

COMMON VOTING SCENARIOS & SOLUTIONS



Every eligible voter should be able to cast a ballot. As a poll worker, the power is in your hands to make sure that happens. That's a big responsibility, but don't worry, you've got this!

Before you get to the polls, you'll have an official training session with your elections office, where they'll prepare you to resolve the most common scenarios you could face. Here are some common voting scenarios to consider and ask about during your training. These scenarios are offered for informational purposes only to help you consider what kinds of scenarios you might face as a poll worker and to prepare you to ask questions at your official training or of local officials. Voting laws vary from state to state; information provided here does not replace local and/or state guidance you receive in your official training.

SCENARIO

A voter shows up, but their name is not on the voter list.

Solution → If a voter's name isn't on the voter list, a supervisor can help to clear up the confusion. If there's still an issue, most states allow a voter to cast a provisional or affidavit ballot that will get counted once their information is verified. Ask about this process in your official training.

SCENARIO

A voter shows up at the wrong polling location.

Solution → If a voter is at the wrong polling location, direct them to the correct location based on the address they used when they registered to vote. This can often happen when polling locations have moved. Make sure to ask your local elections office where you can look up a voter's polling location, particularly when a last-minute change has occurred.

SCENARIO

A voter forgot to bring the required ID, or does not have the required ID
(NOTE: not all states require ID to vote).

Solution → If a voter didn't bring the required ID to vote (or doesn't have it), check if your state has a process for voters to confirm their identity in another way. If needed, encourage the voter to get their ID, and then come back to cast their ballot ASAP before polls close. Know the rules to cast a provisional or affidavit ballot if the voter does not have any ID or if time does not permit. Ask about this process in your official training.

SCENARIO

A voter requested a vote-by-mail ballot or absentee ballot, but never got one.

Solution → Your state has a process for this situation. Depending on the circumstance, the process will be different. Make sure you ask about vote-by-mail rules during your training, and know who to ask or call if this issue arises during your shift.

SCENARIO

There's a broken voting machine.

Solution → If there are technical problems like a broken voting machine, immediately call the technical support number provided during your official training. There are likely additional machines on site, a process for them to be delivered, or backup resources. One of your most important jobs as a poll worker is to ensure that an issue like this doesn't create a long line or cause someone to leave without casting their ballot. Make sure voters know that you are addressing the situation, and thank them for their patience as you work to resolve the issue. Ask about this process in your official training.

SCENARIO

A voter needs support in a language you don't speak, or wants to vote in a language other than English.

Solution → Some voters may benefit from assistance in another language. Find out if there are bilingual poll workers working with you, or what resources and support your local elections office provides for commonly used languages in your area. Some areas may have bilingual materials or resources or hotlines if no bilingual poll workers are on site.

SCENARIO

A voter requests assistance voting from a person they bring with them - or they want you to provide assistance.

Solution → Voters with disabilities have a right to assistance from a person of their choosing. Remember that even if a voter's disability is not visible or obvious to you, they are entitled to this assistance if they ask for it. During your poll worker training, ask what kind of assistance you're able to provide a voter with a disability who requests your help. There may be special equipment to help voters with disabilities cast their ballot, so ask about that during your training as well.

These are just some of the common scenarios that could come up at the polls. Make sure you ask questions and read any materials provided at your training so you can have an easy and successful day!