

WeCAN 2022 FINAL REPORT

April 26, 2023



Executive Summary

A core tenet of County-to-County's mission is to elect more Democrats to the North Carolina General Assembly. In 2022, we championed a new initiative to help Democratic legislative candidates across the state by having more one-on-one conversations with voters. WeCAN hired and trained local canvassers to work in carefully selected swing districts with vulnerable Democratic incumbents and strong Democratic challengers. Through this project, we knocked **43,300** doors in support of **10 Democratic candidates** across North Carolina.

Working with a nationally-known professional canvassing firm, C2C supported dozens of locally hired and well-trained canvassers working across the state on each of the final 30 days before the election, talking with voters identified by the campaigns as key strategic targets.

Building **Democratic power in North Carolina** is a long game, and there is clearly much more work to be done. WeCAN demonstrated a collaborative model that reached thousands of voters statewide. **We believe that this type of grassroots organizing is the way forward.**

The data back us up. While WeCAN was not designed as a controlled experiment, we conducted a robust follow-up evaluation, detailed in this report. To arrive at our conclusions, we compared (1) subjects who were on our target lists who we attempted to reach but whom we did not speak with (2) the voters that we successfully canvassed.

Our topline data (averaged across our supported districts) show:

- **Turnout was +12.2 points higher in canvassed subjects** compared with voters we did not reach
- Even when we adjusted for a subject's underlying propensity to vote, canvassed subjects voted at a **6% higher rate** than their peers
- Canvassing had **the most effect** on voters who had a turnout propensity score between 25% - 75%.

Background

The stakes of the 2022 election in North Carolina were high for Democrats. Republicans held a 28-22 majority in the NC Senate and a 68-51 majority in the NC House. Losing two seats in the Senate and three in the House would mean that Republican legislators would hold a supermajority in both chambers, enabling them to override any veto handed down by Democratic Governor Roy Cooper. The NC Supreme Court also held a narrow Democratic margin (4-3), with two seats on the ballot.

Since 2016, County-to-County (C2C) has been working with county parties across North Carolina who back terrific candidates in NC House and Senate races, but who have fewer volunteer and material resources. In the high-stakes election of 2022, C2C wondered “what more can we do to hold the Republican supermajority at bay?”

The answer was paid field organizing. Both statistically and anecdotally, we know that in-person, door-to-door canvassing is the most effective way to influence voter turnout.¹ The effectiveness of canvassing is even higher when people from the community knock on the doors of their neighbors and talk with them about local issues and candidates who represent them. This work can be crucial, especially in districts where very few votes determine the outcome of a race, but it is the hardest strategy to employ at scale.

In 2022, C2C supported canvassing in key NC counties by establishing a paid canvassing program called WeCAN (Canvass Among Neighbors). Legislative candidates were selected for this program based on input from C2C advisors, including legislative leadership and key strategists, data on average Democratic performance, and history of existing relationships with the candidate and county. See table below for a list of the candidates C2C supported through WeCAN. In this innovative program, local residents canvassed in their communities for Democratic candidates for the North Carolina General Assembly (NCGA). In many cases, canvassers also provided literature on up-ballot races and sample ballots. The intent was for this project to support Democratic candidates running not only in the district that was canvassed, but also candidates running in up-ballot races.

WeCAN was administered by an experienced, specialized firm. Campaigns were responsible for selecting the lists of voters who were canvassed, giving each staff flexibility to utilize the WeCAN knocks in the way that best complemented their field plan. Experienced field organizers from our contractor’s office and trainers worked

¹Green DP, Gerber AS. *Get Out the Vote: How to Increase Voter Turnout*. 4th ed. Brookings Institution Press; 2019.

with local residents and trained them in the skills of organizing and door-to-door canvassing. In addition to providing capacity for campaigns in 2022, C2C hoped that this project would leave behind a team of trained local residents who would be ready to do this work in 2024 and beyond.

A volunteer fundraising team was established early in the process, and their efforts were key in raising substantial funds for the project. In addition to making direct asks to individual large donors, this group worked with out-of-state organizations to leverage grassroots fundraising networks.

