Changing the Conversation Together (CTC) is an organization of concerned citizens building a national corps of deep canvassers to grow an American electorate that embraces compassion and inclusion.

THE PAST IS PROLOGUE: 2018 SUCCESS

CTC started in 2017 with just one staffer and a vision: to apply the art of “deep canvassing” to electoral politics, using a swing district in NYC’s Staten Island as a test case.

It worked.

By Election Day 2018, CTC had recruited and trained 300 volunteers who had in-depth conversations with nearly 2,000 targeted swing voters. And for the first time in decades, a midterm in Staten Island went to the Democrat—who won by a margin of only 1,100 votes.

At the same time, CTC had developed a reputation and group of experienced volunteers committed to supporting trainings, logistics, communications, fundraising and other organizational development.

2019: FOCUS ON THE WHITE HOUSE; TARGETING THE KEYSTONE STATE

As 2019 gave way to 2020, many Democrats sat passively watching the doomed impeachment process and handicapping primary contenders. CTC, though, was busy locking in our strategy for this election: to turn Pennsylvania blue.

Trump won PA by just 40,000 votes in 2016. Democrats’ ability to win nationally would connect directly to flipping the state. In the months ahead, pundits went on a roller-coaster ride—declaring Democrats a disaster or a shoo-in, obsessing on Florida or Texas or Iowa. That’s why we jumped at an invitation by Pennsylvania activists to explore partnership opportunities. Moving forward, we kept a laser focus on persuading voters in the Keystone State.

Invited to launch a partnership with Indivisible activists in Southeastern PA, we launched our first canvass there in September 2019. We canvassed monthly, with trainings in NY, NJ, and PA. In between we debriefed, and evaluated, revised, recruited, and publicized — again and again.

CTC IN THE MEDIA

“Lisa is good at canvassing not because she is eager to talk to anyone about politics; that’s not her. She is good at it because she is resolute and honest. Many of the days she has canvassed, she would truly rather have been with her kids at their track meets. She told the voters that. They understood that this was important to her.”

— “Politics is for Power” by political scientist Eitan Hersh
By the end of our February 2020 canvass, we’d recruited and trained 120 volunteers, *knocked on 4,600 doors*, and completed in-depth conversations with over 503 Pennsylvania voters. And it was still 9 months till Election Day.

**SPRING 2020: PIVOTING AND GROWING**

When COVID came, CTC forged ahead. With speed and agility, we pivoted to a virtual campaign. We figured out how to conduct trainings via Zoom, adapted our deep-canvass scripts and techniques to phone-calling, and found the best vendors for up-to-date technologies to reach voters by phone. Starting in March, hundreds of volunteers were trained (or re-trained) and participated in weekly phone canvasses.

Our volunteers found that many people isolated by quarantine were hungry for conversation. A retired police officer opened up about caring for his ailing wife, and about how infuriated he was by Trump’s incompetent handling of the pandemic. Other people we called talked about their economic fears, and their anxiety about how long quarantine would be necessary. These were all opportunities to create meaningful connections, the essence of deep canvassing.

**Two Strategic Developments:**

During this time, we developed a closer working relationship with the Leadership LAB, whose work was underwritten by LGBT Connection PAC. The LAB helped pioneer deep canvassing, and advised CTC from the start; now we officially partnered with them and benefited from their time and expertise every day.

**Ripples in the Pond**

While our work focused on PA, From 2019-2020 we spread “the gospel of deep canvassing” more widely. CTC regularly hosted candidates, staff and activists from around the country, including key districts in OH, TN, WV and FL. Through trainings, site visits, publications and videos, we equipped countless others to work more effectively towards defeating Trump by using our philosophy and cutting-edge approach.
Our goal was to flip Pennsylvania and stop Trump. Our obligation was to design the most effective strategy we could. Our commitment was to constantly analyze our impact and adjust our approach as necessary. Our analysis showed that we were having a larger return on investment when talking with the hard-to-reach infrequent voters who lean Democratic. CTC will never give up on persuasive conversations, but we adjusted the voter we brought them to.

In the end, quarantine turned out to be a period of significant growth.

By June, with the LAB's help, we also created a more robust campaign structure. This eventually included designing 13 leadership teams which recruited 300 volunteers to fill various positions. These teams included Coaching, Internal Recruiting, External Recruiting, Info Sessions, the Executive Team, Data, People You Know Campaign, Fundraising, Safety, Tech and Logistics, Safety Handlers, The Safety First “Doors” team, and Poll Captains. Week in and week out, we had dozens of leaders volunteering 10-20 hours of their time.

