DEEP CANVASS INSTITUTE

PEOPLE'S ACTION INSTITUTE | THE NEW CONVERSATION INSTITUTE

CONVERSATIONS TRANSFORMING AMERICA

"OUR EPIDEMIC OF LONELINESS AND ISOLATION HAS BEEN AN UNDERAPPRECIATED PUBLIC HEALTH CRISIS

that has harmed individual and societal health. Our relationships are a source of healing and well-being hiding in plain sight — one that can help us live healthier, more fulfilled, and more productive lives."

— **Dr. Vivek Murthy** • Surgeon General of the United States

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The Deep Canvass Institute is a partnership between the New Conversation Institute and People's Action Institute that exists to teach the practice of deep canvassing to an unprecedented number of organizers, activists, volunteers, and movement leaders.

Deep canvassing is a person-to-person conversation methodology that guides us to listen without judgment, share heartfelt stories that can bind us together, and process internal conflicts in ways that result in persuasion towards more equitable solutions around the issues that are used to divide us. The approach has proven powerful on topics from immigration, LGBTQ+ rights and racial justice to climate change and economic justice. Over the course of eight years of rigorous research, deep canvassing has been scientifically proven to create lasting shifts in personal beliefs and to be significantly more effective than traditional, transactional persuasion efforts.

In an era redefined by hyperpolarization, unfettered misinformation, and the rise of authoritarian forces, the Deep Canvass Institute speaks to the urgency of connecting people through conversation, building social cohesion, and equipping organizers with the tools to win their fights for a more just, inclusive society. By leading us to practice compassion, deep listening, and democratic values at a mass interpersonal level, the Deep Canvass Institute's training work supports the monumental cultural, social, and political shifts required to meet this moment in history.

HISTORY & CONTEXT

In May 2021, the New Conversation Institute and People's Action Institute partnered to launch the Deep Canvass Institute, a robust training and development program teaching the practice of deep canvassing at scale to volunteers, People's Action Institute member organizations, and allied organizations working on a broad range of issues across the country.

The New Conversation Institute is the premiere hub for training and expertise in deep canvassing. It is led by Ella Barrett and Steve Deline, members of the team that developed deep canvassing in the LGBTQ+ rights movement, at the Los Angeles LGBT Center's Leadership LAB.

In 2009, after 28 straight losses on marriage equality at the ballot box over the course of a decade, Leadership LAB organizers mobilized volunteers for a first-of-its-kind project: an experimental canvass to talk face to face with people who had voted against marriage equality and to see if it was possible to change their minds.

The team tapped into all the tools that the LGBTQ+ movement had long been using to powerfully organize queer people and their allies - tools inherited from labor and the fight for Black liberation - and began to apply those tools to conflicted voters and those on "the other side." Through two years of trial and error on the doors, that effort evolved the specific methodology now known as deep canvassing.

Barrett and Deline then helped lead the deployment and scaling of deep canvass methodology in a way that contributed powerfully to winning marriage equality at the ballot box for the first time in the United States. New Conversation Institute staff now have over a decade's experience helping organizations build impactful deep canvass programs through in-depth, hands-on support.

Two years into our partnership, the Deep Canvass Institute has trained thousands of organizers and volunteers and hundreds of organizations, who have gone on to use the skills they learned to create powerful deep canvass programs in their own communities. As we both reflect back and look ahead to what's next, we celebrate our accomplishments and rigorously examine how we can grow and strengthen the program to widen the impact of deep canvassing.

TOPLINES

3,469 INDIVIDUALS

participated in deep canvass training to learn about the origins and history of deep canvassing

1,534 INDIVIDUALS

participated in intensive 101 training to build their skills and confidence to participate in ongoing deep canvass campaigns

117 TRAINERS

completed our 20-hour Training for Trainers to prepare them to train staff and members of their organizations to deep canvass

229 ORGANIZATIONS

sent staff and volunteers to our Deep Canvass Institute trainings

9 NEW DEEP CANVASS SCRIPTS

were developed alongside community organizations including efforts to reimagine public safety and policing; promote immigrant inclusion; build support for voting rights; expand access to health care; and encourage infrequent voters to participate in the democratic processes

245,838 DEEP CANVASS CONVERSATIONS WERE HELD

by organizations that participated in the Deep Canvass Institute training around a broad range of critical issues

28 INDIVIDUALS & ORGANIZATIONS HAVE APPLIED TO JOIN OUR COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

launching in summer 2023, to continue learning together and to strengthen their capacity to build powerful deep canvass programs in the coming years

OVERVIEW OF ACCOMPLISHMENTS

EXPANDING OUR TEAM

In 2022 and 2023, generous support from the funding community resulted in the first two full-time staff hires for the Deep Canvass Institute. Training Manager Eboni Taggart joined the team in January 2022 and brought 15 years of experience organizing and training in movement spaces to build out the Deep Canvass Institute's training work. In February 2023, Program Manager Heather Schmucker began her work to strengthen the Deep Canvass Institute's systems and to grow the 401 cohort and community of practice for advanced deep canvass practitioners. Working alongside New Conversation Institute and People's Action Institute national staff, Eboni and Heather focus their efforts full-time on strengthening and expanding the work and impact of the Deep Canvass Institute.

