



TOOLS ROUNDUP: CANVASSING AND DOOR-KNOCKING

This doc was designed to travel. Please feel free to share this around with other progressive campaigners. You can download this (look under File menu top left) in several formats or link to it / [embed it](#) on a web page.

TOOLS ROUNDUP: This doc is a compilation of useful tools and resources we have found on a topic that was requested by our audience community of campaigners. If you have more to contribute on this topic, please write us at: blueprintsfc@gmail.com

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Disclaimer / request for your help

This is a work in progress that is meant to evolve over time with input from campaigners. At the moment, the tips and ideas here reflect the voices of the [contributors/reviewers listed below](#). We are always looking to add more voices of campaigners that have knowledge and experience on this topic. If this is you, please contact us here: blueprintsfc@gmail.com.



Canvassing Guide from Organizing for Action

This guide was put together by [Organizing for Action \(OFA\)](#), a community organizing project of the Democratic National Committee.

What is a Canvass?

Canvassing refers to going door-to-door in a neighborhood and having conversations about important issues with community members. It is an essential component of organizing. We use canvassing to talk to voters about issues that matter to them, spread our message and recruit new volunteers. The results of every conversation are recorded so we can make sure we are organizing in the most efficient way possible and focusing on what's most important to voters. Organizing for America's success in 2010 depends upon our ability to share our message through as many discussions with voters as possible.

Thanks for your interest in putting together a canvass. This guide will walk you through each step of the process and provide you with all the resources you'll need to be successful. Good luck!

Why Do We Canvass?

Canvassing in local neighborhoods (both at the doors and in high traffic areas) is the most effective way to talk with community members about the issues that matter to them. Our success on the Obama campaign and in advocating for health insurance reform depended upon our ability to share our message through face-to-face discussions with voters. We need to let our neighbors know about our efforts and invite them to join us!

Where Do We Canvass?

Usually the goal of any canvass is to talk to as many people as possible. Therefore, we want to target areas that are dense with people and allow us to easily talk to them all. We recommend canvassing both public locations and going door-to-door in neighborhoods. Public locations should be areas where people pass by regularly. Good



canvass spots include grocery stores, sporting events, public transport stops, fast food restaurants, parks, college campuses, etc. It's important to have several back up places in case the location is unsuccessful or the canvasser is asked to move. Make sure your canvassers know not to be discouraged if they are asked to leave a location – flexibility is key.

Door-to-door canvassing should focus on dense neighborhoods that are easily walkable. You want to choose neighborhoods where the houses are relatively close together and you can hit as many doors as possible.

We do suggest that you do not schedule voter contact events before 10am or after 9pm.

Planning a canvassing drive

Step 1: Select a Staging Location

Determine where your “staging location” will be. That is where people will gather before and after the canvass. Your staging location can be a private home, park, school, or any other location that will accommodate your group and allow for a brief training.

Step 2: Recruit Volunteers and Build a Team

Invite as many volunteers as possible to participate in your canvass. Make phone calls and tap into your network of friends, neighbors, and colleagues to find volunteers. You may also want to create your own flyers promoting the canvass and post them at your local coffee shop, grocery store, or library.

It's often helpful to distribute the tasks involved in running a canvass. You may want to consider finding volunteers for the following roles:

- Canvass Coordinator – coordinates splitting up neighborhoods, identifying high-traffic locations, and makes maps, as well as helping to prepare, distribute and re-collect canvass materials.
- Volunteer Recruitment Coordinator – responsible for reaching out to volunteers, confirming volunteer canvass sign-ups, and managing volunteer sign-in on canvass day.
- Resources Coordinator – Helps to find and secure the staging ground; a place to meet before and after the canvass. This person may need to consider parking



needs, restrooms, etc. This person also helps to get donations of food and water to sustain canvassers.

- Trainer – this should be an experienced canvasser who can talk through how canvassing works, as well as explain why the neighborhood and the people you're contacting are important. This person also should be able to set and communicate a clear goal that will motivate and focus volunteers.

Step 3: Prepare all of your Materials

Create a list of canvass locations, keeping in mind that you want to canvass in walkable neighborhoods and high-traffic public locations. Be sure to photocopy enough maps for everyone to have one and delegate out an appropriate amount of streets for each person. Here's a list of other items you might need to have ready:

- Map and Walk List - Your walk list is made up of the households you must visit and will be provided by the canvass organizer (Most often an OFA staff member or regional leader). Each page of your walk list will include only the houses on one side of one street and will be in the order that is easiest to walk them. Its best of you pair the walk sheet packets up so that two people can walk in the same area together.
- Script - The script will be provided by your canvass organizer and is meant to act as a guide for your conversations. It will feature a number of questions you should ask the voters you speak with.
- Tally Sheet - The tally sheet will typically be a part of your walk list. It is critical that when you talk to each voter, you code your conversations correctly on the walk sheet with their answers to the questions in the script. Accurate data is essential to our organizing efforts.
- Campaign Literature - Give each voter one of these. If the person is not at home, leave the literature with someone else or on his/her doorstep. Do not leave any literature in the mailbox as this is illegal.
- Pens and a Clipboard - Be prepared by making sure you have supplies to make canvassing easier, have enough pens and clipboards for your entire team. Having a clipboard to write on will make recording the results of your conversations much easier.



