

# 350MA Street Canvassing Guide

(last updated 7/2214 by JTJ)

## Canvassing Basics

**Purpose:** A canvas is meant to do many things at once: (1) acquire contact information; (2) recruit volunteers; (3) gather signatures for campaign initiatives; (4) distribute information; (5) and raise the public visibility of the group. The most important thing is to recruit volunteers and acquire contact information - unless it's part of a formal petition process (electoral candidates, city or state referenda, etc.), the petition/sign-up sheet is essentially a vehicle for gathering contacts. If asked, reassure that all information is confidential, private, and won't be sold to a third party.

**Coordinate:** A "lead" should be responsible for managing the canvas schedule, training as needed, providing materials and general support.

**Materials:** Leaflets can provide more information and legitimize the issue, and can be offered if the sign-up is refused, but leaflets are no substitute for direct contact. Also, giveaways (stickers, pins, etc.) can be fun. Materials should be in good order and condition. Ideally, a chair and/or table can be used to display leaflets, buttons, etc. Try to use something that a banner or poster can be attached to. Try to have multiple pens and clipboards handy.

**Information:** Canvassers should have a basic grasp of the issue and quick facts and arguments to use. Provide a simple 1 or 2 page fact-sheet for canvassers to review, and have print-outs of supporting articles or reports in a binder for reference. However, you don't need to be an expert. If a question is asked and you don't know the answer, do not pretend to know - it's perfectly okay if you don't know something, and you can offer to contact them with a reply once we have their contact information.

**Opportunity:** Go where the people are! Pick a high-traffic location during peak periods, where and when people are most likely to stop and talk. Try to take a spot with the least noise and obstacles, regular foot traffic, and room to maneuver and engage.

**Appearance:** Wear 350MA paraphernalia (t-shirt is best, pins, hats, stickers, etc.). Needless to say, hygiene and a well-kept, conventional appearance allows the focus to fall and stay on the *message*, not the messenger.

**Demeanor:** Canvassers should be friendly, outgoing, and approachable, using appropriate body language (do not cross arms, do not touch, allow for space, do not follow, etc.). Speech should be clear and confident, and eye contact should be made and maintained. As always, relax and try to be yourself. Smiling and a light wave or gesture can help gain attention and get a contact. Be personable and try to find grounds on which to relate (shoes, tote bag, weather, sports, etc.), but do not ask into personal or private information and do not assume too much from their appearance.

**Selecting Contacts:** Obviously, if foot traffic is steady and heavy (which it should be if you picked a good spot and time), you must select particular contacts. While you can't judge a book by its cover, and never really know who is going to talk and/or sign up and who isn't, body language and visual cues can help you prioritize contacts. Prioritize engaging groups over individuals to get more sign-ups.

**Discipline:** Do not engage in debate, argument, screaming/shouting or invective, or otherwise respond *negatively* to *negative* contacts. You are not going to dramatically convert anyone, and shouldn't waste time trying. Remember that you are the public face of the organization, so remain civil, cordial, and nonviolent at all times. If someone insists on distracting you, simply and politely say something like, "Thanks, we have different opinions, and I've got to get back to work." If someone physically threatens or assaults you, withdraw to the nearest safe space, call 911 if necessary, contact the canvas lead, and take a break or go home.

**Set Goals:** Realistic and challenging personal and team goals can be good motivators.

## The Encounter

A canvassing interaction has five basic steps:

(1) **Hook:** make and keep eye contact early and greet them with a “hi” or “good morning.”

(2) **Introduction:** who you are and what you’re doing.

(3) **Problem:** presents a problem that violates shared values, and elicits questions or a response.

(4) **Solution:** invites them to take action by signing the petition or demonstrating their support.

(5) **Follow-up:** ensure full contact information recorded, invite them to volunteer, follow-up with new volunteers.

Hook: First, grab their attention by smiling, facing them, making eye contact, waving or gesturing, and greeting. Do this at a distance of around 15 feet, giving time for the introduction to follow.

*“Hi, good morning!”*

Introduction: Introduce yourself, mention 350 Mass, why you’re out there, and what you need. Keep this as quick and simple as possible.

*“350 Mass is fighting to hold the line against more tar sands and fracked gas. Care to send a free postcard to the Governor?”*

Problem: Now that they’ve stopped (“What’s this all about? What’s 350? What do you want me to do?”), you can very summarily explain why you’re canvassing.

*“350 Massachusetts is a volunteer network working for a livable climate. We’re out here today because Big Oil and Gas are pressuring the state to import more tar sands-derived oil and fracked natural gas, both much more polluting than usual fossil fuels. For Massachusetts to do its part in the fight against global warming, and keep faith with the coming generations, we’ve got to reduce our carbon emissions by cutting our gas and oil consumption. Importing the dirtiest gas and oil will simply make it impossible to hit our climate targets.”*

Solution: At this point, although you should be prepared to answer any questions they may have and engage in conversation, don’t hesitate. Make the “ask” (e.g., sign a petition) and make it as easy as possible (e.g., offer the clipboard and pen). The

address simply verifies their residency (and status as a constituent), but the goal is to get their contact information and ask if they'd like to volunteer or help with the campaign.

*"Gov. Patrick's been a real leader on the climate and clean energy, but he's under intense pressure from the oil and gas companies. We're sending in these postcards over the next two months asking him to push back against new gas pipelines and tar sands and commit 100% to renewables. Can we get you to fill one out? If you'd like to keep informed or get involved, we'd love to get your contact information. We've got groups across the state working on this campaign, and we could sure use the help."*

Follow-up: Quickly review their information and be sure to thank them for their time and support. The canvassing coordinator should add new contact information to your database/lists, and new volunteers should be contacted by a recruitment lead/coordinator within 1-3 days to arrange for one-on-one meeting or attendance of an upcoming node meeting.

*"Thank you so much for signing the card, every little bit helps. Check out [350ma.org](http://350ma.org) for more information. If you want to stay informed, we have a weekly email newsletter, and if you checked off to volunteer, somebody from the local node will contact you to and talk about our organization and the campaign. Have a good day!"*