

RESOURCES FOR POLL WORKERS: Respectful Interactions with Gender Non-Conforming, Non-Binary, and Transgender Voters

Thank you for your service as a poll worker! As a front-line election worker, you help make sure everyone feels welcome as they practice their fundamental right to vote. The following advice will guide respectful interactions with transgender and gender non-conforming voters.

Quick tips for Poll Workers

1. Use respectful language without assuming someone's gender. For example, "Pardon me" or "Would you be so kind as to step over here?" are appropriate phrases regardless of whom you're addressing. Simply avoid using "sir" or "ma'am."
2. Expect someone's physical appearance may differ from their photo identification. In South Dakota, voters who are currently registered are not required to confirm their identity at the polling place with ID. If the voter chooses to vote without providing an approved form of ID, South Dakota law secures their ability to do so via personal identification affidavit. They should be given a regular ballot. If someone does present their identification card and their physical appearance does not match their card but all other legal requirements to vote have been met, that person is entitled to vote.
3. When you are not sure of a person's gender identity or the name shown on their formal documentation does not appear to "match" the person's gender presentation, it is OK to ask. "What are your pronouns?" or "What name would you like me to use?"
4. Acknowledge and apologize if you make a pronoun mistake, then move forward quickly. Being honest about your mistake shows respect but making a scene can make transgender/ gender non-conforming people feel uncomfortable and unsafe.
5. Keep it private when you learn about an individual's transgender/ gender non-conforming identity. It is privileged information. You should never "out" people by revealing their identity to others.
6. Validate how transgender and gender non-conforming people present themselves by treating them respectfully, just as you would everyone else.

Thank you.

Democracy works best when every eligible South Dakota voter participates. Thank you again for your commitment to providing a welcoming environment for all voters! For questions, email southdakota@aclu.org.

Terms you may hear

Transgender. Someone whose identity (their internal sense of being a man, woman, or something outside that binary) differs from the gender they were assumed to be at birth.

Gender non-conforming. Someone whose behavior or appearance does not conform to prevailing cultural and social expectations about what is appropriate to their gender.

Non-binary or gender-queer. A gender identity other than male or female. Some non-binary people use "they" or another gender-neutral pronoun rather than "he" or "she."

Avoid doing these four things

1. Never assume someone's gender.
2. Never ask a transgender/ gender non-conforming person what their "real name" is.
3. Never inquire about surgeries or any other intimate details. Just like anyone else, transgender/gender non-conforming people's personal medical information is private.
4. Never use words such as "it" or "whatever" when referring to someone who is transgender/gender non-conforming. These words are hurtful and inappropriate. If you witness this happening, report the occurrence to your Superintendent.