- Comfortable Walking Shoes and Water - Tell your volunteers to be prepared for spending a few hours on their feet and to bring water for while they're out.
- Contact Information - Exchange cell phone numbers with the staff or other volunteers you are working with, in case you get delayed or lost.

Step 4: Make Reminder Calls

Be sure to make reminder calls to everyone who has signed up online or has told you verbally they plan on attending. Turn out will increase dramatically if you ask them for a firm commitment.

Sample Agenda For Your Canvass

This agenda is meant as a suggestion to guide you through your canvass. Feel free to adjust the agenda to best suit your neighborhood and participants.

Welcome and Introduction (10 min)

If possible, have each person introduce themselves by name. Have two people share their personal stories, addressing what is at stake for them personally. Stories should give a human side to our organizing work and remind us of the real impact of the decisions made in Washington.

Also be sure to explain why you're knocking doors today and what the group's motivation and ultimate goals are.

Set expectations (3 min)

Share your goal for the number of doors you are trying to knock and the number of people you are trying to reach. Put this number into perspective by reminding your volunteers that they are part of a huge effort with thousands of volunteers across the country engaging in similar efforts.

Review the script and role play with a partner (5 min)

Have all your volunteers take some time before you begin to think of a one-minute explanation of why they are volunteering for Organizing for America. Read the script out loud and ask if anyone has questions. Practice what you are going to say when you knock on the door. Let people know that it's alright to share their story in order to



personalize the message, but that they should try to answer all the questions on the script.

Explain logistics (3 min)

Address how people should organize in groups, give any necessary transportation details and pass out materials.

Hit the streets! (3 hours)

Check on your team during the action. As the event host, it's your job to keep your team motivated. Collect cell phone numbers and text updates about your group's success! Example: Alex got his first signature, Caroline's out of pens because she's had so many signups, etc!

Debrief (15 min)

At the end of the canvass have everyone tally up the number of doors they knocked and the number that were successful contacts. Gather the information and make sure the data has been entered or will be (There should be a staff member or regional lead who will collect data). Present how your group fared overall and ask those who did well what made the difference. Ask those who struggled what the challenges were that we need to prepare better for next time.

Don't forget in your debrief to let people know about your next event or how they can get more involved in your local group.

Celebrate!

If possible, organize a potluck or an optional social gathering afterward. Talk about your success together!

Tips for Canvassing

Follow your walk list.

Knock on every door identified on your walk list, and don't stay too long at a door. Leave literature at every listed door, even if the person is not home. Try to talk with the voter



listed on the sheet and only visit the houses on the list unless your canvass organizer specifically tells you otherwise.

If you speak with a member of the household other than the voter on your walk list, do not record the responses as those of the person on your list. You should simply report the voter as "Not Home" and move on to the next house.

Stay safe!

Don't go inside houses, even in a group. Don't knock on a door you feel uneasy about. Don't offer to shake people's hands at the door - it can often put people off - but shake their hands if they offer.

Things to Remember while Talking to Voters

Smile!

This is the most basic rule of voter contact. If you look and sound like you are enjoying yourself, people will be more interested in engaging in conversation with you and discussing what issues are important to them.

Stay positive!

As a volunteer, you're here to excite voters about the President's agenda and the work Organizing for America is doing - not to weigh them down with complaints about the opposition or their viewpoints. Comparisons are good, but keep a positive focus on the President's goals. And don't argue with people who disagree with you. Kindly thank them for their time and move on. Your time is valuable, and there are a lot of voters to contact.

Don't pretend to be a policy expert.

It's likely that someone will ask you a question to which you do not know the answer. That's okay. You should never be afraid to admit you do not know the details of one of the President's policies. If you aren't sure, say just that.

Follow the script, but speak from the heart.



You will be provided with a script and information on the issues to help you engage voters. But you should use the script as a guide and feel free to explain to voters what inspired you to work with Organizing for America. Your personal story will always be the most effective way of engaging with voters.

Capture Information

Reporting good data from your canvassing is just as important as actually talking to the voters. Understanding what voters think about important issues helps us ensure we are running the most effective organization possible.

Also, make sure to enter the information from your sign-in sheets. Remember this is very important as it allows Organizing for America to gauge the impact of your group and gauge what additional resources we can provide.

Thank your guests

Send a personal email thanking everyone who participated in the canvass. Be sure to stay connected with your fellow volunteers and get ready for the next action!

Sample canvassing scripts courtesy of CallHub

[Taken from this article on the CallHub site](#)

Voter identification script

A voter ID script is used to identify the voter, where they stand, how they might vote and what issues concern them. It is a brief script with the goal of getting to as many voters as possible.

