

Canvassing in Red Texas

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Here in the rural, red counties in the Hill Country, we are starting from the ground up on Get Out The Vote activities. It is a process that starts with building relationships with Democratic voters. We cannot just ask for votes and “carpetbag,” which refers to leaving after the election. We must consider this as “canvassing for relationships.”

Get Out The Vote consists of contacting (canvassing) Democratic voters based on a list of known voters. All methods of canvassing come down to your message and the reaction to your message -- listening to and learning from responses.

Everyone has unique talents so not all of canvassing methods work for everyone. Here are four forms of canvassing, listed in order of effectiveness.

- Blockwalking - #1 method of canvassing
 - This method allows you to have a face-to-face conversation with your Democratic neighbor. This is most effective if you visit regularly and if you provide useful information about candidates and voting. It is also critical to get a verbal commitment or promise if you're making a specific request, such as voting in the primary.
 - Deb, who blockwalked for Barbara's campaign for Kerr County Democratic Chair, shared her experience in her neighborhood. She said folks appreciated an opportunity to talk about issues and to be visited by another Democrat - we need to “normalize being a Democrat” - being liberal and progressive is not wrong - it’s being human.
 - You can have a script but consider it a place to start.
 - Always ask for email address for your county's Democratic party newsletter.
- Phone calls - #2 method of canvassing
 - Jeannette, who made phone calls for candidates in Kerr County leading up to the primary, said she wanted to make sure she didn’t sound like a robocall so she said she was from the neighborhood. She asked if anyone needed a ride to the polls, which allowed for conversations about early voting, the candidates, and where to vote. She reported that she received such a warm reception that she wants to continue the phone relationship with those she called.
 - Joyce added that she made phone calls on the days leading up to the primary and then saw some of the people she spoke to at the polls. She offered rides to the polls and let voters in her precinct know that they have a new polling place. Making calls on the

weekend was more effective because more people answered the phone.

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- Always ask for email address for your county's Democratic party newsletter.
- Social Media - #3 method of canvassing
 - Barbara found that in her campaign, using social media, primarily Facebook, was an effective way to find like-minded individuals. She says she was particularly successful with reaching Hispanic women. She used “boosting,” which is an inexpensive way to advertise your post.
 - Effective for younger voters and those outside your immediate circle of supporters.
 - Consider email to be a way to keep in touch after you have established a relationship some other way, such as blockwalking or calling. People don't like to receive emails they have not agreed to receive. Always ask for permission to send them email.
- Direct Mail - #4 method of canvassing
 - While this is considered the least effective method and most expensive, it has its place in the canvassing spectrum. It is a way to get started if you have few volunteers. In rural areas, where going door-to-door is not feasible, it's a way to reach out to Democratic voters. It is also an easy way to cultivate new volunteers. It's a relatively small ask to request help writing postcards, compared to making phone calls or blockwalking.
 - Susan from Kendall Co. said it's easy to create custom postcards using Vistaprint.com.
- Other ideas
 - Our friend Sharon from Hays County describes canvassing as knitting together the Democrats in your community. Her philosophy is that by regularly contacting your Democratic neighbors, you form a community that strengthens the democratic process by encouraging voting.
 - How often should we contact our group? There is no hard and fast rule. Barbara suggests coffee visits, backyard BBQs, garage sales, etc. to strengthen the sense of community among like-minded people. It's about creating communities -- letting others know that there are other progressives living around them.
 - Now that the primary is over, call and thank everyone who voted in Democratic.
 - There is a theory that it takes “seven touches” to get people to the polls, which means contact must be made seven times.
 - Volunteer deputy voter registrars (DVRs) must be registering voters all the time.