LOOKING BACK, LOOKING FORWARD
2022-2023
The election of Trump in 2016, an authoritarian candidate with no respect for democracy, made it clear that the very survival of our country as a democracy is at risk, and elections with enormous importance are being won or lost with very small margins. While Trump is no longer president, the virulence of Trump and Trumpism continues. What’s more, 2024 will be here in no time.

Changing The Conversation Together for Progress (CTC For Progress) is a 501c4 social-welfare group that reconnects Americans with our democracy. Through “deep canvassing”—a highly personal, highly effective method—we help people understand why voting matters, and how to overcome any obstacles in getting their vote counted. CTC’s deep canvassing has repeatedly demonstrated success in engaging the hardest to reach voters in elections. We saw it in 2018 and 2020. In 2022 we went to work again and made an impact again!

The voters we spoke to went to the polls at a rate that was 15% higher than their neighbors!

This has national implications. Many states like Pennsylvania see voter turnout continue to grow, but that trend isn’t reaching into cities like Philadelphia, where turnout continues to fall. CTC has shown that when we take the time to connect with individuals thoughtfully, patiently, and respectfully, we make an impact.
2022 was a high-stakes year for Pennsylvania. Voters went to the polls to decide not only who represents Pennsylvania in the Senate, but also the direction of the country. The US Senate holds the key to passing legislation and confirming judges, and in 2022, the historic open seat in PA was an enormous opportunity for voters to rise up to send a message to extremist movements attempting to undermine democratic principles and force the Trump agenda on Pennsylvanians.

It wasn’t bad enough that the GOP picked a Trump-esque celebrity as their U.S. Senate nominee. The gubernatorial race featured Doug Mastriano, a reactionary, pro-Trump right-winger who participated in the January 6 insurrection, who compared Democrats to Nazis and threatened to outlaw abortion rights.

As we put together our strategy for 2022, we knew how close these races could be. Our research showed that in the nine wards we’d canvassed in 2020, more than 115,000 registered voters didn’t vote. Recent statewide races had hinged on about 1% of votes tallied, so we knew it could come down to less than 30,000 votes.

Seeing the hard numbers of how many voters stayed home in 2020, even with all that was on the line in that election, was a stark reminder of the disengagement and disempowerment that happens in communities when groups resort to only using less effective, impersonal methods like texts, robocalls, and mailers to get voters to the polls.

After reading Politics is for Power, a book by political scientist Eitan Hersh about political participation, Alex Upton, a young Philadelphian, and his wife got involved with CTC. Early on in his canvassing, Alex met a young man in North Philly who didn’t know what the U.S. Senate was or did until Alex explained it to him. After having an in-depth conversation with Alex, he registered to vote.
Knowing that having substantial in-person conversations is the non-negotiable, research-backed gold standard for getting meaningful results, we set out to deploy a robust deep canvassing program to reach the hundreds of thousands of Philadelphians who don’t regularly vote.

Starting on the doors in the spring, our volunteers and staff had conversations with voters, many of whom felt like their communities had been left behind. We found that many of them were eager to talk to us about voting and how to improve their lives and communities.

The beauty of our strategy is that it’s not just about one election for us; over the last few years, we’ve managed to build relationships and partnerships that promise a bright future for our work.

Our focus on giving regular people the training and tools that they need to become leaders in their communities means we don’t have to start from scratch every single year.

Out on the doors, Kirsten Britt, an activist and minister-in-training who learned of deep canvassing from Rev. Donna Jones at Cookman Beloved Baptist Church in West Philly, heard from an educator eager to make her voice heard, but whose three jobs would keep her from waiting in line to vote. Kirsten was thrilled to inform the young woman about Vote by Mail, and signed her up on the spot!

Kirsten is spearheading an emerging partnership between CTC and Cookman Beloved, a West Philly church deeply involved in community building. We’re excited to train neighbors and local activists in deep canvassing, and to keep putting down real roots in Philadelphia.
We started the year out with several goals: to train canvassers, build out our volunteer base, and cultivate Philly relationships. We did all three!