GROWING OUR 101 TRAINING PROGRAM

In 2021, the Deep Canvass Institute launched its 101 training aimed at giving participants the foundational skills, knowledges, and mindsets required to deep canvass.

Held over three days with a chance to put their skills into practice at a live phone bank in a supported training environment, more than 1,500 people and representatives from more than 200 organizations have attended our 101 training. The training includes opportunities for role-play and practice around the script and key skills needed to have a successful deep canvass conversation.

In 2023, we launched a low-barrier "Introduction to Deep Canvassing" information session aimed at the large audience of people who are curious about the approach but not yet sure they want to commit to the full training. We look forward to tracking the impact of this new offering on our recruitment and retention goals.

As part of this foundational 101 series, we've trained participants to talk to strangers about issues ranging from immigration to climate change to paid sick leave, using these conversations as a jumping-off point for teaching the fundamental deep canvassing skills that can be applied across a wide spectrum of topics.

A NEW PIPELINE OF TRAINERS

The Deep Canvass Institute's Train the Trainer (T4T) program has rapidly succeeded in opening up an urgently needed pipeline for the development

of confident deep canvass leaders. Since 2021, 117 people have participated in our T4T program. The three-day training brings together organizers, activists, volunteers, and movement leaders with previous deep canvassing experience to learn how to impart key deep canvassing skills to others. Participants deepen their capacity to train on topics like curiosity, the structure of a deep canvass script, assertiveness, and redirection. Additionally, participants dive deep into running a successful debrief after each canvass, a vital skill to help them process their experience and to inspire them to recommit. Deep Canvass Institute staff provide opportunities for role play and coach participants through live practice sessions.

Past T4T participants are invited to train as part of our 101 series giving them the experience of training large audiences to deep canvass that they can take back to their home communities and programs.

T4T participant Jill Murphy, the Deep Canvass Organizing Director from Michigan United, has taken all of the skills she learned via the Deep Canvass Institute, then honed through running deep canvass programs on the ground in Michigan, to train other groups in the state in the methodology. Long term, Michigan United aims to become a regional hub for deep canvass training.

WHEN I STARTED DEEP CANVASSING IN 2019, I STRUGGLED TO ADMIT THAT I WAS DOUBTFUL OF THE PROCESS. BUT IN MY FIRST DEEP CANVASS CONVERSATION, THE LIGHT BULB ABOVE MY HEAD ILLUMINATED

and changed my view on how to talk to people about divisive issues. Once I saw the kinds of trust and vulnerability that are possible through these transformative conversations, I knew this method was the winning ticket to have open dialogue without arguing. My experience with the Deep Canvass Institute has continually kept me grounded in the value of teaching others how these conversations can make a positive impact in our public-facing life as well as our private-facing life. As I continue to grow as a trainer with the Deep Canvass Institute team, I am grateful to learn how we can use deep canvass conversations to spread like wildfire and heal our state and country."

— Jill Murphy • Deep Canvass Director, Michigan United.

SUPPORTING HEALTHY ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURES

In 2022, Training Manager Eboni Taggart identified a growing need for organizations running deep canvass programs to strengthen their internal cultures to support this intensive work. To address this, the Deep Canvass Institute launched its Healing Spaces program. Built on the premise that culture eats strategy for breakfast, the Healing Spaces program seeks to help organizations build a healthy team culture by equipping them with tools to address and process tensions in a way that is grounded in equity, compassion, and accountability.

"EBONI CREATED ONE OF THE MOST SECURE, SPACIOUS, AND HONEST INTRA-RELATIONAL HEALING SPACES I'VE EVER BEEN A PART OF. SHE SLOWED US DOWN TO MAKE THE SPACE FOR TENSIONS TO BE ADDRESSED AND HEARD, ADJUSTED THE AGENDA TO THE NEEDS OF THE SPACE, AND STAYED WITH US IN THE TABLE SPACE SO SHE FELT TRULY CONNECTED & ON OUR LEVEL."