List of candidates supported by WeCAN:

District	Candidate
HD103	Laura Budd
HD73	Diamond Staton-Williams
HD98	Christy Clark
HD9	Brian Farkas
HD24	Linda Cooper-Suggs
HD25	James Galliard
HD35	Terence Everitt
SD17	Sydney Batch
SD18	Mary Wills Bode

Goals

1. Elect Democrats to the NC General Assembly. Our primary goal in launching the WeCAN pilot paid canvassing initiative was to help Democratic House and Senate candidates for the NC General Assembly win their elections, with a focus on candidates that C2C determined were running in challenging but winnable contests. In addition to believing that Democratic candidates would best safeguard and protect the interests of all North Carolinians, we wanted to prevent the GOP from gaining the supermajority which would allow Republican legislators to override Democratic Governor Roy Cooper's veto.
2. Reach voters through door-to-door canvassing. Our initial goal was to knock on 19,000 doors in two geographic areas of the state (Eastern NC and

Piedmont NC). In the process of selecting candidates who were running in challenging but winnable races, we decided to expand our efforts into Charlotte-Mecklenburg as well with a goal of knocking on a total of 31,500 doors for nine legislative candidates. Additionally, C2C supported Ricky Hurtado's own paid canvassing program by donating directly to his campaign; this approach reduced the overhead of setting up an additional staff office in Alamance County so that more funds were available to pay canvassers.

3. Supplement candidate's volunteer base. Going into the 2022 election, C2C leaders recognized that it would be more difficult to attract volunteers to support midterm elections than it had been in the previous election when the presidential race was on the ballot. In thinking about how to best support candidates who were running in races that we felt were challenging but winnable, we decided to provide paid canvassing support in order to supplement our candidates volunteer pool and enhance their ability to reach voters directly through door-to-door canvassing.
4. Build capacity. In our original planning, we hoped that local residents who were hired would learn valuable organizing and canvassing skills that they would use year-over-year to support the local party and local candidates.
5. Raise funds. Our initial fundraising goal to support this work was \$100,000. We were able to exceed that goal and raise \$206,518 which allowed us to increase the number of doors to 43,300 in 10 districts. We learned we have the capacity to raise substantial amounts of money, and most members of the fundraising team are willing to stay active if we choose to do this project again.

Lessons Learned

This report takes a deeper look in subsequent sections at the results and effectiveness of WeCAN. However, some big-picture takeaways stand out.

1. Canvassing works. Data from across the 9 WeCAN canvassed districts indicates that WeCAN canvassing efforts increased voter turnout by over 12% on average. We believed that canvassing would be an effective method of campaigning - and it was!
2. Candidates were extremely pleased with the project. There is unanimous agreement among all the candidates who were a part of WeCAN that the program was a substantial, meaningful gift that contributed positively to campaigns. In the words of one campaign manager: "In a year where volunteer capacity was down across the state, the WeCAN initiative was able to provide significant resources to a number of frontline campaigns to help us achieve our field goal targets. There is no question that the number of voter interactions was incredibly useful."

We also came away with some ideas for improvement. In the course of leading this pilot effort to fund paid canvassing in ten NC General Assembly races, C2C learned several key lessons that we believe could increase the effectiveness of this work if

C2C decides to engage in another paid canvassing effort. All of these potential changes to the program are designed to increase the impact and efficiency of future paid canvassing efforts by: 1) improving the quality of canvassing conversations at the doors; 2) increasing the contact rate at the doors; and 3) increasing the number of knocks in the counties C2C supports so that paid canvassing has a more significant impact on electoral outcomes.

1. Improve canvassing conversation quality.
 - a. One theme running through many of the post-election conversations with campaigns and internal C2C conversations was the need to ensure that the contractor incorporates candidate information as well as information about local issues into its canvasser training as a way to increase the quality of conversations at the doors. In a post-election conversation with our contractor, they said that they would be willing to do this so next steps would be to include guidance around this in any future contract.
 - b. One takeaway from the pilot was the importance of having candidates meet with the canvassers. Canvassers, candidates, campaign managers and C2C County Team Leads all mentioned how important and powerful these meetings had been and several people recommended that this happen earlier, if possible before the initial group of canvassers begins knocking on doors. Anecdotally, one canvasser mentioned that he had taken a photo with the candidate and showed this at the doors which he thought had had a positive impact on voters, so this could be arranged at the candidate meetings and become standard practice. In the future, C2C would include early candidate meetings in the list of commitments that campaigns make in order to receive paid canvassing support and also in its contract with a vendor.
 - c. While the initial intent had been to include literature for up-ballot candidates, most notably Cheri Beasley, literature was not readily available from statewide campaigns. If C2C does this program again, it would print its own literature including slate cards, sample ballots, etc.
2. Increase contact rate at the doors.
 - a. One of the most efficient ways to increase the impact that paid canvassing has on voter turnout would be to increase the contact rate at the doors. The average contact rate across the nine WeCAN-supported candidates in the 2022 election was 12.7% and outcome data suggests that increasing this by any amount would have a positive impact on voter turnout rates. Some ideas for increasing the turnout rate that came out of interviews and data analysis include: 1) shifting canvassing blocks to make sure they occur when voters are most likely to be at home; 2) increasing the number of canvassers at high contact times like weekends and early evening; and 3) asking campaigns to alert precinct leaders about the days and times when