Throughout the year, our volunteer recruitment teams worked hard alongside staff to make sure we were continuing to expand our base of volunteers. Our coaches team of about 30 volunteers held more than 20 training sessions and trained 150 canvassing volunteers, 25 of whom completed five or more canvasses over the course of the year.

Rather than just haphazardly sending volunteers out with a script and a list of doors to hit, CTC’s canvass training includes story workshops, sessions that help volunteers practice talking about their lives and experiences and why they are doing the work, which gets them prepared to have meaningful, effective conversations when they’re knocking on doors. These sessions are also geared towards giving volunteers the tools they need to become leaders in their communities year-round.

Over the summer, CTC was pleased to forge new partnerships with Philly-based organizations. We ramped up to twice-monthly canvasses and had our biggest event of the year. New volunteers were showing up by carloads, public transportation, and foot! We started to see more local community groups involved in our events. Meeting at first Philly’s Haitian Center and then Cookman Beloved Community Baptist Church for canvasses, there was a wonderful mix of canvass veterans, newcomers, Philadelphians, students, retirees and more. Cookman Beloved Community Baptist Church organized a training and canvass with us for the Juneteenth Festival in Malcolm X Park.

BUILDING UP TO ELECTION DAY

Kofi “Atiba” Kwesi, founder of a community service center in West Philly, canvassed with CTC over the summer. He then brought friends and neighbors to a Story Workshop and canvass. Kofi and his friends believe deep canvassing can help address national and local challenges.
We were invited into an exciting new Get Out The Vote (GOTV) partnership with the Philadelphia Citizen, a nonprofit, media organization that serves the region by providing deeply reported journalism emphasizing solutions, and works to actively reignite citizenship. Sponsored by Philly Citizen, CTC led “Not Your Average Voter Canvass Training,” an inspiring deep canvassing training session attended by about 30 different leaders of local organizations. You can read the article about the Philadelphia Citizen’s event [here](#).

In October, we expanded our canvasses to each weekend day and announced a new partnership with POWER—a multi-racial, multi-faith movement of voters fighting to improve life for working families in PA. As part of that partnership, we jointly organized three weekends of training and canvassing in South Philadelphia at Mother Bethel African Methodist Episcopal church. Its pastor, Dr. Mark Kelly Tyler, called CTC’s technique of using personal stories “a godsend,” and has expressed his excitement about extending the deep-canvassing efforts year-round on local issues like climate, criminal justice, and more.

The effects of the canvassing were undeniably powerful. As just one example, CTC canvassed Omar, a young black man. He started out “only 50-50” on voting. But Marcos, a young Philly volunteer, got Omar talking about cooking with his grandmother and about how voting connects to the people we love. By the end of their conversation, Omar promised he would “definitely vote—100%!” Marcos said, “It’s as if no one ever had this kind of conversation with him before. He clearly appreciated his vote being taken so seriously.”
On November 1, with Election Day eight days away, we started focusing on Getting Out The Vote (GOTV). During the GOTV period, these conversations are much shorter than your average deep canvass conversation. By this point in the campaign, potential voters are often feeling inundated by the many campaigns that have knocked their doors (and called, texted, stuffed their emails and mailboxes). Our GOTV training and canvassing, therefore, focuses on helping ensure voters know how to vote and helping them make plans to ensure they do. Once again we saw it work!

On a rainy day, veteran canvasser Margaret Lew spoke with a registered voter who hadn’t realized there was an election coming up. The voter called her son to the door where Margaret helped him get registered to vote and made voting plans with both mother and son.

One canvasser met Alan, a 27-year-old who’d never voted. He admitted to feeling some guilt in 2016 after Trump won, but he just wasn’t connected to politics. After exchanging personal stories, CTC’s canvasser helped Alan register on the spot.

