

Chapter 3 – Voter Assistance and Cross Cultural Communication

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General Guidelines



Voters with disabilities have the same rights as all other voters.

1. Be courteous and respectful.
2. Do not underestimate people with disabilities.
3. Do not put a time limit on voting.
4. Always speak directly to the voter, not to the voter's companion, aide, or sign language interpreter.
5. Offer assistance, but do not insist or be offended if your offer is not accepted. The person may not want or need assistance but your asking will be appreciated.



Never insist upon providing assistance when a voter has not requested it.

6. Be sure that there are signs to direct voters with disabilities to the most accessible way to the polling place.
7. Be aware of obstacles and hazards that could cause injury.
 - Fasten floor mats, rugs, and power cords securely or move them out of the way.
 - Keep floors as dry as possible.
8. Keep the ramps and wheelchair-accessible doors to the polling place unlocked and free of clutter.
9. If necessary, be creative in how you accommodate voters with disabilities. For example, **if a voter is unable to stand in line, ask another voter in line to serve as a placeholder**, and allow the voter needing assistance to sit until the placeholder reaches the check-in judge.

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Never ask or require a voter to provide proof of a disability. A voter's disability may not be apparent to you.

Voters Who Cannot Sign Any Form(s)



Always ask the voter before assisting.

1. Do not assume a voter cannot sign his or her own name.
 - Follow regular check-in procedures and inform the voter when a signature is required. Let the voter inform you if he or she cannot sign his or her name.
 - If the voter is blind or has low vision, the voter may ask you to guide his or her hand to the location on the paper in order for the voter to sign. Never grab the voter's hand or pen, or attempt to guide the voter's hand when not requested to do so by the voter.
2. If a voter is unable to sign his or her voter authority card, *Voter Update Form*, or any form(s), ask the voter to make an "X" or similar mark on the signature line. This mark is acceptable as that individual's signature.
3. When a voter is unable to make a mark, place one of the following labels, found in the Check-In Judge folder, on the back of the form the voter is to sign:
 - On the voter authority card: "This voter is qualified to vote but is unable to sign his or her name."
 - On all other forms except the voter authority card: "This voter is unable to sign his or her name."
 - Sign your name and write the date under the statement.

Voters Requesting Assistance to Vote

1. A voter may select any individual to provide assistance except:
 - The voter's employer or agent of the voter's employer;
 - An officer or agent of the voter's union;
 - A person appointed as a challenger or watcher for this election; and
 - A candidate who is on the voter's ballot.



Two election judges of different political parties can also assist a voter.

2. The assistant must read and sign a *Voter Assistance Form*.
3. The assistant may assist the voter only by:
 - Reading the voter the instructions, ballot content, or the provisional ballot application; and/or
 - Marking or casting the ballot, operating the ballot marking device or completing the provisional ballot application as directed by the voter.
4. Individuals providing assistance are prohibited from suggesting how a voter should vote on any contest.



The *Voter Assistance Form* must be completed when a voter requests the assistance of another person or two election judges of different political parties.

Completing the Voter Assistance Form

1. Complete Part I of the *Voter Assistance Form* found in the Check-In Judge folder.
2. Ask the individual providing assistance to complete Part II of the *Voter Assistance Form*. If election judges are assisting the

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voter, the election judges must complete Part III of the form.

3. When completed, the voting unit judge will collect the form and place it in an envelope labeled “Completed Voter Assistance Forms” which will be included in the supplies.

State of Maryland Voter Assistance Form	
Instructions: Use this form if a voter has a disability or is unable to read or write English AND requests assistance with voting or completing a provisional ballot application. Assistance is limited to: (1) reading the voter instructions, ballot content, or the provisional ballot application; and (2) marking or casting the ballot, operating the voting equipment, or completing the provisional ballot application as directed by the voter.	
Part I – Completed by Election Judge	
Printed Name of Voter: _____	
Street Address: _____	
City: _____	State: _____ Zip: _____
The voter named above has requested assistance in voting and is being assisted by: <input type="checkbox"/> A person designated by the voter (Go to Part II) or <input type="checkbox"/> Two election judges (Go to Part III)	
Part II – Completed by Person Designated by Voter	
Printed Name: _____	
Street Address: _____	
City: _____	State: _____ Zip: _____
I affirm that:	
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. I am not the voter's employer or agent of the voter's employer;2. I am not an officer or agent of the voter's union;3. I have not been appointed as a challenger or watcher for this election;4. For a voter casting a provisional ballot, I am not a candidate who is on the voter's ballot;5. The named voter asked me to assist with marking or casting the ballot or in completing a provisional ballot application;6. I will assist the voter only by: (a) reading the voter the instructions, ballot content, or the provisional ballot application; or (b) marking or casting the ballot, operating the voting equipment, or completing the provisional ballot application as directed by the voter; and7. I will not attempt to influence or suggest in any way how the voter should vote in any contest or question.	
Signature _____	Date _____
Part III – Completed by Election Judges Assisting Voter	
Signature – Election Judge _____	Party Affiliation _____
Signature – Election Judge _____	Party Affiliation _____
SBE 10-10 (Rev. 9/15)	

