

First Things First

Poll Worker Safety



FOR LOCAL ELECTION
OFFICIALS AND SMALL TEAMS

IMPLEMENT THESE
PRACTICES THIS MONTH

KEEP IT SIMPLE AND
VERIFY AS YOU GO

Poll workers are the backbone of the election process, and they deserve an environment that supports their safety and success. Strengthening their physical and operational security on and around Election Day doesn't require complex tools or major expense. It starts with thoughtful preparation, clear roles, and a plan everyone understands. Small, deliberate actions taken ahead of time can create a safer, more confident experience for the whole team.

These low-cost, high-impact actions can help prevent issues ahead of time and give confidence to election workers and voters alike.

1. Design Effective Site Organization and Setup to Maintain Security

Impact: High  Effort: Low  Cost: \$-\$\$ 

Why this matters

A well-organized polling place improves your security posture and simplifies de-escalation and other responses, giving poll workers a sense of security that will keep them coming back.

When planning site setup, ask:

- Are sensitive areas clearly marked as only for authorized personnel?
- Could an unauthorized person attempt to reach ballots or election equipment, creating a situation that could endanger a poll worker?
- Would poll workers have nearby support and know who to contact if there are any issues?

Do it!

- **No poll worker should ever be alone.** A two-person rule, ideally bipartisan, reduces threat risk and provides built-in oversight. This is especially important during opening and/or closing of the site, or when taking election materials to a vehicle. Always move in pairs.
- **Position check-in tables so workers have a clear view of the entrance.** Avoid placing workers in corners where they might feel isolated. Ensure every worker has a clear path to move behind the table.

- **Provide greater security at vote centers** and other larger polling places.
- **Consider posting "Election Personnel Only" boundaries** and "Prohibited Items" signs at all voting sites as appropriate. Clear, written, posted rules reduce confusion and risk and protect sensitive materials. They also signal even-handed enforcement, that the same rules apply to everyone. These signs can help reinforce the idea that while there are boundaries, the process and activities are not being hidden.
- **Make sure poll workers know to whom they should direct challenging persons.** This may be a lead poll worker, on-site

- election constable, or someone at the main office.
- **"Defend in depth"** - When speaking with a challenging observer or voter, a second poll worker should stand behind or aside, ready to change places, intervene or assist.
- **Ensure all poll workers have completed** basic de-escalation training.
- **For larger voting sites,** consider whether the scale of your preparations match the size of the location.
- **Personal Privacy:** Remind workers to keep their personal bags, car keys, and phones in a secure, non-public area.

2. Establish Clear Lines of Communication

Impact: High  Effort: Low  Cost: \$-\$\$ 

Why this matters

Poll workers need quick access to the right contacts to maintain security on Election Day. This means they should know who to call under which circumstances, and how to reach those contacts without delay. Critical contacts include both nearby and regional election personnel as well as public safety officials for emergencies.

Ask:

- Does every poll worker have the cell number and ability to connect directly to their Site Lead and/or regional supervisor?
- Does every poll worker have the ability to connect quickly and directly with their local emergency personnel?

Do it!

- **Establish Simple Communication Chains:**
 - » Explore tools that can connect the central election office directly with every poll worker, or at least key workers at each site without relying on phone calls. Options might include secure cell-phone apps or other simple communication platforms that support quick, direct messaging.
 - » Create clear lists, lanyards, and/or posters for each polling place that

- show names, roles, and direct contact information for all relevant personnel, along with circumstances in which each should be contacted. Include election staff, emergency management, law enforcement, fire services, and other key partners.
- » Have backup communication methods ready in case cell service or Wi-Fi fails, and make sure all polling place personnel know what those backups are and how to use them.

- **Convene a working group of partners** before the election to help establish and strengthen these lines of communication and response with relevant security partners.
- **Document Everything:** Use an incident log to record the time, description, and individuals involved in any disruption. Minor notes now prevent major headaches later.

3. Establish Connections with Local First Responders Ahead of Time

Impact: High  Effort: Medium  Cost: \$-\$\$ 

Why this matters

Law enforcement and emergency personnel are not typically trained in election procedures, and election officials are not trained in public safety protocols. Forging connections ahead of time - during normal pre-election operations - gives first responders a chance to understand your jurisdiction’s normal election procedures and timelines. It also creates space for you to raise concerns and ask questions before an incident.

Amidst the current climate of heightened stress, you will want to know that first responders will be available quickly to keep voters and workers safe, should they be needed. Cooperation and coordination are key, and meeting ahead of time will help each sector better understand how to work together. Should a poll worker have an issue on Election Day, your pre-existing relationships with law enforcement and emergency management will lay the groundwork for rapid and efficient incident response.

