



Door-to-Door Neighborhood Outreach

Going door-to-door to talk to members of the community is a way to meet people who might not come to community meetings or events, learn more about residents' concerns, advertise a meeting, capture signatures on a petition, and/or introduce yourself and your project to the community. For neighborhood organizing, door knocking is essential.

Why is Door Knocking Effective?

Door knocking is effective because it is a personal, one-on-one contact with a community member. People living in the area are likely to be personally impacted by the issue or initiative you are discussing. While they may care about their neighborhood, they may not be involved in committees or organizations. By going door to door, you have an opportunity to reach everyone and create a connection.

Ten Steps for Effective Door knocking

1. Identify the Goal
2. Identify the Geographic Area
3. Determine Who Will Go
4. Notify the Community
5. Before You Start Out
6. Wear an ID Badge or Shirt
7. Go in Pairs
8. Use a Clipboard
9. Leave a Flier or Brochure
10. Check In and De-Brief

1. Identify the Goal

Be sure everyone is on the same page with responses to the following questions:

- Why are you going door to door?
- What do you have to offer, or what do you hope to learn?
- Are you seeking involvement?
- Do you want to personally invite people to a meeting?
- Do you want to get a general idea of their concerns or address a specific well-defined issue?
- Do you want to increase their awareness of your group?
- Is there an incident you'd like to provide information about?

2. Identify the Geographic Area

Identify the geographic area to be door-knocked for what you want to accomplish. The geographic area will be determined by the issue, the area your organization serves, and the time and number of people you have involved.

3. Determine Who Will Go

Identify residents who live in the specific area to join you in door knocking whenever possible. Train and prepare your volunteers. Don't send people out to door knock without practice, or proper instruction on safety procedures. Make a "cheat sheet" of items to discuss, or questions to ask. Have each of the volunteers practice with a partner, and give feedback.

You may not have volunteers. It may just be you at first, and then maybe you and one other person. But door knocking can lead you to neighbors who will join the effort and pitch in.

4. Notify the Community

People can be apprehensive about someone coming to their door, so whenever possible, distribute a flier in advance that lets people know you will be door knocking in the area on certain dates and times.

5. Before You Start Out

Before you begin door knocking, bring all door knockers together and assign addresses. Make sure everyone has all of the materials they need: clipboard, forms, and pens. Also, it can be very helpful to "role play" the door knocking experience, where an inexperienced door knocker gets a feel for responding to residents who are suspicious, just running out the door, mistaken about why you are there, too busy to talk, etc. See sample script below.

6. Wear an ID Badge or Shirt

If feasible, door knockers should wear some kind of ID. If your group has t-shirts, wear them. If your group will be door knocking frequently, you might want to make a more permanent type of identification tag. If you have some kind of ID, mention this in any communication you send out prior to the door knocking event.

7. Go in Pairs

Never send door knockers out alone. Two people should always go to a door together. This ensures the safety of the door knockers. If possible, send man-woman teams. This helps some residents feel more at ease opening the door and talking to you.

8. Use a Clipboard

A clipboard makes it much easier to get signatures on a petition. Consider providing a form for residents to record name, address, email, and phone number. If you are trying to identify residents' concerns, you might wish to include a list of issues or concerns — such as safety, speeding, and economic development — that you or they could check or circle easily.

9. Leave a Flier or Brochure

This can be a formal brochure or just a one-page meeting flier or information sheet with at least one leader's name, email address, and phone number. This helps establish the credibility of your effort.

10. Check In and De-Brief

After door knocking, make sure everyone returns to a specific location and checks in. Collect the forms, and spend a few minutes de-briefing about the experience. What has been learned? What, if anything, should change for future door knocking?

Sample Door Knocking Script

Here is a sample script that you might use when knocking on doors to talk about speeding and traffic calming. Each conversation will be different, but this will help get you started.

Hi! I'm Jane Neighbor, and I live just one street over... This is Joe Organizer, and he lives two blocks down.

We're out in the neighborhood today to talk about speeding traffic. We are concerned about it for the sake of the children in the neighborhood. Cars are just going way too fast.

(Wait to see if resident responds.)

So Joe and I, along with another neighbor, Sam, have applied for to the City of Knoxville's neighborhood traffic safety program. Have you heard about it?

In order to move this forward, we need to show the City that other neighbors are also concerned. So we have a petition to request that the city conduct a speed study on our street / in our neighborhood. Would you consider signing the petition so we can do something about the speeding?

YES – Okay please read the petition and let us know if you have any questions about it....

NO – That’s entirely okay. If we do get something going, would you like to be informed of any meetings with the City?

YES – Could I ask you to write your name, email and phone on this other form?

NO – Okay. If you change your mind, here is a flier explaining what we are doing. It has our contact information on it...

Other Questions

Have you lived in the neighborhood very long?

Do you have young children who play in or near the street?

Do you ever talk to your neighbors about speeding, or call the police?

Do you have any ideas of how we could make our streets safer?

Do you have any questions for us?

You seem really interested in this problem. Would you be interested in serving on our committee?

Thank you so much for your time this evening! We really enjoyed talking to you. Our phone number is on that sheet we gave you, so please call us if you have any comments, questions, or concerns. Have a good night!