- canvassers will be coming through so they can spread the word and potential Democratic voters are expecting the canvassers.
- b. Another way to increase voter turnout would be to use contact rate data to create more strategic target lists. Some possibilities include: 1) creating lists based on findings about the range of voting propensity scores that are most likely to be influenced by canvassing (e.g. data suggest that voters with scores between about 25 - 75% were most impacted by paid canvassing); 2) building weekend vs. weekday lists; 3) considering the demographics of canvassers and voters, although statistical evidence that the effect of canvassing varied between sexes, or among races or age groups, after adjusting for differences between canvassed and uncanvassed individuals in the WeCAN universe, was weak at best.
3. Increase the number of knocks in the counties C2C supports.
 - a. Our data show that the average increase in turnout was +12.2 percentage points (range, +0.7 to +16 percentage points).
 - b. The data analysis team was not able to determine why some districts had much higher voter turnout rates than others, but hypothesized that how campaigns created target lists was a factor. Data indicates that increasing the number of knocks per district would positively influence voter turnout. Strategies to increase knocks could include: 1) adjusting commute times to increase the time on doors; 2) concentrating the same number of knocks in fewer districts; 3) working with campaigns to strategically target voters who are most likely to be influenced by paid canvassing (see above); 4) most obviously, to raise more money for the overall initiative.

Methodology

In writing the qualitative sections of this report, the authors reviewed results from the WeCAN survey that was administered a few days before Election Day 2022 as well as audio recordings of post-election interviews with representatives from eight of the nine campaigns that participated in the WeCAN initiative. The survey was given to the co-leaders of the WeCAN initiative within C2C, to County Team Leads within C2C, to campaign managers and candidates for all nine participating campaigns and to the twenty canvassers who attended the final celebration parties held by C2C a few days before Election Day.

The quantitative analysis examining the impact that the WeCAN initiative had on election results was conducted by a data team that included C2C volunteers who have extensive professional experience with data analysis. Quantitative evaluation of the effect of canvassing on turnout was based on comparing the turnout among people who were successfully contacted to the turnout among people who

canvassers attempted to reach; where possible, canvassers left literature when they were unable to have a canvassing conversation with the voter.

Initiative Description

- Total number of doors knocked
 - 37,143 by our contractor; 8,175 financed for Ricky Hurtado's campaign
- Average percentage of registered voters reached by WeCAN across districts
 - Of a total of 37,143 voters the contractor attempted to canvass, they successfully canvassed 4725 voters. Canvassers left literature at the door when they were not able to speak personally to the target voter or a member of the household.
- Average contact rate/percentage of voters canvassed
 - The contact rate across the nine WeCAN districts is 12.7% (4725 successfully canvassed (contacted) subjects / 37,143 total WeCAN subjects)
- Total amount spent on WeCAN
 - \$206,518 raised by C2C for program and overhead;
 - \$10,125 allocated directly to Ricky Hurtado's campaign;
 - Additional contribution of \$17,640 from NCDP House Caucus in the final 10 days (paid directly to the contractor.)
- Amount spent per door
 - \$5.14
- Cost per canvassed voter
 - \$40.42

Election and Turnout Results

Description of Terms

- WeCAN subject: a voter on the campaign-provided target list whom WeCAN canvassers attempted to reach.
- WeCAN subject canvassed/contacted: a voter with whom WeCAN had a canvassing conversation.
- WeCAN subject not canvassed: a voter whose door was knocked but not home (or otherwise not reached); literature was left where possible but no canvassing conversation occurred.

Outcomes

- **Number of candidates who won/lost and by what margins.** Five of the candidates that C2C supported with paid canvassing through the WeCAN program won their races and four lost. The winners included Senators Sydney Batch (SD17) and Mary Wills Bode (SD18), Representatives Terrence Everitt (HD 35), Laura Budd (HD 103) and Diamond Staton-Williams (HD 73) who won her race by 629 votes. The loss margins ranged from 354 votes in the case of Brian

Farkas (HD 9) to a much wider spread of 2775 votes in James Galliard's (HD 25) race.

