

STRATEGIES FOR SAFETY WHILE CANVASSING

Developed by Vote Run Lead in Partnership
with Maria Banjo

Version 1.0



STRATEGIES FOR SAFETY WHILE CANVASSING

Developed by Vote Run Lead in Partnership with Maria Banjo

Direct voter contact is the most impactful tool for campaigning. Black, Indigenous, women of color and queer women experience high rates of harassment in their daily lives—and that harassment may continue on the campaign trail. While there are laws that guarantee your right to canvass door-to-door, safety should be a priority when you are doing so.

Safety Fundamentals

Follow these fundamentals when canvassing door-to-door in any community.

Volunteers can:

- Be on public property.
- Offer literature about a candidate and encourage voters to learn more.
- Knock doors in a locked apartment complex or gated community if they live there or are with someone who lives there or has permission from management.
- Knock on doors with “no soliciting” signs. Political campaigning is not considered soliciting by law, but you may have to educate some voters about this. If a voter insists you are not welcome, do not continue to insist, simply end the conversation.

Volunteers should:

- Walk on sidewalks and avoid walking through private lawns.
- Leave campaign literature on doorknobs or sandwiched in between screen doors, but never leave literature in mailboxes.
- Seek management permission to be in secure apartment complexes or gated communities.
- Respect “no trespassing” or “no canvassing” signs.
- Never go into a voter’s home.
- Never remove literature/signage related to other candidates.
- Never assume all pets are friendly.

Personal safety of the candidate and volunteer goes beyond these basics. There may be parts of the district that you are unfamiliar with or know there may be individuals with strong feelings about your campaign or the issues you are bringing forward.

Planning ahead for any canvassing event is key:

Learn about the community or turf you will be knocking and train your volunteers well for what they may experience. [Click here for our “Researching Your District” tipsheet.](#)

- If you are going into a new community, introduce yourself to community leaders and local law enforcement before you arrive in the community. If possible, let them know when you will be canvassing in the area. This is not required by law, but may benefit your campaign in the long run.
- Consider taking a surrogate from that community with you to help you initiate local relationships or act as a buffer.
- Volunteers should be easily identifiable with candidate swag (stickers, t-shirts, name tags etc.)
- If you have concerns about a certain part of your district—do not doorknock it. Engage those voters through events, phone banking, or texting campaigns.

Prepare Your Team

- Meet with volunteers at a central location before they begin canvassing. This allows you to answer any questions or concerns they may have prior to the volunteer shift.
- Role play possible scenarios that may occur during a shift of voter engagement.
- Ask volunteers to wear clothing that clearly identifies them as a member of the campaign, and be prepared to identify yourself with literature.
- Offer a buddy system. If volunteers must do certain blocks alone, keep them in the same neighborhood as other volunteers.
- Finish your canvassing during daylight hours.
- Do not enter premises with “no trespassing”, “no canvassing” or “beware of the dog” signs.
- Use inviting body language, instead of body language that could be interpreted as aggravated (hands on hips, or folded arms). Avoid any and all types of physical contact.
- Avoid arguing with voters. Instead, stay calm, speak gently, slowly and clearly, and know when it is time to end the conversation and move to the next house.

- If the voter seems irritated or angry you should leave. Compromising your safety is not worth flipping one voter. The likelihood of flipping an angry voter is slim, and can likely backfire. Now that voter is motivated to vote against you or your candidate.

Campaigning in the time of COVID-19

- Follow all CDC and local health department guidelines for your community or the community in which you are canvassing.
- Encourage volunteers to be vaccinated and provide hand sanitizer, masks, and extra pens as appropriate.
- Consider requesting volunteers have a negative at-home COVID-19 test before they begin any field activities.
- Allow volunteers to wear a mask if they are comfortable doing so.
- Immediately step back and create space between you and the voter after knocking on the door. (6-8 feet recommended)
- Be brief. Do not linger at a door longer than the recommended 15 minutes of exposure time.
- Volunteers should avoid touching their faces while canvassing and should wash or sanitize their hands frequently during their shift.

Personal Safety Tips

- Share your location with your canvassing team, friends, and/or family. You may want to turn on location services on your cell phone.
- Carry a cell phone with you when canvassing. And make sure it is fully charged! If you do not have one, ask the campaign if they can provide a “burner” phone for your use.
- It may be beneficial to carry pepper spray, a personal alarm, or some other safety tool. Just make sure this tool isn’t visible when you first approach a voter to avoid appearing hostile.