— Healing Spaces Participant

ADVANCED COACHING & CONVENING A COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

The impact of deep canvassing on our democracy will be directly determined by the health of the deep canvass programs that develop on the ground. The Deep Canvass Institute is uniquely positioned to provide the advanced coaching and long-term support that projects require to thrive. In 2022, we launched this effort by selecting six organizations to receive bi-weekly, ongoing 1:1 coaching with a deep canvass expert.

"WORKING WITH THE DEEP CANVASS INSTITUTE WAS CENTRAL TO INDIVISIBLE'S 2022 DEEP CANVASSING PROGRAM. PUT SIMPLY, THE PROGRAM WOULDN'T HAVE BEEN POSSIBLE OR SUCCESSFUL WITHOUT THEM. FROM TRAINING-FOR-TRAINERS TO SCRIPT DESIGN TO UNIVERSE BUILDING TO VOLUNTEER RECRUITMENT, RETENTION, ENGAGEMENT, AND LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT, THE DEEP CANVASS INSTITUTE TAUGHT US SO MUCH NOT JUST ABOUT DEEP CANVASSING, BUT ABOUT ORGANIZING. AND NOT ONLY WAS THE EXPERIENCE MEANINGFUL, IT ALSO WORKED."

— Nora Sharpe • Indivisible Training Manager

SHIFTING THE NARRATIVE AROUND CONVERSATION AS TRANSFORMATION

Alienation from people in our lives whose views have come to feel incomprehensible. Powerlessness to break the hold of false narratives and fear-mongering. Overwhelming fear that we can't speak about important things without destroying important relationships. We are all grappling with these experiences on personal and societal levels. And the more hopeless we feel, the worse the problems get.

Over the last 14 years, as deep canvass programs have evolved across the country, there has been a clear pattern: new canvassers step nervously into the work carrying this feeling of hopelessness but then walk away with an entirely new sense of possibility.

Canvassers are given the tools to bridge these gaps and then

discover unexpected willingness on the part of others to accept curiosity and empathy and to empathize and listen in return.
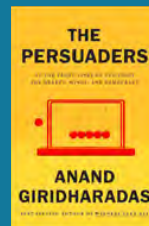
We believe that sparking this discovery on the largest scale possible – seeding a larger cultural shift – is a key element of the Deep Canvass Institute's work. We seek to experiment with new ways to recreate and cultivate this discovery of possibility more broadly. To find more ways to tell the story of this work, and the experiences of the people who are taking part in it, in evocative ways.

In 2022, we were successful in educating the broader public about the work of the Deep Canvass Institute via media platforms, such as being featured on Gimlet's "How to Save a Planet" podcast, in "How Minds Change" by David McCraney, and in Anand Giridharadas' New York Times best-selling book, "The Persuaders." In 2023, we engaged the services of Berlin Rosen to help increase our earned media exposure and we've brought on partners at Rope Line Media to develop dedicated video content to invest in building a broader cultural narrative around the need for deep canvassing and its effectiveness.

It is damaging and isolating when people experiencing genuine conflicts around belief don't have a healthy, non-judgmental outlet for processing those conflicts. Deep canvassing is an antidote that builds social cohesion, connects us across lines of difference, moves people's perspectives away from prejudice and towards more equitable solutions, and ultimately brings us closer to the goal of building a stronger democracy with true solidarity across race, gender and economic status.

"This new deep canvassing method, by contrast, was about staying long enough to surface something different. Cesar was trained by his new employer to knock on doors, get people to start talking and keep talking, and begin a protocol designed with scientific rigor to change minds. It was live-action persuasion built on an approach that felt quaint and somewhat contrary to the culture's drift toward confrontation and fatalism about others."

– Anand Giridharadas • author of New York Times bestselling book, "The Persuaders," observing deep canvassers with LUCHA in Arizona

"Through our partnership with People's Action Institute and The New Conversation Institute, we've conducted groundbreaking experiments on deep canvassing that have shed new light on how to effectively and durably change minds and reduce prejudice. People's Action Institute and The New Conversation Institute's efforts have revealed specific techniques and strategies that are most effective for engaging with individuals in persuasive conversations on challenging political and social issues, such as immigration and election misinformation. Without the hard work and dedication of these organizations, we wouldn't have the valuable insights that we do today."

– Joshua Kalla • Assistant Professor of Political Science, Yale University

EXPANDING THE CANON OF DEEP CANVASS SCRIPTS

Deep canvass methodology can be used to engage people in conversation around a myriad of issues, but the work of developing, iterating, and testing a script's effectiveness takes time and effort. The Deep Canvass Institute supports training and skill development for practitioners building and iterating deep canvass scripts across a wide variety of issues. These base scripts can then be adapted to the needs and aims of a particular community to help win the change they're seeking. We share script learnings by connecting practitioners with similar interests together so that no one is recreating the wheel and a new group looking to build a program can learn from the trial and error of groups that have already been in the field.

