

Service Animals

The ADA gives people with disabilities the right to bring their service animals to public places, which includes polling places. The ADA defines a service animal as a **dog** that is individually trained to perform a task or work related to the person's disability. The dog can be any breed or size, even if your community has breed restrictions.

Who Uses Service Dogs

People with different types of disabilities use service dogs for different reasons. Often, the reason for the service dog is easy to recognize, such as a person who is blind using a service dog for guiding. However, many people who have "hidden disabilities" also use service dogs. For example, a person may use a service dog to alert them of oncoming seizures.

Take-Away: Don't assume a dog is not a service dog just because the owner doesn't appear to have a disability.



Identification

Polling place staff should not ask for service dog identification.

- Service dogs are **not required** to wear a vest or any other type of identification. Their handlers are not required to have documentation of training, certification, or licenses.

If it is not obvious that a dog is a service dog, staff may ask two questions.

- Is your dog a service dog?
- What task or work does your dog perform?

Note: Staff may not ask the dog to perform its task. Performing a task when it isn't needed can interfere with the dog's training.

Removing a Service Dog

- The ADA clearly states that a service dog handler can be asked to bring the dog under control if it is wandering around, bothering other voters, barking excessively, etc.
- If the dog cannot be brought under control quickly, then polling place staff can ask that the dog be removed from the area.
- If a dog is aggressive: snapping, snarling, lunging, or biting, the handler may be asked to remove the dog immediately.
- **Note:** The voter has the right to return without the dog.

Best Practice

Staff should not distract service dogs by trying to get their attention, petting them, or offering treats. The dog is working and needs to keep its focus on performing its job.

Best Practice

If a service dog must be removed from a polling place or a voter is asked to bring their dog under control, document the details of the event. Election officials should set their own policies regarding removal of a service dog from a polling place as the ADA does not provide specific guidance on removal. Generally, election officials should address procedures such as documentation and supervisor notification.