

## Getting Started With Voter Contact

### **Who, me?**

It is completely understandable that you might find it unsettling to talk to people you don't know -especially since you are either calling them at their homes or actually going to their door. Few people truly like phone calling or door knocking, but when it comes to elections or advocating for issues it is an essential part of winning.

And yes, that means you. Think of it this way: this is where your values and conviction are tested. If you really believe what you say, you'll do the hard work of communicating it to voters. And it's just talking; no need to argue -just have a short respectful conversation. You can do it! Let's take a look at common concerns and some things you can do to be effective and comfortable.

### ***I'm nervous because I'm shy.***

It may come as no surprise that shy people can often communicate more effectively than others. Shyness sets voters at ease and tends to forestall a negative response. It may take a few contacts to get comfortable, but you'll get there! Two things you can do: be prepared and then just do it; before long you'll feel like a pro!

Think about these things...

- The campaign will give you talking points and basic instructions.
- Ask who the best phone bankers or door knockers are and sit next to them or go with them. You'll pick up talking and style points.
- Be yourself. Tell voters you are a volunteer. Be conversational and friendly.
- If you are calling or knocking into your neighborhood (you can request this) mention that you live in the neighborhood. Refer to yourself as a neighbor.
- Most people are pretty polite; say goodbye if they're not. Hang up or leave if they're abusive.
- Most people who will never agree with you will tell you and they're most often polite about it. Thank them for their time, mark this on your call or walk sheet and and move on.

### ***I'm not sure how to begin.***

You'll diffuse a lot of tension by identifying yourself as a volunteer and, if applicable, as a neighbor. They will be more comfortable knowing you are not a paid operative.

Don't ask "Can I ask you about the upcoming election?" or "Is this a good time?". Remember, the voter is also uneasy and it is too easy for them to answer a yes or no question with a "No".

If you are making voter identification contacts (i.e., which way do they lean) or Get Out The Vote (GOTV) contacts, your job is easy –ask them the questions from the script, thank them and move onto the next call. There is no persuasion involved and the conversation is tightly scripted and short.

If you are making persuasion calls, let the voter talk a little. They may mention an issue you are familiar with. Take notes so you can come back to these issues later.

Practice helps —and faster than you think. As you practice you'll sound less scripted and more confident. For most people, one shift is all it takes to get comfortable enough that you'd be willing to do it again!

### ***What if I get an extreme conservative? Will they yell at me?***

Even the most hardened extremists are much more polite face to face than they are behind the anonymity of the Internet. Hard righties may simply brush you off (no great loss -you wouldn't have convinced them anyway). A few, however, relish the chance to throw their views at you. Arguing back is a waste of time and means less time with persuadable voters. Simply say thanks and goodbye.

### ***I'm scared that I don't know enough. What if a voter asks me things I know nothing about?***

Well, first understand that the voter is quite likely thinking the same thing. And welcome to the club, Sport; nobody knows everything. Try these things:

**Start by asking voters what matters to them** ...and stop when they get to something you know! You might find one thing you are both passionate and knowledgeable about and you'll feel much more confident!

**Talk about values!** This is way easier than flinging facts and statistics and far more effective. Facts will not win voters. I know it makes you want to scream when people ignore reality. Facts *are* important; but people see things from different frames of reference that are quite resistant to change. In fact, when it's a cage match between facts and frames *the facts will almost always lose* (think climate change deniers). Values do work and they're way easier -and way, way, way more effective. **Everyone can talk about values.** Value Framing is about morality -very simply, what's right and wrong.

**Re-frame the issue from our values and worldview.** We encourage you to study up on "[framing](#)" but here's a quick cheat sheet. Frame your talking points around one or more of these core progressive values:

- Empowerment and Protection
- Common Good & Investment
- Decency & Dignity
- Equity and Opportunity
- Empathy & Social Responsibility
- Freedom & Equality
- Public support for Private Success
- Excellence & Fulfillment
- Justice & Accountability

When a voter brings up an issue, stop for a moment and ask yourself: "What is the underlying value?" For example, when a voter asks about spending and taxes, the underlying value for republicans is cost but for progressives it's **empowerment**. We hate waste as much as Republicans, but we feel it's crucial to invest in things like roads and schools that benefit *all* Americans.

### ***Make the "Ask":***

Campaigns and organizations will have specific "asks" -i.e., what they'll ask the voter to do. Simply ask the question and note the answer. The ask is the rare yes or no question.

It will probably be difficult the first few times; it *feels* wrong. You just met this person and seem to be expecting a definite answer based on a minute or two of persuasion. The point here is not *necessarily* to get an instant voting commitment; a very positive answer identifies this person as in our camp and not an undecided voter. We'll likely spend less time with this person as the campaign continues. A very negative answer tells us we probably won't get this person no matter how many resources we use. Any kind of tentative or non answer tells us we need to go back to this person. This is all valuable information -be sure to note this on your walk sheet or phone list.

For GOTV there's a specific ask: "Will you be a voter on election day?" There are a couple of psychological nuances going on here: Cognitive dissonance: If a person *says* they'll vote for your candidate, however tentatively, they are more likely to actually do so. Second, note that the sentence does not ask "Will you vote" but "Will you *be* a voter?". It's a subtle difference: the former asks if they'll perform an action; the latter asks a question about *who they believe themselves to be*. How effective are these things? According to the studies, maybe a few percent. Ask any candidate that's suffered a recount and they'll tell you that small percentages really matter!