Working West Philadelphia’s third ward, CTC canvasser Jimmie Blackford learned that a woman named Cornelia Coverdale needed help voting and passed her name to another volunteer, Anim Steel. Cornelia received an Election Day visit from Anim. Cornelia explained that she’d applied to vote for mail but her vote was at risk of not being counted. Anim and Cornelia walked to the polls together to ensure her vote counted.

James Wright, a local community activist and new CTC volunteer, said: “I believe that most people know about the election. But some people don’t understand why they should vote. We can’t take these people for granted. We need to take the time to connect and help them break down their own internal barriers to participation. Deep canvassing is the thing that can really make a difference. Drilling home the greater purpose of voting, not for some candidate but for ourselves and the people we love, it’s powerful!”
The morning before Election Day, Philadelphia released a list of more than 3,000 people whose Vote By Mail ballots were at risk being voided due to simple mistakes and last minute court decisions. We made an instant pivot and intensely focused on turning out these voters who had been stymied by Vote By Mail system glitches – voters who were disproportionately older, disabled, and isolated.

It was in the final stretch as we reached out to these voters that we heard some of the best stories from our volunteers:

Stanley Flood, 96 years old, didn't know his ballot had been canceled until CTC Director Adam Barbanel-Fried showed up on his porch the afternoon of Election Day. Adam told him he could vote provisionally at his polling station, so they walked to the polls together. Due to an intense tremor in his hand, Stanley designated Adam as a trusted person to fill out his ballot for him. His vote was counted!

Anim Steel first met Ms. Charlotte during a September canvass, when she opened up about her mother’s recent move to a nursing home, her own health challenges, and her belief that voting would help her community. In October, they made an Election Day voting plan for her. On Election Day morning, Anim was surprised when Ms. Charlotte wasn’t home. When he returned in the afternoon, he learned that her 91-year-old mother had gone to the hospital and had hours or days to live. They hugged, chatted and then she declared she still wanted to vote. She did go to the polls – twice, because when they hadn’t received her mail-in ballot, she had to return with her ID. Afterward, Ms. Charlotte called Anim to confirm and celebrate that she had voted!
From 2021-2022, 175 CTC volunteers completed over 500 volunteer canvassing shifts. And we’re pleased to say that many are excited to stay involved.

In 2022, we knocked on 12,800 doors and had more than 1,000 complete deep canvassing conversations across more than 140 Philadelphia precincts.

As we expected, our impact was even greater during a midterm election than what it had been in 2020. Whereas in 2020, the voters we spoke with voted at a rate that was 10% greater than their neighbors, in 2022, the voters we spoke with voted at a rate that was 15% greater than their neighbors!

The precincts we canvassed were chosen because they traditionally have very low turnout. Despite receiving multiple “passes” and many touches by the larger paid canvassing operations, the turnout in these neighborhoods remained low as it did citywide. Yet, while only 38% of those whose doors we knocked showed up to vote, 53% of the people we spoke with did.

Zion Sykes

Zion Sykes, a Penn State sophomore and activist who canvassed with CTC, was blown away by how effective CTC’s deep canvassing tactics were at the doors. “I didn’t believe this approach would work until I saw it happen with my own eyes,” he said.
IMPACT ON AN “OFF YEAR” IS EVEN BIGGER

Turnout Comparison: 2020 vs. 2022

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Targeted Voters</th>
<th>Canvassed by CTC</th>
<th>Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2020</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2022</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>15%</td>
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</tbody>
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All voters we attempted to reach were considered unlikely voters based on voting history. Canvassers, however, were instructed to speak to everyone they encountered.