CURRENT DEEP CANVASS SCRIPTS

Reimagining Public Safety. In 2022, we worked closely with TakeAction Minnesota to develop a highly effective deep canvass script and training program around reimagining public safety. The script helped people wrestle with their conflicted feelings around the police and process questions about what kinds of policies will lead to safer communities for all.

Immigration. We supported, and continue to support, the training and capacity development of deep canvass programs in Maine, Colorado, and Michigan around immigration, learning more about the capacity to scale these conversations and shift public opinion about immigrants in a meaningful way over multiple years.

Engaging Infrequent Voters. We supported the development of a new deep canvass script aimed at engaging and learning from infrequent voters, and trained organizers and canvassers on deep canvass skills and script development. The canvassers were participating in an experiment in Massachusetts, Pennsylvania and Minnesota in consultation with Professor Donald Green. The results of the experiment were extremely promising and we are working to build out new experiments that draw from the learnings of this initial pilot.

Climate. We worked with a broad set of community organizations to develop a deep canvass script around building support for government action on climate change focused on bringing to light how climate change is affecting people at the personal level and digging into the belief many people have that climate change efforts kill jobs. Deep canvass campaigns on this issue are now being developed in five states.

Disinformation and Voting Rights. In 2022, we provided training and skill development for groups in Georgia, Idaho & Missouri testing the transformational power of deep canvassing on communities most impacted by disinformation and appeals to authoritarianism. These organizations led another successful experiment that demonstrated that deep canvassing had a significant positive effect inoculating voters against disinformation about the security and integrity of votes cast by mail.

Health Care. We have provided training and skill development support to the Land Stewardship Project in Minnesota and Progressive Maryland in developing a new deep canvass script around building public support for expanding government investment in health care.

DEEP CANVASS SCRIPTS IN-PROGRESS

People First Economy & Role of Government. In 2023, we will be developing a script to help people wrestle with core questions about our economic system and what we want from our government. We stand at a pivotal moment where, on one hand, working people face 40-year-record inflation, cost of living that has long outstripped wage growth, and spiraling government disinvestment. On the other hand, we have all just watched the government take on a radically different role during a global pandemic and communities are about to experience an enormous influx of federal funds via the Inflation Reduction Act. We are setting out to have conversations to increase people's belief that working people deserve more and to renew faith that government can and should do more to support them.

Honesty in Education and Critical Race Theory. The Deep Canvass Institute is preparing to build out a new deep canvass training focused on 'Honesty in Education' in collaboration with Race Forward and H.E.A.L. (Honest Education Action & Leadership) Together to inoculate community members and school boards against fear-based attacks and to strengthen and rebuild support for public education.

Overdose Crisis. Organizers and activists from the New Jersey Organizing Project attended our 101 training en masse to support their work to shift attitudes towards people impacted by the overdose crisis. Their work is ongoing, and we hope to engage them in our advanced programming and community of practice.

Transgender Justice. The Equality Federation and the New Conservation Institute are embarking on the development of a new transgender education deep canvass script adapted from the LA Leadership Lab's previous work deep canvassing around transgender justice in 2015. In 2024, the Deep Canvass Institute will support training and skill development for people and organizations who want to utilize that learning. Given the severity of the attacks transgender people currently face, it is essential that our movement is equipped with the skills and knowledge to transform attitudes towards compassion and empathy for transgender young people and adults.

DEEP CANVASSING IN ACTION

CASE STUDIES & TESTIMONIALS

CASE STUDY

Down Home North Carolina

In the fall of 2020, Bonnie Dobson was working in Mebane, North Carolina as part of Down Home's deep canvassing team. She had picked up the phone and called a woman on her list named Linda. "She was a white woman, very Southern, born and raised in North Carolina," recalls Bonnie.

"I told her that my husband had lost his job and that it was really tough because I didn't know how we were going to make ends meet," Bonnie continues. "She explained that [her family] had gone through tough times in the past, so we bonded over that."

As she had been trained, Bonnie continued asking questions and carefully listening to Linda's responses. "We talked about race relations, and that's where it got a little tricky. Linda expressed that she was not prejudiced, but she didn't understand why people were looting and rioting after George Floyd was murdered. Prior to that, I had not explained to Linda that I was black. So I told her I was, and what my experience over the years had been being African-American.

