Colorado Developmental Disabilities Council

Accessible Voting for Individuals with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities

Checklist for Polling Locations

Purpose:

More than 35 million Americans with disabilities, roughly one-sixth of the total electorate, are eligible to vote in the United States, accounting for a broad range of disabilities, including mobility, communication, physical, and cognitive impairments. . The Americans with Disabilities Act, Voter Rights Act, and Voting Accessibility for the Elderly and Handicapped Act, among other federal laws, require polling locations and voting processes be accessible to all eligible voters, including those with disabilities.

This checklist aims to equip election judges and polling site supervisors with information to ensure that all Coloradans voters with intellectual and developmental disabilities can exercise their right to vote. People can be disabled in multiple ways. A voter may identify with an intellectual or developmental disability and use a wheelchair or a service animal for support for a different disability.

Inclusion and access for voters with disabilities is not just good practice; it is the law! Under Colorado law, if someone has the intent to vote, they are able to do so.

Accessibility Checklist for Polling Locations:

Posted Signs and Notices

For all signs, public notices, and other information posted at the polling location:

- ☐ **Make information easy to read and process.**
  - ☐ Use lists, tables, or bullet points to summarize multiple points. Avoid heavy blocks of text or paragraphs.

- ☐ Use large print, such as a font size 18 or larger for standard documents or the largest font possible for signs, such as where the voting line starts or where the restrooms are.
- ☐ Don't use bright contrasting colors, like neon colors. Keep colors simple.
- ☐ Don't underline words or use italics.

☐ **Make information easy to understand.**

- ☐ Use literal language without idioms, figures of speech, or hidden or implied meanings
- ☐ Use a 3rd grade reading level
- ☐ Use simple pictures or infographics, especially for commonly used areas (like exits or restrooms)

Sensory Environment

- ☐ Loud, persistent, or unexpected sounds can be distracting and/or overwhelming. Minimize noises from ringing phones, door alarms, or devices that beep. Turn off televisions and radios. Limit the use of intercoms to emergency use. Lower the volume of walkie-talkies. Consider offering headphones to voters to dampen noises.
- ☐ Bright lights can also be distracting or overwhelming. When fluorescent lighting is unavoidable, consider offering sunglasses to voters.
- ☐ Consider offering sensory kits. A kit could include: picture communication cards, fidgets or other calming tools, sunglasses, and headphones. For example, fidgets can reduce anxiety and help a voter focus.
- ☐ Long lines with uncertain waits can lead to anxiety, distress, and overwhelm. Use clearly marked signage to allow disabled voters to bypass long lines.
- ☐ Consider offering "quiet hours" during early voting days. A quiet hour may feature dimmed lighting and minimal noise.

Direct Communication

Voters can use a range of communication methods. All forms of communication are all valid. Not all voters communicate with spoken words, especially when in an unfamiliar environment. Be flexible and ready to adapt your approaches.

- ☐ Note the voter's preferred method of communication, which may include a form of Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC). Examples of AAC methods include:

- ☐ Gestures and facial expressions
- ☐ Writing
- ☐ Drawing
- ☐ Thumbs up/thumbs down
- ☐ Spelling words by pointing to letters
- ☐ Pointing to photos
- ☐ Using an app on an iPad to communicate

…and there are many more options.

- ☐ If a person requires AAC support, such as an American Sign Language (ASL) interpreter, provide resources.
- ☐ Give the voter time to process information before expecting a response. After delivering important information or asking a question, count to 10 in your head before continuing to communicate. Be patient and do not interrupt.
- ☐ Notice the volume of your voice. Avoid speaking loudly, even when a voter is using headphones. Many people wear headphones or earplugs because they are sensitive to sounds even at a normal volume. They may use the devices to filter sounds. Assume that they can hear you and speak at a normal volume.
- ☐ Remember that eye contact is not necessary for communication. A voter may look away to better process your communication. A voter may avoid eye contact to protect their energy. Voters can listen to you even if they do not make eye contact.
- ☐ Be respectful. Always assume the voter is competent and able to communicate with you. Avoid baby-talk or changing the pitch of your voice.
- ☐ Communicate directly with the voter, not to their support person, if applicable. Always face the voter.
- ☐ Use literal terms and concise language. Avoid jargon, sarcasm, idiomatic expressions, figurative language or other phrases that everyone may not understand. Say what you mean.
- ☐ Remain calm and be mindful of your body language. Many voters pick up on non-verbal communication cues to assess whether an environment is safe. Use soft gestures and a regulated tone of voice.
- ☐ If you do not understand the voter, ask them to repeat themselves or to communicate slowly. It is ok to ask for clarification! Do not pretend to understand a person’s communication.
- ☐ A voter may agree or imply that they understood you, even if they didn’t understand the information. For example, the voter may attempt to cover their misunderstanding (this is called masking). The voter may not want to say no to, disagree with or disappoint someone in a position of perceived authority. If the

voter's body language or actions are inconsistent with understanding, is there another method to communicate the information?

- ☐ Check with the voter that they understood the information by asking open-ended questions and provide suggestions, like, "What support can we provide? (and give a few examples)" or "What questions do you have for me?" Avoid asking yes/no questions like, "Do you understand?" or "Do you have any questions?"
- ☐ Do not help without asking or assume that you know what is needed. Provide accommodations to voters with disabilities as requested, without directly assisting in the voting process. Under the Help America Vote Act and Colorado law, voters must be able to vote privately and without assistance.
- ☐ Remember: not all disabilities are visible.

Additional Resources:

- Quick Guide to Polling Place Access (Disability Law Colorado)
- Americans with Disabilities Act - Voting Rights
- Voters with Disabilities FAQ (Colorado Secretary of State)
- Accessible Voting Information (Colorado Secretary of State)
- Plain Language Guidelines