Only if the voters feel that you are listening to them will you know what they really think. The important thing to do is to connect with the voter.

Blueprints for Change

First, identify that you've got the right person.

Start with: **"Hello, may I speak with <name of the voter>?"**

The sooner you have them talking, the better the chances are of having a conversation. The conversation here is guided.

Next, introduce yourself.

For example, **"I am a volunteer/student intern with the <name of campaign>"**

You want them to know that you're not a paid professional but rather a volunteer who is passionate about the candidate or cause.

Next, ask the question.

The question should be short for which they will have an opinion, this will tell you if they support your candidate or not.

For example, **"Do you think that we should cut state income tax?"**

These open-ended questions can initiate a conversation without appearing to be biased and can make the voter see the other side of the argument, thereby giving an honest viewpoint. This helps you see how the individual voter sees certain issues, which can be recorded to be used later in the campaign.

You want to get an honest viewpoint for questions dealing with issues like health care, education, gerrymandering or environment. For example **"What do you think about the lack of funds given to public schools?"** or **"Do you think gerrymandering is ethical?"**

Avoid giving voters the **"I don't know"** option. This will make more voters go with the undecided option than stating their opinion.



Keep in mind to ask questions in a casual way which would keep them interested. *An uninterested voter* will not give you the right information as they'd simply want to get done with the conversation.

Volunteer recruitment script

This script is directed toward voters who are identified as *staunch supporters* of your candidate.

The script should be interactive and it should engage the potential volunteer in a conversation about what is important to them, the various problems to be resolved and the need for them to act now.

The prime reason why people don't volunteer is that they are never asked to! Instead of directly asking for help, you could start off by **thanking the voters** for their support.

For example **"We wouldn't be where we are today without your support."**

The key is to *tap into the matter that concerns the voter*. Bring in a local issue or a problem that needs to be solved; the volunteer can then persuade the voter to act upon it.

[Related: How to write a phone banking script](#)

For example **"<name of your candidate> is willing to bring in certain changes about the safety of your neighbourhood. Are you willing to do the necessary?"**

Conclude with:

"Can <name of your candidate> count on you for your help?"



Voter persuasion scripts

A persuasion script is used to **sway undecided voters** to vote for your candidate. It is usually longer than others and engages the voter in a conversation about relevant issues in their constituency.

Reconnect with a voter who was previously identified as undecided and whose prime concern was an issue close to your candidate. The goal is to persuade the voter to vote for your candidate by using this information.

Use the data collected during voter identification stage to tailor a message to undecided or opposition voters. For some healthcare would be the key concern, tap into this to get support.

First, start off by explaining the campaign to the voter by highlighting their key concern.

For example “**<Name of your candidate> has worked hard to bring in better health care services in this neighbourhood. They have talked and listened to the problems of the neighbourhood and plans on bringing in a change.**”

Some voters are not issue-oriented. That is because they don't follow politics closely. They tend to vote based on who they like or based on commonalities they have with the candidate. In such cases, you can highlight your candidate based on family background, community service, military service, gender, or leadership experience.

Don't expect swing voters to have a sudden epiphany and be swayed by your conversation. If they are swayed, get them to subscribe to election alerts, get their emails and phone numbers for follow up campaigns.

In conclusion, stay connected with the undecided voter and always come back to the reason you're there in the first place, your candidate.

For, example: “**<Name of the voter> can <name of the candidate> count on you for your vote?**”



Get out the vote (GOTV) script

The GOTV script is used to ensure your core supporters *don't forget about Election Day and help people get to the polls if needed*. The script aims to **increase voter turnout** and motivate the occasional but supportive voter to hit the polls. The volunteer must keep it local and positive.

One thing to keep in mind is that it's not about you rather it's about them, the voter. Subtle changes in language can make a big difference in the impact of your script. Consequently, avoid using lines like **"I need you to vote"**, say: **"We need you to vote."**

If voters intend on voting, give them information about the polling station and the ideal time to cast the vote.

Avoid persuasion during GOTV. Your goal is to reach the maximum number voters so don't get drawn into conversations or arguments. It is not a persuasion campaign and for that reason move on to the next voter if the former is not interested.

Remember to **contact voters who live alone** as they are less likely to have a plan as compared to the ones living with their families.

Always close by thanking the voters for their time. For example: **"Thank you for your time. Have a great evening."**

Training videos on canvassing, door knocking and persuasive conversations

Canvass Training from Mobilize America

<https://youtu.be/aQoJMZAfRII>

Canvassing 101 from SwingLeft Academy

<https://academy.swingleft.org/training/canvassing>

Uplift Repeal Training: Persuasive Conversations



<https://www.crowdcast.io/e/lqn8ums7/register>

Effective Conversations from SwingLeft Academy

<https://academy.swingleft.org/effective-conversations>

Attribution

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