

Checking Our Biases

A Guide for Poll Workers

ALL VOTING
IS LOCAL



Biases at the Polls

As a poll worker, your job is to help ensure that every eligible voter in your community can make their voice heard. And it's important that you serve your community without judgment. All of us have biases (an inclination for or against something or someone) that can show up in different ways. Sometimes we are aware of our biases, but sometimes we may not be. As a poll worker, it is important to be intentional about putting aside our biases to ensure everyone is able to exercise their right to vote — especially when we hold different views or come from different backgrounds than a voter or fellow poll worker.

»» Implicit bias and voting

Implicit bias may be the cause of what poll workers believe to be irregularities in the voting process during Election Day. Language, customs, types of identification, and familiarity with the voting process can all cause poll workers to question some voters while giving other voters the benefit of the doubt and greater assistance. Implicit bias can influence all of these decisions. In addition, implicit bias among poll workers isn't just directed at the voter. Bias can also cause us to make assumptions about why voting procedures are the way they are, or the ability of fellow poll workers.

»» What are implicit biases?

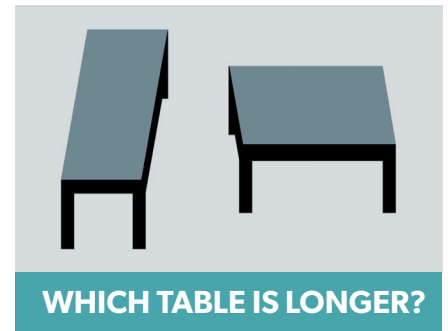
Implicit biases are unconscious assumptions that we make of people based on how they look or behave. This can result in us assuming the worst about people impacting how we interact with them.

»» Why are implicit biases so dangerous?

As human beings, we all have implicit biases based on our life experiences – good and bad. Implicit biases can be dangerous when they result in us treating people differently based on assumptions and not on facts.

Close your eyes and envision people in the following three occupations: doctor, professor, stay-at-home parent.

Did you envision them as male or female? What age are they? What physical characteristics do they have? Notice how our subconscious mind can quickly create barriers to how we view things consciously.



WHICH TABLE IS LONGER?

They are actually the same length. This is an example of how our biases can lead to us also making the wrong assumptions about people, or unevenly applying policies and procedures.

»» How do I combat my own implicit biases to ensure everyone has an equal opportunity to vote?

- Exercise empathy for all individuals, especially those that seem most different from you
- Start every interaction with a voter by assuming the best of them
- Be self-aware and understand your own biases. (See the Resources section below for videos and quizzes)

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How Do Biases Show Up on Election Day

»» Political Affiliation:

Political affiliation biases can present themselves in small ways, like seeing other voters wear t-shirts with opposing views and having negative judgements towards them. We have to remember that democracy means giving everyone a chance to have their voice heard, so remember to not cast judgements.

»» Checking Identification:

There have been many [reports](#) of higher rates of people of color having their ID checked and being unfairly [turned away from the polls](#) in states that did not even require ID verification. Check your bias before checking-in a voter.

»» Signature Matching:

- **Women** who recently married or divorced may have a different name or hyphenated name so it may appear differently.
- **Voters with disabilities** or older voters may result in changes in the way someone signs their name.
- **English as a Second Language** voters may be writing their name for the first time in a different language.
- **LGBTQIA+** may have a different signature, and use a different name than when they initially registered to vote. If they sign with a name that does not match the name in their voter registration file or attempt to recreate their old signature, it may trigger a signature mismatch.

VIDEOS & VALUABLE RESOURCES

Here are some valuable videos to learn more and share with others.

Educate yourself on implicit bias:

- [We all have implicit biases. So what can we do about it?](#)
Dushaw Hockett
- [Implicit Bias | Concepts Unwrapped](#)
McCombs School of Business

Test your level of bias:

- [Project Implicit Test](#) (less than 10 mins)
Harvard University
- [Bias Cleanse](#) (less than 10 mins)
Kirwan Institute

»» Other recent examples of institutional bias in local election administration:

- Poll worker training only offered on weekdays
- Poll worker training at locations not accessible by public transit

This results in only people who have jobs that allow time off from work can afford to attend the training. This also implies that those who may not own their own car will not be able to participate in the training. This creates a barrier to fair representation of social classes working at the election polls.