But we still found ourselves at capacity and were turning away potential volunteers. We resolved to hire an additional organizer. The Fundraising Team raised over $50,000 in one month, and we ended up hiring two new organizers. We would soon add two more part-timers. These additions drastically expanded our capacity to recruit and support volunteer canvassers, which would pay off again and again in the coming months.

**EVERYONE CAN FUNDRAISE**

We receive support from a mix of sources, including groups like the Movement Voter Project and wealthy individuals. But our most important resource is small-dollar donations, and we teach CTC volunteers how to solicit support from their own networks.

“I didn’t think I could do this. But the training was so clear and helpful, it got me over that hump. I’ve started calling people and have collected a lot of donations. People are actually eager to help!”

— Doug Graiver, CTC volunteer

**CTC 2020 CAMPAIGN STAFF**

ADAM BARBANEL-FRIED
Director

AUSTIN SMITH
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LAURA LEE RANDOLPH
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THADDEUS HILL
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NOAH BRADLEY
Campaign Staff
Dr Andrew Goldstein, a leader of the new Safety Team, put it this way, “Just as Americans protect ourselves while getting the groceries we need to feed our families, so too must we protect ourselves while doing the crucial work of democracy.”

Despite our caution, this was a bold move ahead of almost every other Democratic group. A NY Times piece even mocked our decision. Other progressives eventually adopted similar safeguards and resumed door-knocking in the weeks before the election.

Meanwhile, our door-knocking volunteers started making great headway. Voters were surprisingly eager to talk in person, safety protocols notwithstanding, and canvassers were newly re-energized. “When I go door-to-door,” wrote Alan Chan, “it’s like I have a superpower. It’s so easy to be discouraged during this time of hardship, but I know I’m doing a service by being vulnerable at a time when it’s hardest to do so. To connect voters with their own strength is a privilege I wish everyone can experience ... This is how we actually rise up.”

The shift yielded tangible results. Helped by vote-by-mail laws, we started registering dozens and then hundreds of new Biden voters, and helping twice as many obtain mail-in ballots.

## SUMMER 2020: SAFETY FIRST; BACK TO THE DOORS

Despite our success adapting to the virtual world, we always knew that nothing is more powerful than connecting with voters in person. So starting in June, we recruited health professionals to design a safe way of returning to the doors. Dr Andrew Goldstein, a leader of the new Safety Team, put it this way: “Just as Americans protect ourselves while getting the groceries we need to feed our families, so too must we protect ourselves while doing the crucial work of democracy.”

Throughout July, while phone canvassing continued, we conducted three small “Safety First” pilot canvasses. By mid-August, our protocols were in place—including pre- and post-canvass tests, temperature checks, masks, social distancing, even sterilized clipboards—and we began to carefully scale up.

**ENOUGH IS ENOUGH**

In September, one generous individual offered to match donations of $1,000 or more, up to $25,000. We met the challenge within two weeks. With that push, and a growing tide of contributions, CTC ended up raising a total of $75,000 in one month!

For many organizations, more donations just whets their appetite for bigger budgets. Not CTC. At that point we shut down all solicitations, and asked the leaders of the Fundraising Team to put their skills to use elsewhere, canvassing and supporting our final GOTV push.
FALL 2020: GO TIME; GETTING OUT THE VOTE

In early October, CTC made another transition. Now it was time to Get Out the Vote. This meant revising our scripts and trainings. New volunteers were trained (and old volunteers re-trained) to share stories and forge connections, and to make concrete voting plans with each voter. CTC had to stay on top of shifting state voting rules, resources, and polling places, and ensure that each canvasser had only the best information with which to support voters. We set up our own helplines, and figured out how to aid canvassers assisting non-English-speakers.

Meanwhile, our ranks kept growing. Each canvass broke new records for CTC. Our teams recruited and supported the work of roughly 530 people who participated in at least one phone bank and 400 people participated in at least one Safety First Door canvass filling over 2,000 volunteer shifts focusing on voter contact.

In over half of those conversations, the voter Registered to Vote, to Vote By Mail, or Made a Voting Plan with our volunteers. Those conversations have a ripple effect with the canvassed voter as they talk to their friends, family, and neighbors. Even through the final hours of election day volunteers were people who didn’t realize they could still vote or where to do so. All of this took place in Pennsylvania, the state which put Biden over the edge. The state that Biden won by only 81,654 votes out of 6.9 million cast.

