

Always ask the person how you may best assist her or him.

Take the attitude that you will do everything reasonably possible to assist this voter.



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Communication with Voters with Disabilities:



Poll Workers Guide

Communication with Voters with Disabilities



Even Poll
Workers who feel
comfortable with
individuals who
have disabilities

may lack information about the effect of different disabilities. While you cannot be an expert on all disabilities, the following guidelines can be used to make communication go more smoothly.

Voters with Cognitive Impairments



1. Before speaking, make sure you have the person's attention. Avoid long, involved statements and unnecessary abstraction.
2. Be patient, allow the individual to find a word even if it appears the person is struggling.
3. About body language: flat affect may not indicate depression; difficulty focusing may not indicate substance abuse.
4. Difficulty communicating does not necessarily indicate less intelligence than average.



Voters with Mobility Impairments

1. Do not presume that s/he needs assistance. An individual who uses a wheelchair or a cane will not normally require your help to push him or her into an area.
2. Always ask first, while facing the person, if assistance is needed. Never come up behind a person who uses a wheelchair, crutches or cane and grab or push them. Never take the door out of a person's hand to assist them in operating it, as they may be using the door for balance or leverage.
3. When addressing a person who uses a wheelchair, position yourself to speak to him or her at his or her level.



Voters with Hearing Impairments

1. When using a sign language interpreter, speak to the person with the hearing impairment, not the interpreter.
2. In the absence of an interpreter, you may be able to use notes, passed back and forth. Keep language simple. (First language may not be English)
3. If the person with the hearing impairment is able and willing to speech-read, be sure to maintain eye contact, use facial expression and body language to illustrate what you are saying. Speak slowly, do not chew gum or keep looking away from the individual.
4. Shouting is of no benefit. Some may prefer that you speak to one side or other; others may require a setting with little or no background noise.
5. Many people use more than one of these communication modalities. Ask about preferences, type of interpretation preferred (ASL, signed exact English).



Voters with Vision Impairments

1. Provide clear oral directions. Include information that orients the individual to the entrance and immediate layout of the facility.
2. Before approaching an individual, ask if she or he needs any assistance in following you. If so, how does she or he prefer to receive that assistance. Often, an individual will wish to take your arm at the elbow with you slightly in the lead.
3. In moving or directing a person to a voting area, describe the path of travel and orient the person to the space.
4. Before interacting with a guide dog, or any other service dog, consult the owner.
5. Shouting is inappropriate. Words such as “look” and “see” can be used.



Voters with Speech Impairments

1. If you cannot understand the person’s response, ask him or her to repeat himself or herself.
2. You may lose valuable information if you do not follow-up on answers that are confusing or that don’t make sense to you.
3. Relax while listening. Your ears will adjust more quickly to the sound of the applicant’s speech patterns.