



# Grassroots 101: Organizing a Canvass

AMPLIFY  
YOUR VOICE!

***Canvassing**, often called doorbelling, or doorknocking, refers to going door-to-door in a neighborhood to talk about issues important to community members. It can also refer to approaching people on-on-one at events, while tabling at an event, or on the streets.*

## Overview:

Canvassing is a tactic used by a group to organize around an issue important to your group or organization. Organizing a canvass will take some work but the result of talking with people one-on-one, is the most effective way to connect with community members about an issue. Canvassing can be done tabling at an event, at a rally or concert or door-to-door. Door to door is generally done in urban neighborhoods where it is easy to walk between doors, and paired with phone banking for more rural neighborhoods where reaching someone by phone will be more efficient.

## Goal/Objectives:

The goal of canvassing is to form a connection with someone about your issue and ultimately persuade them to take action. Taking action can be anything from signing a petition, voting for a candidate, volunteering, pledging to vote at all, or donating money to your cause. Canvassing is an extremely effective method to achieve all these actions because you are able to have a personal conversation with that person at their door and be receptive to their questions and concerns. This “human” element often gets lost if you are just handing out flyers, sending mail, or even talking with someone over the phone. Concrete goals for your canvass are also valuable to define when planning. For example; 20 signatures, 15 pledge to vote cards, \$200 in contributions. Make sure each canvasser is actively working towards that goal at each door

**Time Required:** 2-3 hours

## Resources Needed:

- **A script:** You will want something to refer back to in case you forget any details. A script will generally lay out word for word what you “could” say but a best practice is to not read off the script and simply use it to guide your conversation and as a reference.
- **Literature or information:** This is not a must, but you may want some type of literature or information to hand out to people as a reminder of your conversation. Handing literature to someone is a great way to start a conversation or can be helpful to leave at their doorstep if nobody is home so they still know they got a personal visit!
- **A walk list or map of the area you are canvassing if going door to door:** You will need to give volunteers or members of your group either a list of houses they will be knocking or a map of a small specific area to go to.
- **Tally sheet or petition:** You will want to provide canvassers with some method of recording their conversations and collecting or updating contact information. It’s great if you end up with

10 new people supporting your issue, but if you don't know who they are or how to contact them again, you won't be able to build off of that relationship or keep them updated about future actions.

- **Pens and clipboards:** Remember to arm each of your canvassers with a pen (or two) to take notes with and a clipboard or another hard surface so they can write while they walk or stand on a doorstep.
- **Comfortable shoes and water:** It's always good to remind your canvassers to prepare for the weather and wear something they are comfortable walking around in.
- **Volunteers, group members, or friends:** Having a group of people confirmed to go out is critical when organizing a canvass. Not only does this result in overall higher deliverables, it is also a great way to introduce new people to an issue, and helps our sense of comradery for the day. Ideally, you want a mix of experienced canvassers and new canvassers to help with training and provide everyone with an experienced buddy to go door-to-door with if they want.
- **Contact information:** Make sure every canvasser has your cell phone number so they can check in if they get lost, have a question, or forget where your meetup location is!

## Steps

**1 Week out or as soon as you can:** Make a game plan. If you are engaging in a day of action, it's important to think through **WHY** you have picked that tactic and how that tactic will help you reach your larger goal.

### Example:

**Objective:** Stop the Vancouver oil terminal

**Strategy:** Inform and engage the neighborhood adjacent to the railroad tracks

**Tactic:** Organize a day of canvassing to go talk with community members in that neighborhood about the proposed oil terminal, the dangers it poses, and ways in which they can engage to stop it.

**1 week out:** Recruit your volunteers. Now that you know why your engaging in a day of canvassing and what it will achieve, you can use this message to recruit volunteers, friends, or group members to join you.

**2-3 days out:** Gather all your materials ahead of time: make sure you know what neighborhoods you are going to, have all your literature, clipboards, and any other materials you will need.

**2-3 days out:** confirm your volunteers. You want a very clear idea of how many people will show up so you have the materials ready. Make sure to call or contact everyone who said they would show up ahead of time to confirm that they will still be there and have all the information they need.

**Day of:** Train your volunteers and get everyone out canvassing!

- Give a little training or spend some time discussing the issue you will be talking to community members about. You may have some experienced canvassers and some who are relatively new so make sure everyone clearly understands the issue.
- Go over some tips and tricks for canvassing and encourage everyone to role play a scenario.



### Follow-up:

A day of canvassing is a great tool for building your movement and identifying people you will want to engage further. Other tools to use paired with canvassing:

- **Phonebanking:** you can use phonebanking to recruit your volunteers, follow up with volunteers to ask them to engage in another action, or follow up with people you canvassed to ask them to volunteer, or give them more information.
- **Petition gathering:** Canvassing can be a way to connect with community members and get them to sign a petition.
- **Social media:** Use social media to help get the word out about your action, and elevate the visibility of the work you are doing. While this is not the most effective recruitment tool, it can be used to increase your visibility.



One of the biggest benefits of any type of one-on-one contact is that you gather useful information about them to use in the future. The most important thing you can do after a canvass, regardless of your issue, is to make sure to use this valuable data to continue your contact with them and build the relationship. If someone is 100% against your issue, no need to contact them again, if they are still undecided, you may want to follow up with more information, and if they are 100% supportive, you may want to ask them to volunteer to engage further in your issue.

### Additional resources: Tips and tricks to canvassing

- **Don't read off your script:** refer back to it if you forget an important date or fact but look at the person you are talking to, not clipboard!
- **Smile and have open body language:** just being friendly, introducing yourself, and asking them questions can go a long way!
- **Take a big step back after you knock or ring the doorbell:** you can always step forward again as they open the door and you start to talk, but the goal is not to intimidate them before they open the door
- **Make sure to get the information in their hands:** if you are trying to give them literature or information, make sure to get it in their hands instead of waiting for them to ask.
- **Do not leave literature or information in mailboxes:** this is illegal. Instead, tuck in under a doormat, or in door if they are not home and you want to leave something for them.
- **Leave them space to talk too:** It can be tempting when you know a lot about an issue to do all the talking but make sure to ask them what they know as well or what issues they care about.

### Questions?

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