



# Canvassing 101

Canvassing can take on two different forms: door-to-door and high-density canvassing. Door-to-door canvassing includes knocking on individual doors throughout a neighborhood and gathering information from individual addresses. High density canvassing refers to canvassers that circulate areas with lots of people (like a farmers' market, town square, or community event) and gather information from passers-by. Both are effective forms of canvassing, and some general rules apply to both.

## Canvassing Strategies

In general, when door-to-door canvassing, only about 20% of people will open their door to a canvasser; this equates to about 3-4 conversations per hour spent canvassing. This can seem discouraging, but it really just indicates how critical it is to make a connection when someone does open the door.

Whether you are door-to-door or high density canvassing, you have about 30 seconds to make a connection with your audience: this is called your elevator pitch. Your elevator pitch should include four key elements:

1. Your Name (first name only)
2. Your relationship to the area and project (I'm your neighbor, I'm a city resident, I work for, I volunteer for...)
3. One sentence about the project and why it's important to you (I'm out collecting data for...because we are trying to learn...because I value your input...)
4. One sentence ask (avoid phrasing this as "do you have time to...?")

Techniques for easing into conversations depend on the kind of information you're hoping to learn, but the following strategies can be deployed to gain the interest of a survey-taker, after introducing yourself:

**Open with a question:** "Are you aware that 30% of homes in this community are expected to experience flooding this year? We're collecting data to address..."

**Open with a story:** "My home flooded last year during a storm, forcing my family to evacuate and costing us a lot of money. Because of my personal experience, I'm administering surveys to..."

**Open with a statement/fact:** "I'm approaching you today because our city experienced three major flooding events last year, and it's expected that 30% of the homes in our community will experience flooding again this year. Residents deserve to be safe and prepared, so I am collecting information to..."

Some planning ahead by canvassing organizers can make conversations significantly easier, including making targeted knock-lists (the addresses that you'll actually go to) and cutting relevant turf (the targeted geographic territory you'll be canvassing in). Utilizing databases like Voter Action Network, Voter Vault, DataMart, NationBuilder, or Aristotle are helpful for this; as well as using US Census data.

## *The Canvasser's Backpack*

While traveling light is important for long days spent on your feet, being prepared is even more critical! Below is a list of items to keep on-hand or nearby (in your vehicle or a public locker) to make your days out canvassing more successful and comfortable.

**Water and snacks:** Staying hydrated and energetic throughout the day is key to bringing your best self and staying positive – if it's summer time, freeze 1-2 water bottles for a quick cool down. Pack a full lunch and make time to rest and eat a meal during the day.

**A change of clothes:** Being comfortable and presentable will make a world of difference for your canvassing shifts. Especially in the summer (sweaty) or rainy months, having a dry change of clothes is a great way to refresh and reset at mid-day.

**At least one printed copy of your survey and a pad of paper/pens:** If you use a tablet or smartphone to collect survey data and the battery dies, or there is an interruption to the data/WiFi you're relying on, you'll want a backup so you don't lose an entire day of work. Bringing printed copies of your survey for folks to fill out, or using a printed copy and filling out responses on a pad of paper allows you to persist despite technical difficulties. You can always import the information manually when you're back online.

**Battery bank/USB charger for your device:** Keep your devices charged! Batteries can die especially quickly in extreme heat or cold, depending on the season during which you're canvassing.

**Business cards/pamphlets for the organizations you're working with:** If survey-takers have additional questions or concerns, directing them to call or email on their own time frees you up to continue your canvassing.

**Sunscreen/bug spray/rain coat/umbrella:** Be prepared for the elements (though, it's hard for anyone to turn away a canvasser caught in the rain without an umbrella).

**Emergency contact list:** Have a printed or written list of emergency contacts in case your cell phone's battery dies – you can always ask to borrow a phone to get help.

**A printed map of the area:** If you're canvassing in an area you're not familiar with or having technological failures, a printed map can be very helpful for keeping track of areas you've already covered, marking off streets you need to revisit, or for finding your way back to your car or staging area at the end of the day.

**Wearing a t-shirt, lanyard, button, hat, or other identifier** from the organization you're working with helps to establish your role and formalize your presence while canvassing.

## Safety While Canvassing

*Please refer to page five for additional safety considerations specific to COVID-19.*

While Community-Led Research is a method focused on community members interacting with their own familiar communities, there are still safety measures to keep in mind when approaching individuals in their homes, and there are circumstances when a volunteer or organization staff member might not be canvassing their own neighborhood.

**Canvassing in pairs** helps immensely with feeling and being safe. Whether you go door-to-door together, each take one side of the street to keep an eye on each other, or circulate near each other at an event, having a buddy is the way to go! Implementing a check-in system in case you get separated can be helpful.

**Having a list of emergency contacts and locations** ahead of time can help in the event of an emergency or accident. Before you go canvassing, check the area for a local firehouse/police station and write down the direct phone numbers. Authorities should only be contacted in the event of a true emergency. It can also be helpful to identify places like grocery stores, gas stations, or libraries that often keep first aid kits and have public restrooms as well.

**Keeping charged battery banks** in case of your cell phone dying is not only helpful for collecting data, but for being able to make an emergency phone call if the need arises.

In the event that you are **invited to enter someone's home** while canvassing, and while COVID exposure is an active concern in your community, decline the invitation. If COVID is no longer a public health concern and CDC guidelines allow such contact, trust your instincts when considering such an invitation. It's okay to decline, even if that means you miss a survey response. This happens often with elderly survey-takers, who are less likely to want to stand at their door with you.

Some people will be angry that you've approached them or are on their property, and might raise their voice at you or harass you. **You have every right to walk away** and not respond to that individual, and can call or ask for help if you feel threatened.

**If a home has a “no solicitors” or “no trespassing” sign**, you are still legally allowed to approach the home. Solicitation signs only apply to salespeople and other financial asks. However, trust your instincts and honor your comfort level when deciding if you want to approach the home.

**If a home feels physically inaccessible or unsafe** because of overgrown vegetation, an unleashed pet, a privacy gate or fence, or an inaccessible front entry, trust your instincts and honor your comfort level when deciding if you want to approach the home.

**Report all incidents to your canvassing manager/organizer**, including harassment or bad interactions with community members. It helps them plan proactively if a different canvasser needs to return to that area.

## **COVID Safety for Canvassers**

*In addition to the precautions outlined below, please refer to the latest CDC Public Health Guidance for Community-Related Exposure.*

During the COVID-19 pandemic, it is arguably safer canvass to door-to-door, rather than high density canvassing in crowds. Regardless of which strategy you choose, the following guidance can help keep you (and the people you interact with) safe.

**Wear a facemask** that covers your nose and mouth entirely, even when canvassing outside.

**Avoid touching the outside of your facemask** (to remove it or adjust it). The outside of the mask is a surface where airborne particles collect: use the mask’s straps to take it on and off, instead.

**Carry sanitizing spray** with you to use on electronic devices, pens, and your hands in between interactions.

**Wash and sanitize your hands** thoroughly prior to taking food/water breaks.

**Maintain six feet of distance** during interactions while canvassing: speaking loudly and clearly is preferable over closing the distance between you and another person.

**Take all breaks at least 6-10 feet away from others**, to ensure a safe distance for removing your mask to eat or drink.

**Decline all invitations to enter homes.**