Voter Assistance Form (Sample)

Voters Requesting Instructions

If a voter requests instructions on how to use voting equipment or about the voting process, election judges may give instructions.

Election judges are prohibited from suggesting how the voter should vote on any contest.

Voters Who are Blind or Have Low Vision

1. Tell the voter your name and that you are an election judge as soon as you come in contact with a voter who is blind or has low vision.
2. Read any required information to the voter.
3. If you are guiding a voter, offer your arm to the voter, rather than taking the voter's arm. Give the voter information that is

obvious to voters who can see (e.g., stairs, obstacles, turning left, etc.).



Always ask the voter before assisting or touching the voter. Never grab the voter's arm or attempt to guide the voter unless the voter requests assistance first.

4. If a person uses a service animal, walk on the opposite side of the voter, away from the animal. Do not pet or otherwise distract a service animal without asking the owner. Be alert to others attempting to distract a service animal. Service animals are highly trained and need no special care other than that provided by the owner.



Service animals are allowed in all buildings.

5. If a person uses a cane, walk on the opposite side of the voter, away from the cane. Do not touch or take the cane from the voter. Let the voter determine where to place the cane while voting. However, it is reasonable for you to inform the person if the cane may be a tripping hazard to others.
6. Explain how the voter can get your attention if needed, and tell the voter when you are leaving.

Voters with Physical Disabilities

A voter with a physical disability may choose to vote on a ballot marking device from a seated position (wheelchair or chair).

1. Ask before pushing or touching a voter's wheelchair or equipment. Respect that people who use wheelchairs or equipment consider the equipment a part of their personal space.
2. Ask before helping. Grabbing someone's elbow could throw the person off balance. A voter with a physical disability might need

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to lean on a door while opening it. You might cause the voter to fall if you open the door too quickly.

Voters with Speech or Hearing Disabilities

1. A voter who cannot speak can give the check-in judge his or her required information by writing it. Check-in judges should have paper and pens readily available.
2. Follow the voter's cues to determine whether speaking, gesturing, or writing is the most effective method of communication.
3. If you can communicate with the voter by speaking, speak calmly, slowly, and directly to the voter. Use short, simple sentences. Ask one question at a time. Do not shout. Your facial expressions, gestures, and body movements will help the voter understand you.
4. Do not speak for the voter or attempt to finish his or her sentences.
5. Rephrase, rather than repeat, sentences that the voter does not understand. If the voter is still having difficulties, write it down on paper.
6. If you do not understand something the voter has said, ask the voter to say it again. Do not pretend that you understand. If you are still having difficulties understanding, provide the voter with a pen and paper and ask the voter to write down what he or she said.
7. Speak directly to a person ("What is your name?"), not to his or her sign language interpreter ("What is his name?").

Voters with Cognitive Disabilities

A voter with a cognitive disability may have difficulty comprehending, reading, writing, or communicating. The voter may choose to have someone assist him or her while voting. Do not challenge a voter's cognitive ability.

1. Be prepared to repeat what you say – either orally or in writing.
2. Allow time to understand the voter and make sure that the voter understands you.

Tips for Cross-Cultural Communication

As an election judge, you will be assisting individuals of different backgrounds, ethnicities, cultures, and language abilities. Be patient and helpful, as this may be a new experience for some voters. Here are some effective communication tips.

1. Be clear and concise. Avoid slang and jargon.
2. Be alert for the non-verbal language of those whose cultural background is different from your own. Also, be aware of your own “body language” that others may misinterpret.
3. Speak slowly, directly and simply; be specific.
4. Allow pauses, do not talk too much, and organize your thoughts.
5. Recap conversations and check for understanding often.
6. Do not embarrass the person when checking for understanding.
7. Listen carefully and patiently.
8. Use the written word as well as the spoken word. If English is a person's second language, it may be easier to read English than to hear it.
9. Understand the person's perspective of being in a foreign setting and culture and confronted with an unfamiliar language.
10. Do not assume that undeveloped English language skills mean a person is uneducated.

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