"At that point she kind of got quiet, and tried to tell me that I was 'different.' I said, I'm really not, to be honest with you. We talked about how we're all human, and by the end of the call Linda completely understood where I was coming from," Bonnie says. "She told her husband, who was sitting next to her, that my husband was out of work and he offered him a job. We ended up friends. It was a great conversation, with a woman I probably would never have talked to on the street, and we ended up caring about one another."

Over the last two years, deep canvassing has become a crucial part of Down Home's outreach in rural areas, and an essential tool in their efforts to connect with people around a broad range of issues. Deep canvassing hinges on a radical bit of inspiration: What if instead of talking at people in an effort to sway their opinions on a controversial issue, you instead talked with them? Down Home's deep canvassing has been expansively used to interact with North Carolina voters around issues such as universal healthcare, creating welcoming communities for immigrants, engaging infrequent voters, and criminal justice reform.

Down Home member Amy Cooper had worked more traditional canvassing jobs before for political campaigns, but found that "no one wanted to talk." Deep canvassing interested her because it is based around storytelling which, for Amy, seemed to fit with the relational atmosphere in small towns like hers. Amy shares her personal healthcare story to open up conversations while deep canvassing. "If I hadn't qualified for Medicaid, with the pregnancy condition I had, I would've died," she explains. "For them to know that 'Wow, this person who's talking to me, if they hadn't been covered by insurance, they would've died.' That's a real thing."

After more than a decade of fighting, on March 27, 2023, the North Carolina legislature passed Medicaid expansion which is expected to provide health care coverage to over 600,000 uninsured working class North Carolinians. The Washington Post credited the 'grass-roots pressure' from rural areas as crucial to the victory and it was Down Home members like Amy who led the fight in rural North Carolina.

Bonnie Dobson is now the statewide deep canvass manager for Down Home North Carolina. She has helped train dozens of canvassers and hundreds of volunteers across the state and is leading one of the largest and most ambitious deep canvass programs in the country. It helps, Bonnie explains, that she actually was introduced to this work by being deep canvassed herself by a Down Home volunteer while standing in her driveway.

"I AM SO PROUD OF THE PEOPLE WE HAVE BEEN ABLE TO DEVELOP AND TRANSFORM THROUGH DEEP CANVASSING," DOBSON SAYS. "AND I DON'T THINK I WOULD BE HERE IF IT WASN'T FOR THE INITIAL TRAINING. WE RECEIVED SO MUCH TRAINING AND SUPPORT AND WE JUST TRIED TO EMULATE THAT AT HOME. YOU FELT LIKE YOU WERE BEING HELD THROUGHOUT THE PROCESS AND I BUILT RELATIONSHIPS WITH SO MANY AMAZING PEOPLE."

– Bonnie Dobson • Statewide Deep Canvass Manager, Down Home North Carolina

The New York Times

A New Strategy to Persuade Voters: Listen Carefully. And Don't Hurry.

Canvassers usually knock on doors hoping to chat briefly. With deep canvassing, the idea is to engage voters in more meaningful conversations.

Aaron Nesheim for The New York Times

CASE STUDY

TAKEACTION MINNESOTA

REIMAGINING PUBLIC SAFETY

The tragic murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis by police officer Derek Chauvin in the spring of 2020 became another horrible reminder of the constant reality of the crisis of police violence and sparked another cycle of protests calling for a reimagining of public safety systems.

Although there was widespread outrage, many residents in Minneapolis and across the country were still deeply conflicted about the best path forward. TakeAction Minnesota and The People's Canvass took the lead on the ground to begin script iteration and learn about the conflicting views held by residents across Minneapolis. Organizers in Minneapolis joined both the Deep Canvass Institute 101 training program to learn how to have deep canvass conversations and the Train the Trainer program to learn how to train others to deep canvass. In addition to the training, team members from the Deep Canvass Institute coached their team through an iterative process to develop a script and training that would move people to support structural reforms and wrestle with their underlying conflict around what makes communities safer.

The deep canvass script TakeAction Minnesota developed has been incredibly successful and 41% of the people that canvassers had completed conversations with reported an increase in support for structural reforms. The Reimagining Public Safety deep canvass is a promising model for how to build broader support for new visions for community-driven public safety and police reform.

"BEING PART OF THE DEEP CANVASS INSTITUTE TRAINING FOR TRAINERS GAVE ME CLARITY ON THE SKILLS AND TACTICS TO RUN A POWERFUL AND EFFECTIVE DEEP CANVASS PROGRAM. IT TRANSFORMED MY ABILITY TO SUPPORTIVELY PUSH MY VOLUNTEERS IN A WAY THAT MAKES THEM FEEL PART OF A STRONG COMMUNITY AND HELPS THEM BUILD CONFIDENCE IN THEIR DEEP CANVASS SKILLS."

