

# Voters with Disabilities: What Polling Staff Should Know

**Don't make assumptions** on an individual's ability/right to make an informed vote on appearance/disability.

An individual may have an aide or family member with them to assist with tasks. This should not affect their right to vote!

Voters with disabilities may use identification other than a driver's license. **Do not automatically turn someone away if they do not have a driver's license!** Make sure you know what forms of ID are acceptable (varies from state to state).

**Make eye contact and speak directly to the voter** (even if they are with an interpreter/caretaker/companion, etc.)

**Ask questions, if needed and don't hesitate to offer assistance.** People with disabilities know their needs and will be able to tell you what they do and or don't need in order to be able to vote.

**Introduce yourself** and ask individuals for their names if you will be assisting them. If you provide additional assistance, don't draw attention to the fact you are doing so.

**Staff should be trained to use accessible voting equipment** and be able to provide assistance as needed

**If you make announcements of changes,** such as where people should line-up, be sure to post this information as well. Having poster paper and markers available for impromptu signs is a good idea.

People who use walkers, canes, braces or have conditions that cause fatigue **may need a place to sit while waiting in line to vote.** A simple folding chair will meet this need.

**Some people may need more time to process information** for a variety of reasons-- **do not rush** them or become impatient.

Make sure there are **signs indicating where accessible parking and entrances are located.** Everyone will benefit from signs directing people to the voting area, etc.

**Voters who are deaf may also benefit from signs.** The National Association of the Deaf recommends printing common statements and questions. **Sample statements and questions include:**

- Show your driver's license or other photo identification.
- Is your address correct?
- Sign the registration list/card(s).
- Take the voting card to the person standing near the voting machines.
- Directions for how to use the voting machine are in the voting booth.
- Do you have any questions?

**Use "people first" language.** The following examples are somewhat obvious, but they clearly show the difference between language that focuses on the disability, rather than the person.

**Do:** Would you assist the man using a wheelchair at the door?

**Avoid:** The man sitting in the wheelchair can't open the door, he needs help"

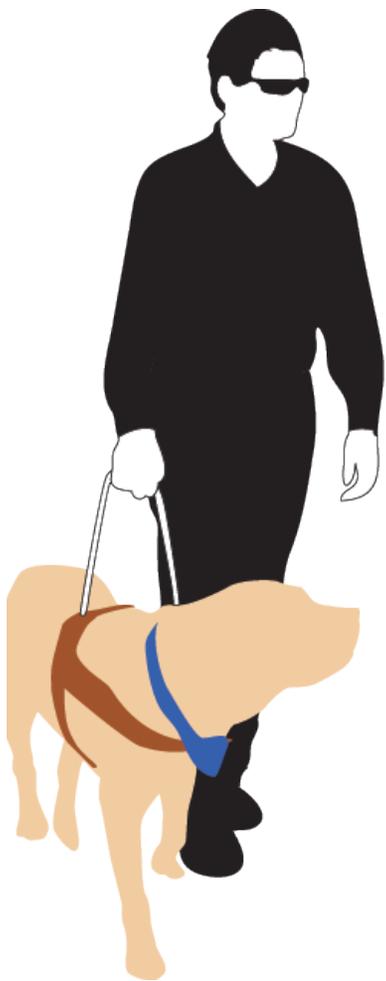
**Do:** The woman in the red jacket with a guide dog has some questions.

**Avoid:** See that blind woman over there (pointing). She can't vote by herself.



Temporary signs can be used to show the entrance to the voting area and whether it is accessible.

Photo courtesy of [Inclusion Solutions](#).



## Service Animals

Under the Americans with Disabilities Act, people with disabilities who use service animals have the right to bring their service animals to public places, which includes polling places. The ADA defines a service animal as a dog that is individually trained to perform a task related to the person's disability.

People with different types of disabilities use service dogs for different reasons. Often, the reason for the service dog is apparent, such as a person who is blind who uses a service dog for guiding. But a person with a seizure disorder may use a service dog to alert them of an oncoming seizure. **Take-Away:** Don't assume a dog is not a service dog just because the owner doesn't appear to have a disability.

### Identification:

Under the Americans with Disabilities Act, people using service dogs are **not** required to provide a certificate, license or any other type of identification.

### Staff may ask two questions for identification:

- Is this a service dog?
- What task does it perform?

A service dog does not have to be on a leash or wearing a vest. Some tasks are hampered by a leash. The service dog, however, should always be under the handler's control.

### Staff Interaction with Service Animals

Don't pet, talk to, offer treats, gesture or distract the dog. Service dogs are working and they need to be able to concentrate on their tasks.

### Problems?

If a dog is disruptive (barks, wanders around, bothers others) staff may ask the owner to get the dog in control. If this can't be done quickly, staff may ask the owner to remove the dog. The owner has the right to stay without the dog.

**Note!** Some states, cities, and counties have additional regulations covering service animals. For instance, some local governments include animals other than dogs as service animals. Make sure polling staff are aware of local laws regarding service animals.

## Accessibility Complaints

If a person with a disability request actions to ensure their voting rights, for example, ask that a broken accessible voting machine be repaired or replaced—don't take this as a personal criticism of yourself or the polling place. Remain courteous and friendly, and follow-through on the request. Generally, these types of issues are handled by polling staff notifying the local election officials of the request.

If the person's request cannot be provided, offer whatever assistance you can to make it possible for the individual to vote. That may mean providing curbside voting for a wheelchair user or marking the ballot for an individual who is blind.

An individual with a disability may inform you that they plan to file a complaint based on issues such as inaccessible facilities or voting equipment. Remember, it is their right to do so and not a personal reflection on polling workers. Filing a complaint is one way to improve future voting accessibility.