

# Toolkit for Organizing Canvassing



Canvassing is a fundamental organizing tool. It involves knocking on doors in a community. You can canvass to ask people to come to a meeting, to do a community survey of an issue, to ask people to register to vote, and more. It's a great way to meet folks face-to-face where they are and to show that you're invested in hearing what they have to say.



## 10 steps to organize your canvass

1. **Set a goal for yourself.** Why are you canvassing? What outcomes do you want?
2. **Choose a community that you want to reach.** Is this the building that you live in? Is this your neighborhood? Is this a neighborhood nearby?
3. **Set a date, time, and meeting location for your canvass.** When do you think people will be home so you can have the highest amount of contacts?
4. **Recruit volunteers for your canvass.**
5. **Plan for any extra logistics.** Do you need to get permission to enter a building? How do you want to divide up your "turf?" How will your volunteers get transported from your meeting location to their canvass sites? How will you get all of your materials back at the end of the day?
5. **Write a script.** Be sure that you include a clear ask!
6. **Develop a training** for your volunteers.
7. **Gather all of your materials**, including walk lists, leave-behinds, and tally sheets.
8. **Train your volunteers, and do your canvass!**
9. **Follow up** with volunteers, and do any follow-ups that were needed for the canvass.
10. **Evaluate your results.** Did you meet your goal? What went well, and what didn't? What might you do differently next time?

**Read further for:**  
Canvass Planning Checklist  
Writing your Script  
and more!

**Pro-tip:**  
Every door is a new  
opportunity.

# canvass planning checklist

Planning a canvass involves a lot of details. Here's a checklist.

- Set a goal for your canvass
- Do the organizer math to estimate how many doors you will need to knock on to meet your goals
- Research the area that you're canvassing, if needed
- Get permission to access buildings, if needed
- Recruit volunteers
- Set a starting location for the canvass
- Develop a training for volunteers (see page 49)
- Follow up with volunteers twice before canvass to confirm that they're coming
- Develop a script (see page 44-45)
- Gather snacks
- Make a list to map out where each person will door knock
- Set a meeting point
- Figure out transportation for each group from meeting point to the turf
- Make a plan to get materials back from volunteers
- Develop a flyer explaining why you stopped by
- Print copies of your script, walk list/tally sheet, leave-behinds for volunteers
- Check the weather and prepare accordingly

# canvass planning worksheet

Here are some questions to work through while you're planning your canvass.

**What is the goal of your canvass?** (inviting people to an event or meeting, recruiting people, doing a survey, voter registration, etc)

**What community would you like to focus on during your canvass?** Is the community you're trying to reach representative of the larger community impacted by this issue?

**What do you know about the people who live in the area that you will be canvassing?** Are there any language needs or other access needs that might impact your planning process?

**How many doors do you plan to knock on?** How many volunteers will you need? (See: Organizer Math on page 48)

**How will you recruit volunteers?**

**Have you planned all of the logistics for your canvass?**

**How will you follow up with volunteers after the canvass?**

# writing your script

**The script will change depending on what kind of canvass you are doing.**

Generally, your script should include:

1. Who you are and where you're from
2. Why you are knocking on somebody's door
3. Your Ask
4. Thank you

### Turnout for an Event - Example Script

Hi! My name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I'm one of your neighbors in [neighborhood].  
How are you today?

I'm out here with several other volunteers because we are concerned with the rising homelessness in our neighborhood and in our city.

We're organizing a community meeting with our neighbors to talk about what's going on and what we can do about it.

Ask: Would you be interested in joining us?

[If Yes] Great! I'm glad that you're interested. Here's a flyer with the date, time, location, and my contact information. Can I please have you put your name and some contact information on this sheet so I can follow up with you when the meeting gets closer? Thank you!

[If No] Thanks for your time.

