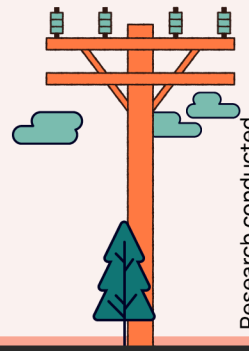


# TRAINING TOOLKIT: LONG-BRIDGE CANVASSING

Based on an independent study of long-bridge canvasser experiences during the 2024 Bridging for Democracy (B4D) Pilot



Research conducted by Ella Streng  
ella.streng@berkeley.edu

## Before You Begin: Mindset & Approach

This is about listening, not fixing. About connecting, not convincing.



### CONNECTION, NOT PERSUASION

- The goal is to connect, not "win" the conversation.
- Your presence matters as much as your words.



### "STAY CURIOUS, GEORGE"

- Ask for clarification, rather than making assumptions.
- Ask the question "why."



### LISTEN FIRST, LISTEN LONGER

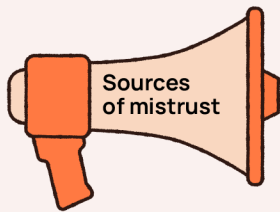
- Let people finish their thoughts.
- Listen without judgement.
- Remain present.



### SHARE PERSONAL STORIES

- Don't use facts to dismiss someone's feelings.
- Lead with empathy, not data.
- Lean into vulnerability.

## Address Barriers of Community Mistrust



### Sources of mistrust

- Broken promises from institutions
- Fear of surveillance or manipulation
- Trauma from police, poverty, or community neglect
- Suspicion toward outsiders

Start with...

"I'm here to listen, not persuade."



## Strategies to Gain Trust

Make pre-contact: Alert residents of the canvass beforehand by sending out postcards with information or posting flyers in local businesses.

Optics of legitimacy: Wear an official uniform or organizational swag and carry a clipboard with information about the canvass.

Use storytelling to open connection:  
"I had a conversation yesterday that really stuck with me..."

Acknowledge the awkwardness:  
Connect through naming the shared feeling.



## Local or Not? : Impact of Locality on Trust

Being local can make it easier to get in the door

You can bond over shared experience by talking about local places, events, or shared struggles.



For those canvassing in unknown areas...

align with trusted local symbols, such as partner organizations, businesses, and customs.



# Navigate Safety and Surveillance

Team leads should...

## Safety Checklist

- ✓ **Canvass in pairs** for safety and moral support
- ✓ **Have a clear "I'm with [organization]"** script and a flyer on hand
- ✓ **Know your rights:** have a script ready for police encounters
- ✓ **Debrief** incidents immediately- don't carry it alone

- Stay close by and be ready to support.
- Encourage canvassers to follow their intuition and leave unsafe situations.
- Be trained in emotional support strategies.



# Manage Emotional Labor

## LONG-BRIDGE CANVASSERS MAY HEAR...

- Stories of trauma and hardship
- Derogatory / hateful / prejudiced comments

B4D Canvasser



"At times, I felt like a community therapist"

## Prepare for reflection:

- Long-bridge canvassing can bring up your own **fears** and **assumptions**.
- Keep a **journal** to process your experience, and **debrief** with your team.
- Approach each conversation as a **clean slate**.



## Recipe for Emotional Resilience

Canvassers are mentally prepared for the possibility of difficult conversations. Roleplay these conversations in training.

Team bonding and debriefs are prioritized. Include practices such as shout-outs and appreciation.

Canvassing teams have a shared sense of purpose and shared mantras.

Team leads are trained to emotionally support canvassers.

# Stay Curious: Embodying Long-Bridge Canvassing

## Training Canvassers for Success

**1** Roleplay difficult conversations in training.



**2** Use real-world, jargon-free scripts and training materials.



**3** Reframe canvassing as "listening sessions" for clarity and focus.

"Stay Curious, George"



When hearing misinformation...

Resist correcting misinformation. Instead, share a personal story, or speak to the underlying sentiment.

Don't make any promises

Focus on listening, rather than offering solutions or making promises.

## Key phrases and principles of conversation

### ASK OPEN ENDED QUESTIONS

- "How has that impacted you?"
- "What experiences shaped how you feel?"

### MIRROR & VALIDATE

- "That sounds really hard."
- "Thanks for being open about that."

### DISAGREE WITHOUT ARGUING:

- "I don't agree, but I appreciate you sharing that."



# LONG-BRIDGE CANVASSING: CONVERSATION ROADMAP



## Before Getting Started

### Self-reflection prompts

- “What’s my intention today?”
- “What’s one thing I need to feel grounded?”
- “What’s something I’ll do to take care of myself after this shift?”



## During the Conversation

### Conversation Starters

- “I’m just out here talking with neighbors about what they’re feeling right now.”
- “I’d like to learn more about you and what’s important to you today.”
- “What do you like/love most about living here?”



### Path to Deeper Ground

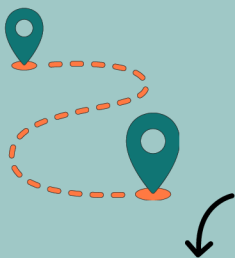
! “In a lot of our conversations, people talk about how much they love their community, but they’re fed up with national politics and how different groups get along.”

? “Are the divisions that you notice in national politics showing up here locally?”

? “Are there ways that divisions are getting in the way of things you love about your community here locally?”

? “What makes you hopeful or optimistic about people being able to come together across differences?”

? “Do you have any stories about a personal relationship or experience where you’ve overcome any of those differences? What works?”



### End the Conversation with...

- **A description of the project:** “We’re building relationships across diverse communities by getting back to listening to each other, respecting differences, and accepting one another even when we don’t agree.”
- **An expression of gratitude:** “Thank you for taking part in this conversation and helping us reach those goals”

## Post-Conversation Reflection

### Debrief prompts

- “What’s one moment today that stayed with you?”
- “Did anything surprise you today?”
- “When did you feel the most connected?”

