



National TA Center for Voting and Cognitive Access

Guide for Poll Workers

Besides having physical access to the polls, voters need to be able to understand the voting process and how to cast their ballots. A poll worker is like a travel agent who guides the voter through the process.



❖ Use words and pictures or symbols that guide voters through each step

- Getting into and around the polling place
- Signing up to vote
- Casting a ballot
- Restrooms, elevators, accessible parking and other important places



❖ Provide important information

- When voters call, remind them to bring their identification cards.
- If a voter isn't sure of his or her voting district or precinct, look it up.
- When you meet a voter who may need support, first say hello, give your name and explain that you are available to assist with

activities like getting around the polls, using the voting machine or reading. Invite the voter to ask for assistance, as desired.

- Explain how the voter can get information in alternative formats, such as Braille, large print or pictures.
- Explain the steps in voting and point to the different areas. For example, say, "Welcome to the polling place. My name is _____. The first thing you need to do is sign-in over there (point to the area)."
- If a voter does not write, say, "It's okay to sign your name in whatever way you do it."
- If you cannot confirm that a person is eligible to vote, always offer a provisional ballot. Follow-up to determine whether the person's ballot can be counted.



❖ **Communicate clearly and respectfully**

- Use straightforward language – common words that most people understand. If you need to use a technical word, explain what it means. For example, “precinct” means the area where you live.
- Always respect the voter by being polite and respectful. Do not patronize or treat the voter like a child.

- Remember that just because someone has difficulty speaking, it doesn’t mean the person cannot understand. Always assume the voter will understand if you can find effective ways to communicate.
- Give the voter plenty of time to communicate and go to a quiet place, if necessary.
- Ask the voter to tell or show you the best ways to communicate.
- Make a set of pictures of the parts of voting that you and the voter can point to as you communicate.
- Thank the voter for being patient while you learn.



❖ **Appropriately involve people who accompany the voter**

- Speak to and look at the voter, not the companion.
- If the companion speaks for the voter, confirm what is said with the voter.
- Do not assume that a companion will give all the assistance a voter needs. It is possible the companion just gave the voter a ride or the

voter would prefer to have support from a poll worker. The companion also may not understand the voting process.

- If a companion says she will help the voter, politely explain to the voter that you also are available to assist and confirm what the voter would like to do.
- If the voter says the companion will assist, say “That’s fine and, if either of you need any assistance, feel free to ask me.”

YOU CAN MAKE THE VOTING EXPERIENCE A POSITIVE ONE!

This guide was funded, in part, by the Administration on Developmental Disabilities. For more information about the National TA Center for Voting and Cognitive Access, contact Nancy Ward (nward@thedesk.info) or Hannah Bowen (powersl@pdx.edu), PO Box 751/RRI, Portland State University, Portland, Oregon 97207.