– Walter Fromm • Deep Canvass Manager, TakeAction Minnesota

CASE STUDY

VOTING RIGHTS EXPERIMENT

In order to fight the growing threat of authoritarianism, People's Action Institute and their member organizations began a process to develop a strategy to disrupt the spread of disinformation. As an important first step in the process, People's Action Institute and their member organizations designed a layered experiment incorporating deep canvassing and digital ads to target populations vulnerable to disinformation.

The Deep Canvass Institute played a key role in helping to build the capacity of organizations that participated in the experiment - anchored by Missouri Jobs With Justice, United Vision for Idaho, Showing Up for Racial Justice Georgia and in collaboration with political scientists David Broockman (University of California and Berkeley) and Joshua Kalla (Yale University.)

The experiment focused on disinformation surrounding voting rights. According to polling research conducted by the Voting Rights Lab, 48% of voters are susceptible to disinformation about the 'Big Lie' narrative that there was significant fraud in the 2020 election. The experiment was conducted during the 2022 election cycle and in the following weeks when disinformation about election results was intensified. Disputes about mail-in ballots were at the core of many of these conspiracy narratives.

Researchers found that deep canvassing does have a significant positive effect in inoculating voters against disinformation about the security and integrity of votes cast by mail. The results of the study suggest that with intentional investments made at scale, deep canvassing can be used to disrupt efforts to divide communities at critical moments in the democratic process.

The experiment found, in a survey 10 days after the canvass, a 4.2 percentage point increase in agreement with the statement that we should "Allow all Americans to vote by mail," after a deep canvass conversation with the script developed in collaboration with the Deep Canvass Institute.

Researchers similarly found a 1.9 percentage point decrease in the belief that mail-in voting contributes to electoral fraud. The data shows that deep canvass conversations were particularly effective with political moderates and independent voters. Furthermore, these deep canvass conversations had positive results among voters both with and without a college degree.

In a follow-up survey conducted 10 weeks after the canvass took place, researchers found suggestive evidence that the individuals receiving the deep canvass remained more supportive of voting rights than the placebo canvass.

MESSAGE	PLACEBO	DEEP CANVASS	DIFFERENCE
"ALLOWING SO MANY PEOPLE TO VOTE BY MAIL WILL INEVITABLY LEAD TO WIDESPREAD FRAUD IN ELECTIONS"	51.2% disagree	53.1% disagree	1.9 percentage point boost
"ALLOW ALL AMERICANS TO VOTE BY MAIL"	51.7% agree	56.0% agree	4.2 percentage point boost

CASE STUDY

HEALING SPACES WITH PENNSYLVANIA STANDS UP

Pennsylvania Stands Up emerged from the Deep Canvass Institute's training to develop one of the strongest and most impactful programs to expand the electorate. In 2022, alongside partners at Pennsylvania United, they took the skills they'd developed with the Deep Canvass Institute and spoke to over 20,000 infrequent voters across 15 counties with a movement rate of 35%. During the same period, however, they struggled internally with unresolved tensions and team culture.

Across the board, Deep Canvass Institute-affiliated groups have reported that unresolved tensions have interfered with their ability to build and sustain powerful organizing and deep canvass campaigns. Launched in 2022, the Deep Canvass Institute's Healing Spaces program emerges from our belief that if we're going to help organizations build successful deep canvass programs we must first ensure that they have a healthy and strong team culture.

Training Manager Eboni Taggart began by interviewing senior leadership and staff at Pennsylvania Stands Up to assess their team culture and identify where they were experiencing tensions. With that information, she built a day-long in-person training to provide practical frameworks and strategies for dealing with those tensions. She held separate sessions with senior leadership and with staff at large, engaged them in conversation about their experiences and walked through strategies for building a healthier team culture. This summer, Eboni will convene the teams again and assess their progress to help inform the direction of our Healing Spaces curriculum.

"HEALING IS ABSOLUTELY NECESSARY TO MOVE FORWARD AND WE HAVE TO ADDRESS WHEN TENSIONS ARISE, BUT THEY WILL LIKELY ALWAYS ARISE BECAUSE OF THE DIFFICULT WORK WE ARE DOING SO WE HAVE TO STICK TO THESE COMMUNITY AGREEMENTS AS GUIDING PRINCIPLES."