Ask:

- Has your office met with local law enforcement and emergency management personnel?
- Do you have a clear two-way understanding of who the appropriate contacts are for circumstances that may arise on Election Day, and the best way to reach them quickly?

Do it!

- Reach out to your local law enforcement and emergency management offices this week and ask for a meeting.
- Use recommendations from the **Committee for Safe and Secure Elections (CSSE)** to help guide your meetings and partnership, and refer to the **guide on building an election security working group** from the Election Security Exchange. This will help you learn each other’s protocols, best lines of communication, and other guidance on how poll workers can keep voters and workers safe.



4. Consider Stocking Basic Emergency Supplies at Every Polling Location

Impact: High  Effort: Low  Cost: \$-\$\$ 

Why this matters

Polling locations are generally open for 12 or more hours, staffed largely by volunteers, and located in buildings that may not have easy access to supplies or nearby support. Accidents happen. Medical episodes happen. Power can go out. A small investment in basic emergency supplies, stocked and ready before Election Day, can make a meaningful difference for workers and voters alike. This does not require a nurse or a safety expert. It requires a kit, a flashlight, and a worker who knows where they are.

Ask:

- Does every polling location have a basic first aid kit on site?
- Do poll workers know where it is and how to use it should the need arise?
- Is there a flashlight, generator, or backup lighting available if power is lost?
- Are there any supplies specific to your location or local conditions (extreme heat or cold) that should be available?

Do it!

- Consider stocking a basic first aid kit (bandages, antiseptic wipes, gloves, pain reliever, and similar items) at every polling location. This is sometimes called a "boo-boo kit" and can be purchased for under \$20.
- For higher-traffic locations, consider other medical supplies that could be helpful in an emergency, such as a Stop the Bleed kit and an automated external defibrillator (AED). These are increasingly common in public buildings and can be lifesaving in a serious emergency.
- Include at least one flashlight with fresh batteries at every location. A power outage mid-day should not stop operations or create panic.
- Before each election, do a quick check of all supplies. Restock anything that has been used or expired, and replace flashlight batteries. A kit that has not been checked since the last election may be missing exactly what is needed.
- Assign at least one poll worker at each location to know where the emergency supplies are and to do a quick check at opening. This does not need to be a formal role, just a clear responsibility.

Reference Materials:

Stop the Bleed: Free training and kit information (stopthebleed.org)

CISA: Physical Security Checklist for Polling Locations

EAC: Personal Security for Election Officials (video training and resources)

CSSE: Security Assessment Checklist

5. Train Poll Workers to Recognize and De-escalate Tense Situations

Impact: High  Effort: Low  Cost: \$-\$\$ 

Why this matters

Poll workers are often the first, and sometimes only, person standing between a tense situation and a serious disruption to the voting process. Most conflicts at polling places do not start as emergencies. They start as frustration, confusion, or a raised voice. A poll worker who knows how to read a situation early and respond calmly can stop most problems before they escalate. This is a skill that can be taught, practiced, and used without any special equipment or authority.

Ask:

- Do your poll workers know how to recognize when a situation is starting to escalate?
- Do they know what to say (and what not to say) when a voter or observer becomes confrontational?
- Do they know when to step back and hand the situation off to a supervisor or law enforcement?

Do it!

- Use CISA's free Non-Confrontational Techniques for Election Workers training video in your poll worker training. It is short, practical, and designed specifically for this audience.
- Reinforce a simple rule: poll workers should engage calmly, avoid arguing, and never try to physically intervene. Their job is to slow things down, not win the argument.
- Practice with a short scenario or two during training. Even five minutes of role-play builds confidence and muscle memory.
- Make sure workers know that if they are not comfortable with a challenging visitor, they should direct the person to the onsite supervisor.

Reference Materials:

CISA: Non-Confrontational Techniques for Election Workers (training video)

EAC: Non-Confrontational Techniques for Election Workers (adapted version for poll worker training)

The Elections Group: De-Escalation Posters and Pocket Guides

Committee for Safe and Secure Elections: Four Steps to Working with Challenging Visitors



Reference Materials

EAC: Personal Security for Election Officials: Video training and resources for maintaining a safe environment.

Committee for Safe and Secure Elections: Four Steps to Working with Challenging Visitors

Committee for Safe and Secure Elections: Five Steps to Safer Elections

CISA: Physical Security Checklist: A comprehensive list to help evaluate the security of your polling location.

Committee for Safe and Secure Elections: Security Assessment Checklist

The Elections Group's Polling Place Pocket Contact Card;

The Elections Group's De-Escalation Posters and Pocket Guides

EAC's Incident Response Checklist