- Turnout targeting.** Campaigns supplied the lists of canvass targets, with the only stipulation that the turfs needed to be dense for the van-based teams of 4 to 8 canvassers. Some campaigns, especially in Eastern NC, asked us to canvass populations with expected turnout that was well-below average, e.g., a persuasion population. Other campaigns gave us lists that largely reflected an average turnout population for the district, and a few campaigns gave us lists of folks that were more likely than average to vote, e.g., base voters.

District	Turnout in the District	Turnout among WeCAN targets
HD-9	50.5%	26.6%
HD-24	48.0%	28.7%
HD-25	52.4%	32.9%
HD-35	56.8%	59.4%
HD-73	47.7%	52.7%
HD-98	52.7%	74.4%
HD-103	57.2%	58.0%
SD-17	59.7%	51.8%
SD-18 (only)	57.5%	80.9%

- Actual turnout rate for voters canvassed.** Average increase in turnout was +12.2 percentage points (range, +0.7 to +16 percentage points): Turnout was 49.2% among voters we attempted but did not reach and 61.4% among voters we successfully canvassed.²

² Study designs that compare contacted to non-contacted-but-attempted groups will overestimate the effect of canvassing, because of a tendency for people who are easier to contact to also be more likely to vote. [Green DP, Gerber AS. Does canvassing increase voter turnout? A field experiment. *PNAS*. 1999;96:10939 – 10942.] At least part of the apparent increase in turnout could be due to an increase in factors that are associated with increased likelihood of voting in the canvassed groups. We conducted an additional analysis to adjust for these differences using the 2022:DNC/DCCC Clarity National Turnout V2 score (TOv2). The TOv2-adjusted comparison showed that across the 9 districts, there was a 6 percentage point increase in turnout in the canvassed group compared with the uncanvassed subjects.

	Turnout		
District	Not Canv.	Canvassed	Diff.
HD-9	25.4%	35.4%	+10.0%
HD-24	28.6%	29.3%	+0.7%
HD-25	32.0%	39.2%	+7.2%
HD-35	57.4%	73.3%	+15.9%
HD-73	51.6%	60.9%	+9.3%
HD-98	72.5%	85.5%	+13.0%
HD-103	56.8%	66.3%	+9.5%
SD-17	50.2%	63.7%	+13.5%
SD-18 (only)	78.1%	90.5%	+12.4%
Totals	49.2%	61.4%	+12.2%

- **Adjusted voter turnout** - Even when our analysts factored in whether or not a canvassed voter “would have voted anyway,” canvassing had a measurable, positive effect on voter turnout (see footnote 2).
- **Turnout percentage by race/ethnicity, age, and gender of canvassed voters.** Turnout differed among voters depending on their race/ethnicity, age and gender. Across all nine contests, average turnout for canvassed white voters was 76.8%, Black voters 49.1%, Hispanic voters 48.5%. With regard to gender, average turnout for canvassed male voters was 62% and female voters was 62%, and with regard to age, average voter percentage for voters who were in the 18-25 yo age range was 39%; the 26-40 yo age range was 48%; the 41-65 yo age range was 67%; and the over 65 yo age range was 76%. However, statistical evidence that the effect of canvassing varied between sexes, or among races or age groups, after adjusting for differences between canvassed and uncanvassed individuals in the WeCAN universe, was weak at best.

Note: We are unable to estimate adjusted turnout for voters whose doors were knocked and where literature was left, but who were not canvassed, because we do not have a reasonable control sample against which to measure. Given that literature

was left at 88% of the doors knocked, this could have had a positive impact on the stated effectiveness of the WeCAN initiative, but unfortunately with the data we have we cannot determine what that impact was. However, research shows that on average, lit dropping was associated with about a 0.53 percentage point (that is, 1.06 additional votes per 200 lit drops) increase in turnout.³

Additional Goals

As stated in the Executive Summary, C2C had goals that went beyond increasing turnout. We also hoped to bolster candidates' volunteer bases and to help build long-term capacity by hiring local residents we hoped would become invested in the local party structure.

Supplement candidate's volunteer base. As anticipated, volunteerism was down across campaigns in all parts of the state. An initial goal of WeCAN was to provide paid canvassing support in order to supplement our candidates' volunteer pools. As it turned out, this help was not only desired, but essential for many of the campaigns to meet or come close to meeting their goal field program numbers. Additionally, many campaigns appreciated being able to utilize paid canvassers to work in areas they would not normally send volunteer canvassers, e.g., lower density areas, houses of lower-propensity voters.