— Healing Spaces Participant

"HOW DEEPLY ALIGNED OUR ORGANIZATION IS AND HOW POWERFUL IT IS TO CONFRONT OUR TENSION & CONFLICTS IN AN OPEN SPACE TOGETHER. I LEFT THIS DAY FEELING SEEN, RESPECTED, AND MORE UNDERSTOOD BY ALL OF THE STAFF. I ALSO FELT LIKE I GOT A DEEPER LOOK INTO THE NEEDS OF MY CO-WORKERS AND HOW I CAN MEET THOSE WHEN WE ENGAGE IN WORK TOGETHER."

— Healing Spaces Participant

LOOKING FORWARD

AS WE LOOK AHEAD TO THE NEXT FIVE YEARS OF DEEP CANVASS INSTITUTE PROGRAMMING, OUR GOALS ARE AMBITIOUS BUT GROUNDED.

BUILDING AN ADVANCED COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

In summer 2023, we will formally launch our 401 Advanced Deep Canvass Cohort aimed at organizers and organizations who are currently running deep canvass programs in their communities. This effort will synthesize and formalize our ad hoc advanced training and coaching work into an ongoing program. Doing so will allow us to extend concrete, strategic support to more deep canvass program leaders than ever before, empowering them to build strong, effective, and sustainable programs that impact their communities.

Late in 2022, we launched a first call for interest and identified 28 organizations who want to participate in a community to share learning and best practices and receive advanced training. With the addition of Program Manager Heather Schmucker to our team in early 2023, we're now positioned to launch the first pilot of this community - the Advanced Deep Canvass Cohort - this summer.

For the pilot we will select 10 organizations to participate in a high-touch course that includes convening, 1:1 coaching, and intensive advanced skill development.

Additionally, we aim to launch a lighter-touch monthly convening for organizations interested in connecting around their deep canvass successes and challenges in a community of other practitioners but who will not receive direct coaching.

We are currently conducting needs assessment meetings with the interested organizations and building out the first three months of programming ahead of launching in late summer 2023.

EXPANDING TRAINING OPTIONS AROUND PROGRAM DESIGN

As we've undergone the needs assessments required in the planning process for our advanced community of practice, we've identified some gaps in our training around program design that we plan to fill through the expansion of our advanced-level training programming. Between now and 2024, we aim to create five new front-of-room trainings to be presented in a Program Design Series for organizers and organizations curious about, or ready to launch, their deep canvass programs. These trainings include Deep Canvass Program Design, Building Your Script, Volunteer Recruitment, How to Run a Deep Canvass Action, Deep Canvass

Data Management, and Building Healthy Team Cultures. Making these training sessions available will streamline how we spend our time during 1:1 coaching sessions with practitioners and will give organizers and organizations an even stronger foundation as they launch their programs. We also intend to expand our Healing Spaces curriculum to support our advanced cohort of practitioners whose organizations may be struggling to execute their programs amid internal tensions and unresolved conflict.

TRAINING & SKILL BUILDING FOR THE CREATION OF A MODEL PROGRAM

The last 14 years have taught us that, in deep canvass work, experiencing success is transformative. New deep canvassers frequently find their sense of what's possible transformed when they have their first successful conversations. And similarly, aspiring deep canvass program leads often discover a completely new vision for what they can achieve with their program after participating in a deep canvass project that is already thriving.

Beginning in fall 2023, the Deep Canvass Institute will support the development of a deep canvass program that can serve as a hands-on training space for Deep Canvass Institute participants at large – a place where organizers can come, experience, and learn hands on from a successful program.

Though the Deep Canvass Institute will only be involved in training and skill-building, and not in the execution of the program itself, we will also use the opportunity to study and evaluate the scale and impact of the program and our contribution to that impact.

GROW THE DEEP CANVASS COMMUNITY OF TRAINERS AND PROGRAM LEADERS

In 2023, we launched our New Trainer Program aimed specifically at building a cohort of trainers for our Deep Canvass Institute 101: How to Have A Deep Canvass Conversation trainings. Along with our T4T program, this side-by-side mentorship will build high-level training capacity in organizations running deep canvass programs. We also intend to target our recruitment efforts on organizers who are already active in their communities with a focus on recruiting Black, Brown, Indigenous, and disabled organizers and activists. We want to equip organizers with the skills - at every level - to build and advocate for deep canvass programs in their communities which will, in turn, increase the opportunities available to volunteers and individuals who want to hone their deep canvass skills.