### Tips

- Include an FAQ sheet for volunteers if you anticipate questions.
- Keep the script short, but give the volunteers enough information so they can carry on a conversation if the person at the door has more questions.
- Make sure that the ask is clear and that volunteers are prepared with follow-ups.
- Always leave some literature, whether folks answer the door or not!

# writing your script

### Voter Registration Canvass - Example Script

Hi, how are you today? My name is \_\_\_\_\_, and I'm a volunteer with the Housing Alliance. I'm stopping by today to ask you if your voter registration is up to date?

[If Yes] That's great - I'm glad to hear it! Do you have any questions or concerns about the upcoming election?

[If No] I have some voter registration forms here. Would you like to fill out your form now? We'll mail it off for you so you can get your ballot in time for the election!

[If Yes]: Great! Don't forget to fill out the entire form. You'll receive a voter's card in the mail in a couple of weeks. Do you have any questions for me about voting?

[If no] Okay. Thanks for your time!

### Common Reasons People Say They Don't Want to Vote - Talking Points

*All of these politicians are just corrupt.*

It's not just politicians that you're voting on – you also get to vote on initiatives/laws.

*I don't feel like I know enough to vote.*

There are a lot of voting guides that have good information out there and organizations that endorse candidates and ballot measures. Here are some examples...

*My vote doesn't count anyway.*

There are several recent elections that have been won by just a handful of votes! Just this past November in Seattle, Councilmember Lisa Herbold won by 36 votes, and former Governor Gregoire won by 133 in 2004. When the races get so tight, every vote certainly counts!

*I can't vote because I have a felony.* Actually, you can! As long as you're no longer under supervision of the Department of Corrections, you can re-register.

## other materials

In addition to the script, make sure you provide your volunteers with a walk list and/or tally sheet to keep track of the data they collect. In addition, you always want to have something to leave behind at doors where you don't get an answer.

### Walk Lists and Tally Sheets

Send your volunteers out with a walk list of all the addresses or doors that they will knock on. Or, if you are not going to specific addresses, send them out with a tally sheet. These tools will help you and your volunteers keep track of the doors they've knocked on. By recording the results of each knock, you can evaluate your canvass afterward. When you're thanking your volunteers, let them know how many doors your team collectively knocked on and how many conversations you had. You can set the tool up however makes sense to you. See the tally sheet on the next page as an example of something you could put together.

### Leave Behinds

Prepare something to leave behind at the doors, whether folks answer or not. This could be a flyer for an event. If you're doing voter registration, this might be an information sheet with directions to register to vote online. If you'd like someone to get in touch with you about a community survey, you could leave an information sheet with a website or other information. Just make sure that whatever you leave behind is straight forward and to the point. Folks will be more likely to read it. **Make sure that you never leave any canvassing material in mailboxes!** It's against the law. You can leave it rolled up in people's doorhandles, under a doormat, or tucked into the door jam.



# walk list/tally sheet

[ Date ] Canvass

NH = Not Home

R=Refused Conversation (Closed Door)

Y = Yes, agreed to your ask

N = No, said no to your ask

## Doors Knocked

Address/Door #	Results	Notes

Address/Door #	Results	Notes

Address/Door #	Results	Notes

Address/Door #	Results	Notes

Address/Door #	Results	Notes

Address/Door #	Results	Notes

Address/Door #	Results	Notes

### setting healthy expectations for turnout

If you've ever knocked on doors before, you know that you have far fewer conversations with folks than the number of doors you knock on. This sheet is meant to help you think about how many doors you need to knock on to reach a certain number of people.

#### "Canvassing Cold" vs. "Canvassing Warm"

The responses that you get at the doors will vary depending on whether or not you've been in the area before. In general, about 50% of people do not answer their doors. "Canvassing Cold" is when you knock on doors in a community where you have not already built relationships. "Canvassing Warm" is when you have developed relationships in a community or knocked on doors there before. The response to your canvass may get warmer as you keep canvassing in a community.