2022 TURNOUT BY VOTING HISTORY

We evaluated our impact by comparing the differences between two groups within the same voting wards and precincts: people we didn’t canvass and those we did canvass.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Not canvassed by CTC</th>
<th>Canvassed by CTC</th>
<th>Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>People who voted in 0 out of 3 prior elections</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People who voted in 1 out of 3 prior elections</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People who voted in 2 out of 3 prior elections</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People who voted in 3 out of 3 prior elections</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combined (Low Propensity Voters*)</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Voters</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Low Propensity Voters are defined as those who voted in 0, 1 or 2 out of the three prior federal election cycles (2016, 2018, 2020)
THE CTC EFFECT - LOW PROPENSITY VOTERS SEGMENTED BY VOTING HISTORY

The CTC effect was apparent across the board for people who voted in 0-2 of the last 3 federal elections (2016, 2018, 2020), a group known as low propensity voters.
CTC EFFECT - LOW PROPENSITY VOTERS

We define low propensity voters as people who voted in 0-2 of the last 3 federal elections (2016, 2018, 2020).

This means our deep canvassing raised voter turnout of unlikely voters by 15 percentage points!

In other words, we increased voter turnout of unlikely voters by 48%!
WHY THIS MATTERS - 2023 AND BEYOND

While Pennsylvania saw voter turnout increase statewide in 2022, Philadelphia’s turnout decreased for the third consecutive election. This story is seen across other states of similar importance. In Philadelphia, Milwaukee and Detroit, turnout fell 10 percent to 12 percent beneath 2018 levels. Meanwhile, statewide in Pennsylvania, Wisconsin, and Michigan, overall turnout increased.

To be clear, it can be hard to reach those disinclined to vote. Despite the tens of millions of dollars spent on campaigns every cycle, in these low turnout areas, many of those considered unlikely to vote still didn’t vote.

Yet, whenever we go out on turf, we can see that poor and working-class Philadelphians are not apathetic; most people we talk to are deeply concerned about the world around them. The challenge is that too many don’t connect those concerns about their lives with voting, so they simply don’t bother.

The reason we remain hopeful about deep canvassing is that the unlikely voters that CTC speak with vote at a rate 15% higher than those we don’t reach. If CTC’s deep canvassers could have reached 100,000 of the Philadelphians who didn’t vote in 2020, would 15,000 more people have voted? In states that are regularly won on the margins, that could be a total game changer! What might that mean for building a more compassionate and inclusive America if it was multiplied across other cities in battleground states? We believe it would mean finally having the power to implement policies that improve the social welfare of our country including healthcare, housing, and other support for the disadvantaged.

Research has shown that deep canvassing is considered to be the most effective form of voter persuasion ever measured. In close races, it can make the difference between winning and losing. It can make the difference between maintaining and strengthening our democracy and social welfare or becoming a Trumpist, fascist nation that deprives its citizens of their rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

Pennsylvania will remain an essential state for a progressive future where national battles are played out, and this work must continue. As we explore new strategies and opportunities, we
Expanding Our Work

We are determined to keep building our capacity and use everything we’ve learned from our work in service of our original vision. Over the next six months, we are exploring how to help local organizations with existing bases develop robust, powerful deep canvassing programs. This way we can help CTC volunteers feel like trusted partners helping to build capacity for all the necessary work that is ahead of us. For some of these groups, we might be starting from scratch with a canvassing program. For others, door-knocking may not be a new concept, but adding our deep canvassing approach is the way to take door-knocking to the next level.

Pat Blumenthal came to us from Denver, CO. She considers herself a lifelong organizer, non-profit professional who believes that deep canvassing is essential to the health and survival of our democracy. After learning from CTC, she is continuing to work to figure out how to build it out in Colorado and around the country. “While I’m an experienced organizer, trainer and non-profit manager, I’m a deep canvassing beginner,” she said. “It has been so valuable that as I strive to grow deep canvassing in Colorado, I continue to talk to CTC.”

In Kentucky, Mitch McConnell’s home state that is generally very Republican, there’s a popular Democratic Governor up for reelection who won his last state elections by a slim majority. A group of 16 Democratic activists/leaders, ranging from Louisville to Appalachia, received a deep canvassing introductory training, and they’ve raised money to bring in a CTC training this June!
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