DE-ESCALATION & CONFLICT RESOLUTION

The Produce Plus Program provides critical support to community members who want to purchase fresh fruits & vegetables. Due to limited funds, Produce Plus is unable to serve everyone who qualifies or to serve everyone who experiences food insecurity.

Farmers’ Market Brigade Volunteers and market staff may interact with Customers who feel frustrated or upset by the program’s rules and operations, including long lines, limited checks, program eligibility rules, and more.

We encourage Farmers’ Market Brigade Volunteers to consider the following de-escalation tactics if any conflict arises while setting up and distributing Produce Plus checks to Customers.

Remember CLARA:

● Calm and center yourself.
● Listen actively to the other person.
● Affirm what they’re saying.
● Respond non-confrontationally.
● Add information if they seem open to it.

Other conflict-resolution strategies include:

● Introduce yourself, ask for their name, and use it often.
● After listening to a person’s whole concern/question, paraphrase what they’re saying and ask if you got it right.
● Clearly explain program rules while continuing to recognize the Customers’ concerns and feelings.
● Encourage Customers to call the Produce Plus Customer hotline, 202-888-4834.

In escalated situations, remember to:

● Move and speak slowly.
● Keep hands lowered, visible, and open.
● Be mindful of body language: relax, give them space, don’t loom.
● Make eye contact, but not constantly.
● Speak quietly or match their volume and slowly lower.

*If any situation remains escalated, ask for help from a Market Manager, Market Champion or Volunteer Leader.*

To report an incident, please call 202-601-9200 ext. 211 or email produceplus@dcgreens.org.
Interacting with Customers with Limited English Proficiency (LEP)

How to Identify an LEP Customer
If you believe a Customer has Limited English Proficiency, first avoid making assumptions about an individual’s ability to speak or understand English. Begin by acknowledging them and asking the same questions that you would for any customer. Check for verbal cues that they understand the information. Often individuals nod along to conversations without absorbing the information. Verbal feedback will help you assess whether the individual needs interpretation.

If you think an individual needs language assistance use simple sentences, such as:

- “How can I help you?”
- “Please tell me your name.”
- “What language do you speak?”

If you and the LEP customer are able to communicate in English, proceed to assist them. Speak slowly and be prepared to repeat your statements. Be patient. Remember that those who self-identify as English speakers may still have difficulty understanding. If you are unable to communicate with the LEP customer, check if there is anyone available who speaks that language. If no one is available, proceed to use the translated phrases provided or, if possible, the interpretation hotline (both can be found in the Produce Plus Binder) to communicate as effectively as you can.

Guidelines for Communication

1. **Speak slowly and clearly – NOT loudly.** Use shorter phrases rather than just speaking more loudly.
2. **Repeat if necessary.** Repeat phrases and summarize key points. Make it clear that you are happy to repeat anything you say in conversation.
3. **Keep it simple and be patient.** Keep word choice simple and sentences short. Be mindful of using any jargon, acronyms, or idioms. Allow silence between phrases and pause after asking a question. The customer may need time to answer.
4. **Give and seek feedback.** You can’t be certain there has been communication until the receiver acknowledges it with feedback. Remember, head nodding does not count as feedback with people from many different cultures. Ask clarifying questions.
5. **Demonstrate while speaking and use visuals when available.** When appropriate, try to gesture while speaking and demonstrate your points through actions or visuals.
6. **Share written materials where possible.** Written material may not be accessible for some customers, but perhaps someone at home can help communicate what is written. Written materials that can be taken away and read another time are often greatly appreciated.

Having a fluent speaker on hand who is either a trained interpreter, a staff member, or adult family member is ideal, but not always possible.