Build capacity. In our original planning, we hoped that local residents who were hired would learn valuable organizing and canvassing skills that they would use year over year to support the local party and local candidates. In a post-program survey, 33% of canvassers indicated that they would continue to do field work on a volunteer basis, though it remains to be seen if this will be the case. 100% of canvassers indicated they would work for the contractor again in a paid capacity. Even if these workers do not volunteer but are re-hired by our contractor, their experience will be invaluable in getting a field program up and running quickly.

Fundraising and Donor Care

C2C began soliciting funds for the WeCAN initiative in January of 2022, although the bulk of fundraising occurred between April and September, 2022. 478 donors contributed a total of \$206,518 to the WeCAN initiative. Within a few weeks of making their donations, all donors received a printed thank you letter with a handwritten note. In addition, donors received updates on WeCAN's implementation and progress during the cycle, and all donors received access to final project results and data, as well.

³ Green DP, Gerber AS. *Get Out the Vote: How to Increase Voter Turnout*. 4th ed. Brookings Institution Press; 2019.

What's Next for WeCAN?

The candidates and campaign managers interviewed after the election clearly wanted C2C to operate WeCAN again in 2024. In post-election interviews, comments from candidates included:

- “I appreciate WeCAN support so much,” “The entire program was critical to the infrastructure of our campaign,” “I strongly encourage you to do this again,” “Yes, more please!” “Yes, I would want to do this again,” “Tremendous asset,” and “I am honored that C2C chose my campaign for WeCAN, it fit perfectly into my campaign.”
- According to one campaign manager, the paid canvassers “swept through target lists faster than we could.”
- Another campaign manager mentioned that “our volunteers were able to knock about 500 doors over the weekend, but the paid canvassers could do this in a day.”
- One candidate mentioned that WeCAN support “took something off her plate” which allowed her to focus on other activities like attending and organizing fundraising events.
- Another candidate mentioned that her campaign was “reliant on organizations like C2C that could execute which enabled them to focus elsewhere.” She also said that C2C is a “true warrior” in some of the toughest races and she said that she “would like C2C to stay in the arena fighting with a strategy that is data-driven.”
- According to one campaign manager, “In a year where volunteer capacity was down across the state, the WeCAN initiative was able to provide significant resources to a number of frontline campaigns to help us achieve our field goal targets. There is no question that the number of voter interactions was incredibly useful.”

While it was clear that candidates would like C2C to operate WeCAN again, it was important for C2C to carefully consider whether it will have the capacity to do this. One of the goals of C2C’s extensive evaluation was to give internal C2C leaders a thorough understanding of what happened during the WeCAN pilot, both in terms of process and outcomes, so that they had the information they needed to decide whether or not to operate WeCAN again in 2024.

There were several key questions that C2C leaders need to consider when deciding whether to implement WeCAN again, including:

1. Is paid canvassing the best use of time and money?
2. Do we believe that we can raise \$200K-\$250K to run WeCAN again?
3. If we have to concentrate WeCAN into fewer districts, is this something we are willing to consider?
4. Do we have enough volunteer power and energy to support WeCAN?

Based on the extensive evaluation and available data, C2C's Executive Committee decided:

1. YES. Paid canvassing is by far the most effective known means of increasing Democratic voter turnout. It is a sound, data-based investment of resources.
2. YES, but... While C2C is very confident in the validity of WeCAN and has all confidence in our Fundraising Team, we are curious about whether the busy 2024 election cycle will offer different challenges to fundraising. There are a lot of good Democratic causes out there. So we decided to embark on a fundraising drive to raise at least \$250,000. Each \$50,000 we raise will support the WeCAN program in one NCGA district. The more funds we raise, the more we increase our reach and effectiveness.
3. YES. Although we sincerely hope we can raise enough money to support each and every candidate we wish to, we are prepared to support fewer candidates with a higher number of door knocks each if we must, because we believe that knocking more doors in a single district is more effective than spreading the same number of knocks over several districts.
4. YES. C2C has a very dedicated core group of volunteers who are passionate about WeCAN and who are invested in its success. They are willing to put in the hours to make it happen.

Overall, we feel this pilot project was successful enough to warrant investing time, talent, and resources in it again, and anecdotal and statistical evidence supports this. In addition to increasing voter turnout in targeted districts, WeCAN provided an opportunity for C2C to engage with counties and candidates in a new and innovative way and to provide an additional means of support to Democratic candidates in swing districts. Therefore, we feel that implementing WeCAN in 2024 is essential to electing more Democrats to the NC Legislature. Our extensive evaluation also provides insight into the process and methodology of the project, so we believe that WeCAN 2024 will be even more seamless and effective.