#### Organizer Math

For every ten doors you knock on, you will likely have about half of those folks answer their doors. Of those folks, you might have about half of them say yes to whatever it is you're asking them to do. Another half of those folks might actually follow through if you're asking them to vote, come to a community meeting, etc.

Here's an example of how you use organizer math. If you're trying to turn out 15-20 people to a community meeting in a place where you don't already have relationships, you can plan for:

200 door knocks  
80-100 contacts  
60-80 conversations  
30-40 yeses to attend community meeting  
15-20 people turn out to your meeting



## training for volunteers

### Things to Include

- **Why they're here today.** Be sure to let folks know why they're there. If you're doing voter registration in low-income buildings, for example, you could let folks know that the people they're talking to have been systemically left out of the democratic process. To fight for a stronger democracy, we're going to be intentional about inviting these folks in. If you're recruiting for an event, you could let folks know that this is contributing to our base-building goals, and thus our growing power.
- **Tips at the doors.** See sidebar.
- **Practice Practice Practice.** You can model a few different kinds of door knocking conversations, and then have folks practice a couple of times in pairs. As they practice with the script, let them know that they should adapt it so it feels comfortable to them.
- Be sure to let folks know how you want them to **record information** on their tally sheets.
- Ahead of time, brainstorm all of the **potential questions** that could come up at the doors, or questions that volunteers might have about your canvass. Go over a list of Frequently Asked Questions or talking points during the training so volunteers don't have to call you often when they're out in the field.
- **Information about how to contact** you if they're out in the field and have a question.

### Tips at the Doors

- Knock loudly, but in a friendly way.
- Wait thirty seconds to a minute before moving on after you knock.
- Leave literature rolled up in handle. **Never leave it in a mailbox.**
- Do not approach a door if you feel uncomfortable.
- Watch for no soliciting signs. People might be upset if you knock on their door.
- If you're entering a yard with a gate, shake it a bit to see if a dog comes up. If a dog comes, you don't have to go up to the door.
- Don't take it personally if people shut the door on you. It happens, and there are also people that are really friendly!
- If you are doing political work, make sure that you're talking to the voter on your list. If you're doing a survey or inviting people to meetings, don't worry about that.
- Maintain eye contact.
- Go over the script. Change it so it fits for you. Let people know that you're a volunteer -- that helps!
- Give a clear ask. Let folks know who you are and why you're there before you make your ask.
- Remember, every door is a new opportunity!

# the day of the canvass

**Today's the day! You've got your volunteers, and you're ready to train them. You've cut your turf and figured out where you want to canvass. Here are some final considerations.**

- Be sure to send your volunteers a note beforehand to let them know to wear comfortable shoes and to dress for the weather.
- Prepare clipboards with walk lists/tally sheets, scripts, leave behinds, and any other materials that you're sending with folks. If it's rainy outside, find some plastic bags to place over the clipboards. Ziplock bags or sheet protectors also work!
- Give your volunteers a few snacks for the canvass. A typical canvass will last two to three hours. Granola bars are a canvassing favorite.
- Be sure to give volunteers your phone number so they can get in touch with you in case they run into trouble.
- Send people out in pairs. People can either knock on doors together, or they can split up the list. Always good to give folks the option.

### Follow-Ups and Debriefs

Coordinate a way to get information and materials back from volunteers. Do a quick debrief with them before you thank them and send them on their way. What kinds of things seemed to resonate with folks at the doors? How was their experience? You might want them to volunteer with you again, so you want to make sure that you get their feedback and maintain that relationship!

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## follow up form

**Please fill out this form and contact staff from the Resident Action Project to set up a debrief meeting about your canvass.**

What was the date, time, and location of your canvass?

How many doors did you and your volunteers knock on?

How many contacts did you get?

How many commitments or yeses did you get?

What went well about your canvass?

What was challenging about your canvass?

How do you feel about the support provided from RAP staff? What did we do well, and where could we improve?

Anything else you'd like to talk about?