Here are other key numbers*:

- Completed in-person deep-canvas conversation: 9,500+
- Completed phone deep-canvas conversations: 3,000
- Volunteers who completed at least one CTC action: 817
- Canvassers taking part in at least one Safety First door-knocking canvass: 400
- Doors knocked/People approached on streets on: 40,000+
✓  Phone numbers dialed: 300,000+
✓  Phone canvassers taking part in at least one shift calling strangers: 525
✓  Phone canvassers taking part in at least one “People You Know” shift: 80
✓  Fulltime paid organizers (including CTC and LAB): 8
✓  Paid interns: 3
✓  COVID-compliance Safety Handlers: 33
✓  Volunteer canvass coaches: 100
✓  Other volunteer leaders (in Tech, Logistics, Data, Fundraising, etc.): 159

*All figures span our work April-November 2020. More comprehensive metrics will follow.

“Canvassing for CTC was one of the most important and meaningful things I did in 2020. Whether it was through phone banking, reaching out to old friends in PA, or knocking on doors in Philadelphia, the conversations I had with voters were more than worthwhile - they were life-affirming. I know we made a difference out there.”—Jessica Wu

Election Day saw our largest deployment. With local clergy and healthcare workers swelling the CTC ranks, we created an additional unit to supplement our door-to-door canvassing: Election Protection Squads. Each of these teams adopted 3-4 polling places in North Philly, where they kept an eye out for disturbances and helped voters negotiate every kind of logistical and bureaucratic challenge. We worked from before dawn to after dark, ensuring that thousands of voters got to the polls and successfully exercised their right to vote.

And then we celebrated long and loud, when Pennsylvania put Biden over the top!

What was our measurable impact on the election? CTC takes data very seriously, and we’re still crunching the many numbers we collected over the course of a year. But here’s a preliminary statistic: in neighborhoods we targeted for the final Safety First canvasses, Biden won with 90-95% of the vote—outperforming comparable neighborhoods by 3-4%. In a state where the margin of victory was 1.18% (or 81,654 votes), those are promising numbers.

We’ve also received anecdotal and qualitative indicators of our impact. Many voters reached out after the election, in person and on the phone, to tell us proudly that they’d voted because of us. Some thanked CTC volunteers for encouraging their political voice, when nobody had before.

Felicia, who lives in North Philly, voted thanks to Muriel, a CTC volunteer.

Muriel herself voted in this election for the first time—although she has lived in the U.S. for 20 years, Muriel is a new citizen. After canvassing with CTC, she wrote, “I’m extremely grateful to be part of this effort.”
“This is Lawrence. You came by my house .... and set me straight on how to cast my vote. I just want thank you for your efforts in helping the democratic vote go forth in great numbers in Philadelphia. I’m sure you inspired many coworkers and those both near and afar. ....I just wanted to express my gratitude.”

I not only appreciate the method of deep canvassing that you guys have been teaching us, I also admire the ability of your organization to adjust to a uniquely complicated context to keep us all safe, thus giving us the opportunity to do effective work. This is admirable!”

For everyone involved, CTC has meant a huge amount. Getting to know individuals and communities we visited and spoke with gave us insights into the world we live in. Story workshops, trainings, and all those debriefs taught us about ourselves. On the ground and via Zoom, we made friendships that will last a lifetime. Changing the conversation, together, has changed us all for the better.

DECEMBER 2020 AND BEYOND: WE MARCH ON

CTC was founded to stop Trump. And we succeeded because of you! Thanks to everyone—and especially our partners from the LAB—for committing so much of your time, energy, and resources. Your belief that kindness, empathy, and human connection could bring this country back from the brink has been an inspiration.

AND NOW THE WORK CONTINUES!

As we write, a TOP team of campaign staff and volunteers are in Georgia. There they are partnering with local activists to create a deep canvassing campaign in DeKalb County. Once again, we’re filling the vacuum left by establishment Democrats’ neglect of intentional and focused face-to-face voter contact. But we know we must do everything in our power to help win the runoffs on January 5th. Control of the Senate—and thus a successful Biden presidency—hangs in the balance.

The country still needs healing. The need to grow an electorate that embraces compassion and inclusion has not gone away. The world of people looking for a meaningful way to use their skills and talents has not gone away. As we continue to seek out new partnerships and opportunities we invite you to continue with us and help us grow our vision. We want to maintain and continue to develop our corps of trained volunteers, so we are ready to swing into action whenever necessary. We want to recruit and train more top notch leaders and organizers. We want to support more important campaigns. As always, if you are interested in getting involved, or have ideas of people who would like to do so, make sure to let us know. In the meantime, it’s been an amazing ride so far! Thanks for coming along with us! We look forward to traveling forward together!

“I’m extremely grateful to be part of this effort. I not only appreciate the method of deep canvassing that you guys have been teaching us, I also admire the ability of your organization to adjust to a uniquely complicated context to keep us all safe, thus giving us the opportunity to do effective work. This is admirable!”—Muriel
OUR CANVASSERS

[Images of various individuals engaged in canvassing activities]