

Let's Talk Canvassing

Canvassing is a traditional form of community engagement that involves meeting the community at their doorstep! This involves going door-to-door, neighborhood-to-neighborhood, and distributing information and resources. Canvassing is one of the simplest but most effective forms of building awareness around any effort. It can be an incredibly rewarding experience, too, enabling you to build genuine connections with people in your community.

Review the tips and guidelines below to ensure your canvassing goes as smoothly and as enjoyably as possible! You may want to print the final page (checklist and sample script) to take with you.

Be prepared!

Have talking points listed ready before heading out to streamline your experience.

Introduce yourself first then present the facts and information you want to share about your effort and what you are asking the people are meeting to do.

Put any talking points that have been provided to you in your own words! A script will always be helpful in navigating the conversation, but it's important to sound natural as well.

Respect the space.

As you meet people at their homes, keep in mind that you are venturing into their personal space. Be respectful of their property by using sidewalks and driveways and avoid stepping on the lawns or gardens.

Look out for and abide by any "No Trespassing" and "No Soliciting" signs. Scan the entryway for these signs before you approach the door!

Be courteous.

When canvassing, general etiquette is to knock and/or ring the doorbell at most two times. Wait several seconds between each knock or ring.

Take a few steps back to allow for ample space when someone steps out and to create a comfortable speaking distance that won't overwhelm or intimidate the listener.

Safety first!

When possible, work in pairs as you canvass neighborhoods, especially in unfamiliar areas. Not only is there safety in numbers, but a canvassing partner can also be there to support you as you're engaging with neighbors about your effort!

Set a specific time and place to meet if you and your canvassing team/partner decide to split up to cover more area.

Trust your gut in unknown situations! For example, avoid canvassing homes with unsupervised outdoor dogs; do not enter any property that looks physically unsafe; and avoid wandering out of your agreed-upon canvassing block without letting your team know.

Get dressed.

It can take up to an hour to canvass an entire block. Make sure to wear comfortable clothing and walking shoes.

Bonus points if you can wear a shirt that identifies what you will be talking about (for example, swag from your local shelter or a Best Friends t-shirt).

Get ready.

Weather conditions can change at any moment. Stay prepared by checking your local forecast before you begin canvassing.

Wear sun-protective gear to keep you safe and cool if you're canvassing during warmer days. Remember to pack water and snacks and take breaks!

Go! Be friendly and remain positive – you've got this.

Canvassing and talking to strangers can seem daunting if you're doing it for the first time. More often than not, people are interested in learning what you want to share, especially when it comes to connecting them to the resources and information that could directly help their community.

You will be surprised how many people are excited to chat with you when they learn you are looking to help animals and aren't trying to sell them anything.

There may be individuals who will not be interested in supporting your effort and that's okay! Kindly thank them for their time and stay motivated. You will find people who want to support you.

Questions?

Reach out to neighbors@bestfriends.org with any questions about how to make your Network Neighbors canvassing a success — or if you want to send us stories and photos!

We look forward to hearing how it goes — and thank you for being part of this important pilot project to help more lost dogs get back home! Your involvement will make a real difference for people and pets in your community and across the country.