

PROBLEM SOLVING AT THE POLLS



As a poll worker, you get to help ensure that all voters have a smooth, positive voting experience at your polling place. And part of this is problem-solving!

Throughout Election Day, some issues may arise that need your help to keep things running smoothly. You can prepare for these situations by (1) knowing what to do, and (2) knowing how to stay calm so others do the same. Think of your role as providing best-in-class customer service: as a poll worker, you help ensure everyone who is eligible to vote is able to, and you help address whatever issues may arise.

The information provided here does not replace local and/or state guidance you receive in your official training, but will give you some general best practices to consider.

If issues arise, keep in mind these go-to best practices:

- ☐ Be communicative. Flag issues for your supervisor and ask questions when in doubt.
- ☐ Be prepared. Know the rules around provisional ballots, same-day registration, identification, etc. so when a question arises, you can prioritize a voter's right to vote.
- ☐ Be welcoming. Check your biases and make sure you treat every voter in a welcoming and respectful way.

And remember:

- ☐ Breathe. If you feel yourself getting flustered, taking a deep breath will help you stay calm and focused on solutions—and will help others do the same.
- ☐ Practice active listening. If a voter has a concern, nod your head to show you're listening and speak in a calm, even tone. You may say something like *"I hear that you're worried about _____. I know it must be stressful to have that concern. I'm here to help you figure out what to do."*
- ☐ Keep it nonpartisan, no matter what. Remember, your job is to protect the process of democracy, rather than encourage any particular outcome.
- ☐ Be solutions-oriented. If tensions rise, focus on what needs to happen to resolve the situation and move forward, rather than rehashing what happened. A good question to ask is *"what needs to happen for us to move forward here?"*

Here are a few potential situations that may arise, with best practices for how to handle them. Combine these with what you learn in your official training, and you'll be prepared to handle these potential situations—and many more—at the polls.

SITUATION

Someone is campaigning inside the polling location.

Approach → Make sure you know what is and isn't allowed when it comes to electioneering, or campaigning, in or near a polling location. For example, there are often restrictions on how far from a polling location campaigns can place materials like signs and posters. Rules may also apply for other campaign materials such as shirts, hats, and buttons being displayed at or near your polling place. Remember to ask about this in your training.

If someone is campaigning inappropriately, calmly inform them that their actions or materials are not permitted and direct them to the allowable area for campaigning. If they refuse to move, talk to your supervisor to address the matter while you continue to help voters.

SITUATION

Someone in the polling location is photographing or recording you, a voter, or individuals' ballots.

Approach → In many states, taking photos, videos or audio recording is not permitted inside the polling place, but this differs from place to place. Confirm the rules in your jurisdiction during your training or with your polling place supervisor. In most states, photos and videos are prohibited if they violate other election laws on voter intimidation or harassment.

If someone is photographing or recording video in a way they shouldn't be, calmly let them know they are not permitted to do so. If they refuse to stop or leave, alert your supervisor.

SITUATION

Someone challenges a person's right to vote without a good reason, or tries to scare them or prevent them from voting.

Approach → Voter intimidation is illegal. Don't assume because someone has challenged a person's right to vote that their allegation is founded. Keep your attention on the voter and continue with your official check-in/verification process. If needed, kindly but firmly remind the challenger that you are the expert in your jurisdiction's protocol, and if further action is needed, follow your official training protocols on how to handle disruptive people inside the polling place. If your supervisor is not responsive to the situation or is encouraging disruptive behavior, escalate the situation by contacting your local elections office or your state elections director.

SITUATION

Someone in the polling location is physically intimidating you or a fellow poll worker.

Approach → Your safety is important—and so is the safety of your fellow poll workers, and of voters. If someone is being physically or verbally intimidating: stay in a public place, remove yourself from the situation and seek safety. Report to your supervisor or any designated security person what has happened.

SITUATION

Someone at the polling place is trying to enter an unauthorized area.

Approach → First, ask the person to leave the unauthorized area in a calm manner. If they refuse to leave, immediately notify your supervisor or any designated security person at your polling place.

SITUATION

A poll worker or election official is trying to challenge, intimidate, or influence you or a voter.

Approach → If a fellow poll worker is challenging or disrupting the voting process, ask your supervisor to intervene and enforce local voting rules. If it's your supervisor or other election official that is causing the issue, the next step would be to contact your local elections office, secretary of state or state elections director.

SITUATION

There is confusion or disagreement about COVID-19 safety guidelines.

Approach → COVID-19 guidelines and practices may vary from place to place, and sometimes you may see voters disagreeing about COVID-19 safety inside the polling location. Make sure you know the rules at your polling location and do your part to ensure that every eligible voter can vote safely. Be sure to bring supplies for yourself (masks, hand sanitizer, etc.) and you can always choose to bring extras for voters who've forgotten them, as most polling places will not have these available.

No matter what, stay calm and keep your cool.

Whatever may arise, remember to stay calm. Keep your voice even, nod your head to show you're listening, respect personal space, identify feelings and frustrations so people feel heard, and focus on the solution instead of the back and forth of an argument.

You may want to practice a few of these scenarios with a friend or even suggest practicing during your official training with other poll workers. Verbally running through some scenarios or practicing de-escalation tactics will help you feel even more prepared for the day.

And remember: if you're not sure about how to handle a situation, call a senior official to help (make sure you keep their contact info handy). If your supervisor is not responsive to the situation or is encouraging disruptive behavior, escalate the situation by contacting your local elections office or secretary of state's office.

As a poll worker, your preparation, patience, and problem-solving skills will help make voting a positive and empowering experience for all voters.

Thank you for powering the polls and making sure every voter is able to cast their ballot!