BUILD & ITERATE ON NEW DEEP CANVASS SCRIPTS

H.E.A.L. Together to Protect Public Education

Race Forward has launched H.E.A.L. (Honest Education Action & Leadership) Together to advance honest, equitable and fully-funded public education as the foundation for a just, multiracial democracy. This is one of the most ambitious organizing efforts to defend public education from the most recent wave of attacks. Public school systems across the country have long been a battlefield for competing visions of society. Recent attacks on critical race theory (CRT) are part of a well-funded and long-term effort to discredit and dismantle public education, and with it, the very notion of public schools as a public good in a strong multiracial democracy. H.E.A.L aims to link the demand for a high-quality public education with the promise of a just, multiracial democracy, using the cultural battle over critical race theory and transgender rights as an opportunity to build people and narrative power in key states.

H.E.A.L. Together is partnering with grassroots community groups to strengthen the infrastructure for organizing against racial division by offering grants, research, leadership and strategy development, and connecting organizations to new and unusual allies to build their capacity and influence to defend and advance equity in our nation's public schools.

The Deep Canvass Institute is preparing to collaborate with H.E.A.L. to build a new deep canvass script and training program to equip grassroots leaders across the country to have conversations that can inoculate people against these attacks on public education and rebuild public support for high-quality education as a foundation for building a multiracial democracy.

Down Home North Carolina is helping to anchor this effort and will serve as a training ground for organizations and grassroots leaders across the country to build successful deep canvass programs to inoculate communities against these attacks and defend public education. The Deep Canvass Institute will also provide virtual training to organizations interested in learning the foundational deep canvassing and program design skills to create similar campaigns in their own communities.

Make Meaning on the Role of Government

The passage of the American Rescue Plan Act, the Inflation Reduction Act of 2022, and the Bipartisan Infrastructure Bill and the Creating Helpful Incentives to Produce Semiconductors and Science Act of 2022 represent an unprecedented opportunity to combat climate change and invest in critical infrastructure. State and local decision makers will be responsible for administering approximately 4 trillion in federal investments, and federal decision makers will be determining how to implement new programs and spending on existing programs.

A major threat to the successful implementation of this historic investment is the declining faith in government, which is at near historic lows. This trend has only been intensified by the explosion of disinformation, especially in rural communities. In a recent report, RuralOrganizing.org found that 80% of rural people polled reported Facebook as their primary news source – the ideal vector for disinformation and confusion about these new public investments.

The Deep Canvass Institute is working with People's Action Institute member organizations to build new deep canvass campaigns to help inoculate people from disinformation and help them to make meaning about the role of these public investments and build civic engagement to ensure that they are successfully implemented.

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THE DEEP CANVASS INSTITUTE SHOWS US WHAT IS POSSIBLE IF WE BUILD A NEW POLITICS CENTERED ON EMPATHY, LISTENING, AND STORYTELLING

as tools for both advancing justice and reconnecting us as a country. Over time, Deep Canvass Institute's work will help to persuade millions more people to support progressive causes and values by putting us into closer relationship with each other."

— Gabe Rose • The Hearthland Foundation

CONCLUSION

As we look ahead to the intersectional crises facing our country from the threat of authoritarianism, challenges to voting rights, attacks against our transgender siblings, inhumane immigration policies, and the continued rollback of rights for black, brown and LGBTQ+ communities, we are rightly alarmed.

We find hope in the realization of a true multiracial, working class democracy and know it lies in our ability to see one another, connect with one another, and find true solidarity across our communities. And, we know that deep canvassing is one of the strongest organizing tools we have to contribute to this vision.

People act on their emotions, not on simply facts or opinions. Deep canvassing goes straight to the heart of a person's conflicted emotions, offering them compassionate and non-judgmental space to explore and process those emotions, shifting them towards more just and equitable solutions. So often, in organizing, people who are not already with us are written off in favor of energizing and focusing solely on our base. This leaves behind millions of people in the United States who - at their core - share our values of peace, fairness, freedom, economic security, and an end to political violence, but haven't been organized yet.

Our ability to scale this essential organizing lies in access to the resources to train, support and, ultimately, fund organizers and organizations to build strong, sustainable, volunteer-driven deep canvassing programs in their communities. Programs that will knock every door, build connection and belonging, and engage with the heart of people's conflicted emotions to move them towards that vision for a truly just, multiracial, working class democracy.

INTERVIEWS / TESTIMONIALS

Amy Cooper, Down Home Member

Bonnie Dobson, Statewide Deep Canvass
Manager, Down Home North Carolina

Walter Fromm, Deep Canvass Manager, TakeAction Minnesota

Anand Giridharadas, Author, "The Persuaders"

Joshua Kalla, Assistant Professor of Political Science, Yale University

Jill Murphy, Deep Canvass Director, Michigan United

Gabe Rose, The Hearthland Foundation

Nora Sharpe, Training Manager, Indivisible

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