

De-Escalation Guidance for Poll Workers



Overview

Poll workers are the backbone of our democracy and can play a key role in preventing, mitigating, and de-escalating potential tensions during the voting process. Planning and training can help create the conditions to minimize disturbances and distractions on Election Day and safely de-escalate disruptions.

Key Principles

- Planning ahead makes your job easier in the moment
- Avoid arguing, ordering, or defensive postures
- De-escalate situations safely by drawing on CLARA (explained below!)

Plan

Planning ahead makes your job easier in the moment

- Think through potential scenarios with your fellow elections administrators.
- Communicate rules and norms clearly: prominently display guidance on safety and security
- Familiarize yourself with [federal](#) and state laws and guidance on polling place disruptions and [unauthorized militia](#)
- Know who to contact in the event of a significant disruption or security concern and designate a worker, who will be the primary point-of-contact with law enforcement
- Debrief collectively after the event, including specifically on any security concerns

Train

Avoid arguments or actions that risk ESCALATING situations

- Remember the goal is not to win an argument but to calm verbal disruptions and prevent physical disruptions.
- While de-escalating don't: order, threaten, attempt to argue disinformation, or be defensive
- Do:
 - a. Request and Suggest Before Commanding or Demanding
 - b. Be Clear, Simple and Specific with Requests
 - c. Policy is not Personal: "state law does not allow" over "you are not allowed"

Respond

De-escalate situations safely by drawing on CLARA and other resources

CLARA

Calm and Center Yourself: Check in with yourself, appear calm, centered, and self-assured even if you don't feel it. Avoid pointing, crossing your arms or other more aggressive postures

Listen: Let the person vent and be sure to listen explicitly for feelings, needs, or values.

Acknowledge: Begin by acknowledging the feelings, needs, or values you have heard. [Not about agreeing with their position, statement, or behavior.] ex. "I sense your aggravation at this situation. I hear your concern for safety."

Respond: After acknowledgment, if there is further threat of harassment or violence, offer open ended or choice questions; address the issue; make a clear request or proposal. ex. "Will you tell me more about your concerns? "I understand you have every right to feel angry but it is not ok to threaten people here."

Assess: Trust your instincts: If de-escalation is not working, STOP. Get help.

What if I want more information on de-escalation for election officials?

Secretaries of State and other election administration bodies are increasingly providing specific guidance on de-escalation for your state. This resource will be updated throughout the year with new links as they are published. For current examples, see:

- [BDI's initial list of online de-escalation trainings](#)
- [De-escalation guidance from the Cybersecurity & Infrastructure Security Agency \(CISA\)](#)