



## Volunteer Tips: Assisting Frail Members

April 2026

### Getting to Know Our Members

Supporting our members starts with understanding their individual needs. Information about a member's situation is gathered and updated at several points in his/her membership:

#### 1. In-home Visit

When a person applies to become a member of Arlington Neighborhood Village (ANV), part of that process includes a meeting in the member's home to have a one-on-one conversation about his/her situation and needs. During this intake visit, we collect information directly from the member, including:

- Use of mobility devices (e.g., walker, wheelchair)
- Vehicle preferences (e.g., type of vehicle they can safely get into/out of)
- Specific accommodations needed for visual/hearing/other condition

This information is documented in the member's record and shared with volunteers in the service confirmation email under 'Special Instructions', so they know what to expect in advance. It's important that volunteers read the confirmation message carefully.

#### 2. Ongoing Updates

Member needs may change over the course of membership. Updates can come from:

- Members themselves
- Family members or friends
- Annual renewal or other periodic check-ins from the ANV Office
- Volunteers (see below)

Relevant updates are added to the member's record as ANV learns of them, for use internally and/or in the information shared with volunteers.

#### 3. Volunteer Feedback (Very Important!)

Volunteers are our eyes and ears in the field – and one of our most important sources of information about our members. You are encouraged to share any feedback with the office when you submit your time/miles information or, if warranted, you can send a separate [email](mailto:office@anvarlington.org) (office@anvarlington.org) or call the office at 703-509-8057.

#### What to share:

- Challenges observed or discussed during the service that made it difficult to complete
- Noticeable changes in mobility (if you have provided a service for the member in the past) or other concern about physical or cognitive condition
- Safety or other concerns in the home

We appreciate and rely on your feedback! Volunteer observations help us keep member information accurate and allow us to provide more meaningful support. Your comments might lead us to update a member's record (e.g., noting a new mobility device), check in with the member, share additional resources, or add notes that will help future volunteers better serve them. In some situations, we may have context or history that informs our decision to act on information or not. Even if you're not sure, your notes are always helpful; when in doubt, it's better to share!

## Providing A Service

1. Review the Special Instructions provided in the confirmation email.
2. Confirmation call after assignment: Using the Special Instructions as a guide, discuss any relevant details with the member. For transportation, you might confirm what mobility device, if any, will he/she plan to use, meeting point, use of disability placard, etc.
3. It is very helpful, though not required, that you make a reminder call the day before the scheduled service. Some members will request it, others may not think of it or need it. During the initial confirmation call, you can ask if the member would like for you to call again when you're on your way.

## Transportation Tips

- Ask before assisting! Do not take a member's arm or otherwise touch them without asking first, as it can be startling for some people.
  - You might ask, "would it be helpful if I held your arm while you walk?"
  - You can also ask them to describe how to best assist them, e.g., "where would you like me to stand while you get in the car?"
- Consider asking if the member has a preferred route to the destination. Though it may not be the one suggested by GPS, some passengers are more comfortable traveling a route they recognize. Of course, as the driver, you have the right to override any questionable directions.
- Some members require assistance from the door to the vehicle (this should be indicated in the Special Instructions). If the member declines help, consider standing/walking nearby if you judge light assistance may be needed.
- Getting into/out of the vehicle:
  - Ask the member if he or she would like assistance before helping
  - Encourage members to back up to the seat, facing away from the car as they slowly sit down. Then, they can swivel their legs around and in, instead of trying to place one foot in at a time. For some members, it may be helpful to offer to help gently lift their legs into the car.
  - Seatbelt use is mandatory. Offer to assist in getting buckled if the member seems to be having trouble.
  - A [car door assist device](#) may be useful for some members. Volunteers are welcome to obtain one of these devices from the ANV Office!
- Managing assistive devices
  - Mobility devices can vary widely in size and design. Be prepared to adapt!
  - Handling a standard walker (no wheels or only two front wheels):
    - Facing the walker, find the release mechanism on each side (usually a push button or a lever, sometimes indicated with red color)
    - Press or pull both buttons at the same time and push the sides in until it folds flat
    - To unfold, simply pull the sides apart until you hear it click into place
  - Handling a rollator (3 or 4 wheels, and a seat)
    - Find a strap/handle, usually in the center of the seat, and pull it up; the sides will fold in
    - For some models, you may have to open the seat compartment to find the handle/bar to pull up on
    - For rollators with storage compartments, you may have to remove the member's personal items so that you can fold it.
  - Before the member exits the vehicle, position the walker/rollator in front of the member and make sure the mobility device is locked into position/brakes are on.
  - Depending on the vehicle type, it may be easier to store the device in the backseat rather than in the trunk.

- ANV only provides transportation for wheelchair users who need only minimal assistance, if any, when transferring between the chair and the vehicle. And the wheelchair should be a lightweight transport wheelchair. When assisting a wheelchair user:
  - Bring the wheelchair close to the vehicle, positioning it between the door and seat
  - Ensure the brakes are locked before the member transfers
  - If the wheelchair is equipped with footrests, you can swing them out of the way before the member stands. You will need to remove them before stowing in your car.
  - To collapse most chairs, look for a strap/handle along the edges of the seat and use it to pull up until it folds in.
  - You might find it helpful to watch [this short video](#) which gives advice on loading a wheelchair into a car.
- If you're not sure, ask the member for guidance.

### **Supporting Members with Hearing Impairment**

- Speak slowly and clearly.
- While in-person, face the member directly as much as possible.
- In some cases, it may be helpful to lower the pitch of your voice.
- Avoid background noise if possible (e.g., turn off the radio in your car, request the member turn off the TV while you're visiting).
- Rephrase statements/questions for clarification, rather than repeating yourself.

### **Supporting Members with Vision Impairment**

- Make yourself known when you meet and/or enter the room.
- Pay attention to light sources in the area and in the car (e.g., visor placement).
- Alert the member to any changes in terrain (step, uneven ground, etc) while he or she is walking (but avoid grabbing his/her arm abruptly unless there is an immediate hazard).
- Consider using a Sharpie or other dark/bold pen if you are sharing your phone number or other information with the member so it's easier to see.

### **In the Event of a Fall**

- If the member can get up on his/her own, let him or her make the decision about next steps. Discuss possible injuries, and whether an ambulance or other assistance may be needed.
- If the member cannot get up on his/her own, or if you observe any sign of head injury, do not attempt to lift or move the member and call 911 for assistance. Though an ambulance or similar emergency response may not be necessary, describe the situation and defer to professional guidance. Err on the side of caution.
- Notify the ANV Office at 703-509-8057.

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Perhaps most importantly, remember to bring your heart and humor to the service! We have a vibrant membership full of interesting and unique people, each with a story to tell. Every service is a chance to learn something, make a connection, and deepen your capacity for empathy.

Keep up the good work!