

## **The Michigan Qualified Voter File: A Brief Introduction**

A new era in the administration of elections has been opened in Michigan through the realization of the state's Qualified Voter File (QVF) project. While the QVF project was originally conceived as a response to the inefficiencies of the state's highly decentralized voter registration system (Michigan's voter registration files are managed by over 1,700 local officials), the implementation of the National Voter Registration Act (NVRA) greatly heightened the need for such an initiative. Mandated under Public Act 441 of 1994 and placed into operation for the 1998 election cycle, the QVF links election officials throughout the state to a fully automated, interactive statewide voter registration database to achieve a wide variety of significant advantages including:

- The elimination of all duplicate voter registration records in the system.
- The streamlining of the state's voter registration cancellation process.
- The elimination of time consuming record maintenance activities.
- The elimination of registration forwarding errors and duplicative tasks.
- Sizable cost gains on the local level.

The QVF was populated with every registered elector appearing in the Department of State's driver license/personal identification card file and the voter registration files held by the state's city and township clerks. Data on the voters is maintained on a UNIX based computer located in Lansing.

Beyond the voter registration file management functions of the QVF, the system offers Michigan's election officials a full array of election management features including components created to assist with absent voter ballot processing; petition and candidate tracking; election planning; and election inspector tracking. The election management components, designed in consultation with a special task force of county and local officials, have introduced a new level of convenience to the administration of elections in Michigan. The election management components have also worked to standardize many of the election related forms and procedures employed throughout the state.

All counties, cities and townships play a role in the QVF program and all will enjoy ongoing benefits through the project's implementation. Michigan's 83 county clerks and the clerks of all local jurisdictions with a voting age population over 5,000 were provided with the hardware and

software needed to establish a direct link with the QVF. Smaller cities and townships (i.e., those with a voting age population under 5,000) have either purchased the hardware and software needed for a direct link with the QVF or access the QVF through the local county clerk's office. In addition, jurisdictions with a voting age population under 5,000 were reimbursed for their assistance with the data validation process. (Each jurisdiction eligible for the reimbursement program received \$.45 multiplied by the jurisdiction's voting age population.)

**Michigan's Qualified Voter File System:  
Transmitting Voter Registration Data to Local Clerks  
Instantly and Efficiently**

176 Secretary of State Branch Offices electronically enter all "motor/voter" voter registration transactions (approximately 85% of all voter registration transactions in state). The electronic data is transferred daily and is immediately available to the local clerks. The hard copy voter registration application form signed by the voter is forwarded by mail within a week.

County, city and township clerks electronically enter all other voter registration transactions such as registrations submitted by mail or in person at the clerk's office.



Qualified Voter File  
6.7 million voter  
registration  
records

83 counties and 363 cities and townships (VAP > 5,000) online (approximately 80% of Michigan's voting age population).



1,151 cities and townships (VAP < 5,000) share QVF resources available at county level (approximately 20% of Michigan's voting age population).

## Additional Details

### **QVF System Components**

The QVF System comprises three primary components:

***Lansing file server:*** The heart of the QVF system is the file server located in Lansing, the state capitol. The file server holds the voter registration database for the entire state. It also holds all system software (QVF application software and Oracle database software). The file server exchanges information with the driver file database (new registrations originating in branch offices) through a series of “server processes” (automated computer programs). The file server exchanges information with local system users through the replication process.

***County/Local QVF installations:*** All of Michigan’s 83 counties and 236 of Michigan’s largest cities and townships (voting age population over 5,000) were provided with QVF installations at state expense. Ninety-four additional cities and townships opted to purchase QVF installations at their own expense. A total of 545 PC’s and 512 printers are employed by the 413 counties and local jurisdictions on-line with the QVF server in Lansing. (Multiple PC’s and printers are employed by the state’s major cities.)

***Telecommunications network:*** The QVF system uses the Internet as its telecommunications network. Each QVF jurisdiction was provided with an Internet account (Merit is the Internet provider) and Internet software (Netscape Communicator) which includes e-mail and web searching capabilities. To initiate the replication process, the local QVF users simply establish an Internet connection. Replication updates the Lansing server with new information provided by the local jurisdiction and updates the local jurisdiction with new information provided by the file server (usually branch office transactions). An average replication takes 20-60 minutes and is generally initiated two or three times per week.

### **QVF Data**

The QVF is administered through the Department of State’s Qualified Voter File Division. The Qualified Voter File Division is organized under the Department’s Bureau of Elections. The staff members employed with the Qualified Voter Division work in four general areas:

***Data entry:*** The data entry staff are responsible for entering data received from Michigan’s city and township clerks into the QVF database as needed to build the QVF file. The data entry staff is also responsible for entering “problem records” received from the branch offices.

***Data reconciliation:*** The data processing staff is in the final phase of completing the data reconciliation processes which had to be accomplished to implement the QVF. Over 1,500 cities and townships submitted voter registration records to the state for inclusion in the QVF database.

Those records submitted electronically were matched against the driver file. Matching discrepancies (generally address or birth date conflicts) are resolved during this procedure. ***Street index reconciliation:*** The QVF street index ensures that each voter is assigned to his or her proper precinct and voting districts. If there is not a street index entry for a voter's address, an error report is created. The data processing staff adds or changes street index entries to ensure that any errors are corrected. While the bulk of this work has taken place during the data reconciliation process, this will be an ongoing function of the Qualified Voter File Division.

### **QVF Help Desk**

The Qualified Voter File Division maintains a Help Desk to assist the county and local clerks throughout the state with any questions they have regarding the operation of the QVF. The Help Desk offers assistance in the following areas:

***Replications:*** The replication process involves the transfer of data between the QVF server in Lansing and the remote QVF installations throughout the state. If there is a problem with the replication process, it generally stems from a user error, an equipment failure or a network failure. The Help Desk is able to trace such problems, find the source and offer corrective measures.

***Equipment problems:*** The Help Desk troubleshoots all equipment related problems. In some cases, a contract vendor is sent to the site. In other cases, the Help Desk staff members pick up the equipment for in-house problem solving.

***Training:*** The Help Desk provides training and on-site consultations to QVF users throughout the state. The Help Desk is also responsible for updating all user guides and training materials.

***Software support:*** The Help Desk offers QVF users advice and instruction on using the QVF software and documents requests for QVF software enhancements. The majority of all inquiries received by the Help Desk involve questions over the operation and functions of the QVF software.

<b>Additional Information</b>
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Further information on Michigan's Qualified Voter File project can be obtained by contacting the Department of State's Bureau of Elections.

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