad, and gives us access to interpreters for over 200 languages. The familiarity of an iPad mixed with an app based program has made the integration of this device into our office and polls absolutely seamless. One touch access connects hearing impaired voters with an American Sign Language interpreter. This system allows deaf and hard of hearing voters of the county to immediately communicate with the poll worker and easily participate in the voting process. The interpreter provides instructions and information to ensure clarity of communication during the voting process.

In addition to better serving our voters, an encouraging aspect of purchasing the MVP system was that it was fully reimbursed. Under the HAVA Polling Place Accessibility Training Program Section C.1.3, we are able to provide these services without adding additional costs to our department. The impact of the MVP has even extended beyond assisting voters. We are able to lend our MVP’s to other departments within Merced County so that they can also assist community members who speak different languages.

When we first received our MVP’s we conducted live demonstrations for our Language Accessibility Advisory Committee (LAAC) and Voting Accessibility Advisory Committee (VAAC). Committee members agreed that the MVP’s would serve Merced voters in an exceptional way. Now that we have been able to utilize them for a year, we know firsthand the positive impact that the MVP has made and look forward to making them available to Merced County voters in future elections!