

# Canvassing the Community

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## FACTS ABOUT CANVASSING

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### Definition

*v. tr. To examine carefully or discuss thoroughly; scrutinize: "The evidence had been repeatedly canvassed in American courts" (Anthony Lewis). 2. To go through (a region) or go to (persons) to solicit votes or orders. To conduct a survey of (public opinion); poll.*

Door-to-door canvassing by friends and neighbors is the gold-standard mobilization tactic. Canvassing requires human resources and organization capacity. A typical canvassing campaign can target up to 300 streets.

Experiments suggest that face-to-face contact raises action results by 8.5 percent. While real effects of door-to-door contact are difficult to estimate, roughly 8% of the people reached by a canvas campaign will take action as a result of their contact.

### The Multiplier Effect

Face-to-face mobilization impacts not only the intended target of the canvassing campaign, but also others who might come into contact with the canvasser. This "spillover" or multiplier effect is the impression made upon additional people. Face-to-face canvassing clearly generates significant multiplier effect. This means in addition to the 8% results from a canvas campaign, another 2% of contacts result in action that were "second generation" contacts.

### History

In a decision of a 1936 Supreme Court case, while discussing the history of the Free Press Clause of the First Amendment, the Court stated that:

*"[t]o be prevented were not the censorship of the press merely, but any action of the government by means of which it might prevent such free and general discussion of public matters as seems absolutely essential to prepare the people for an intelligent exercise of their rights as citizens."*

There are legal interests a community, township, or state may have in some regulation of canvassing practices, particularly if the solicitation of money is involved. It is important to the success of the canvassing campaign to consider any legal restrictions on the activity in the intended canvas area.

## Canvassing Skills

*Using basic skills enables canvassers to reach many people.*

### **EYE CONTACT**

- conveys trust, integrity, and confidence
- holds attention
- allows the canvasser to watch the person's response

### **CLIPBOARD CONTROL**

- establishes a bond between the canvasser and the supporter
- gives them something to read
- reinforces what the canvasser is saying
- when the supporter takes the clipboard the first level of agreement is reached: the person is willing to listen

### **KISS -- KEEP IT SHORT AND SIMPLE**

- canvassers are often at the door when people are busy, so keeping it short is a courtesy
- the problem and the solution statements should be short and simple so people can understand it; many people feel alienated because they are told that only "experts" can solve society's problems
- a primary reason for going door-to-door is to get people off the fence, to involve them and allow them to say "Yes, we can make a difference"; putting the issue in the simplest of terms makes that easier for people to do

*These basic skills are the foundation of canvassing. They are crucial in gaining support and ensuring a successful campaign. There are also subtler skills that are very helpful.*

### **FLEXIBILITY**

A flexible canvasser is one who can approach many different personality types and modify the rap to match each particular person. Analyze each part of your rap and modify any part that is not effective. When you are at the door, feel natural with the rap.

### **PACING**

Look at the number of contacts you want to reach per hour. If under six, move faster and shorten your rap. If over fifteen, analyze what to leave out of your rap, and don't spend large amounts of time with people if they haven't taken the clipboard, or reached that first level of agreement.

### **MAXIMIZING**

When you have identified a strong supporter - regardless of the level - maximize the commitment. People who support the issue and have communicated that support will want to participate. A strong supporter is not going to tell you to go away because you're asking too much.



**TONE OF VOICE**

Work on inflection for the important parts of your rap to keep from sounding monotone. Also, don't end a statement in a high tone; it sounds like a question and less confident.

**MIRRORING LANGUAGE**

If the person you are talking to appears to be less informed about the issues, avoid using specialized language unfamiliar to a person who is not "in the business" of the issue. Use short, clear, "to the point" statements in the rap. For example: "We're trying to protect our community." Conversely, if a person appears to be well-versed on the issue, keep your rap short and detailed in the problem and solution. Don't over-justify (see Assume Support).

**POSITIVE LANGUAGE**

Using positive words like "winning" instead of "trying" will make you sound more confident. In the contribution rap, use phrases such as, "Your neighbors are supporting this!" instead of "Maybe you could help out" or "If you could help out."

**ASSUME SUPPORT**

Every time you approach a door, regardless of what you see outside, envision a friendly person who supports what you are doing. Even if your last encounter was not successful, each door is a new beginning. Think of the reasons you became involved in the effort. Think of all the other canvassers knocking on doors at the same time you are. What would happen if you gave up? These are ways to boost your energy from door to door and keep you motivated. The people you meet will be motivated by your energy and enthusiasm. And remember: when the person takes your clipboard, you know they're interested in what you have to say, so say it with confidence!

## **Pounding the Pavement**

The more efficiently you work your turf, the more successful you will be and do a night's work with the least effort and time. Here are some strategies:

### **BE SENSIBLE -**

Before you take a step, look over a reliable map. You can create your own from a preliminary walk-around, or use printed maps from the area Department of Planning. Many detailed street maps created from GIS tools are currently available online as Portable Document Format (PDF) for you to download and print. Once you have a good map, find the best route to all of your intended houses. Be sure to cover the area using the least amount of walking time. Ideally, you should be able to stop in two hours, make follow-up calls while you re-trace your steps, and be back at your starting point shortly thereafter.

### **MARK THE MAP ACCURATELY -**

Inaccurate marking of your map can sabotage the effort. If you've done only one side of a street, mark only that side. If houses do not exist on a street, mark the area as non-residential. Mark your map clearly, keeping track of your callbacks too. **Only mark areas you have already done, not the ones you intend to get to.**

### **KEEP TRACK OF CALLBACKS -**

Reaching the greatest number of supporters in a given area means covering each neighborhood as completely as possible. At the beginning of each street, record the street name and note all the house numbers. Record the house numbers where no one was home and go back at the end to try again. This is the "callback." Be strategic about it; don't walk more than 10 minutes for one potential callback. Keep good notes about where you want to retrace your steps.

