Home Fire Preparedness Campaign
Pre-Event Canvassing Planning Guide
Disaster Cycle Services Job Tool

DCS JT Prepare

September 2014
Change Log

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Page(s)</th>
<th>Section</th>
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</tbody>
</table>
Table of Contents

Purpose and Overview ...................................................................................................................................................... 4
Organizing Event Leadership .......................................................................................................................................... 4
Working with News Media ............................................................................................................................................... 4
Selecting Staging Locations ........................................................................................................................................... 4
Planning for Communication with Teams ..................................................................................................................... 5
Organizing Pre-Event Canvassing Materials and Equipment .......................................................................................... 5
Planning Pre-Event Canvassing Schedules ................................................................................................................ 5
Planning for Registering/Signing-In Volunteers ......................................................................................................... 6
Organizing Teams on the Pre-Event Canvassing Day .................................................................................................. 6
Planning Pre-Event and Day of Event Volunteer Training .............................................................................................. 6
Planning for Safety ............................................................................................................................................................. 6
Planning End of Day Meetings ........................................................................................................................................ 6
Additional Pre-Event Notification Methods .................................................................................................................. 7
Purpose and Overview
Before going door-to-door to install smoke alarms, it is usually best to go through the neighborhood to inform people that the installation event will be happening soon. This is called “pre-event canvassing.” This guide is designed to assist local Home Fire Preparedness Campaign coalition leadership with planning successful pre-event canvassing. It provides high-level recommendations and guidelines to recruit support, meet logistical needs and organize teams and canvassing activities.

A job tool to help on the day of pre-event canvassing will be released soon.

Organizing Event Leadership
The first step of planning is to recruit leaders and build a local coalition to help organize the pre-event canvassing. Generally, using the same group who will direct the actual installation rally is recommended. At least one month before the installation rally, convene with local fire departments and the other community coalition partners, local volunteers and your local Red Cross volunteer management team to organize a pre-event canvassing team. Leverage coalition partners' knowledge of target areas and populations when forming the event leadership team. Your leadership team may also be willing and able to help plan and implement your smoke alarm installation rally.

Your leadership team may be composed of many people or a few people who handle multiple roles. Each or all of these roles may be filled by any member of your local coalition. Some roles may include:

- **Program Lead** – Coordinates all activities in advance and on the day of the event. Works with fire departments and other coalition members to plan, implement and evaluate the event.
- **Volunteer Recruitment Lead** – Works to get the word out for team recruitment, registration and coordination.
- **External Relations Lead** – Liaison with media, government agencies and community groups to mobilize support. Helps mobilize community support and groups where events will take place, and works with local fire departments, government officials and other community groups. Informs external community groups and stakeholders about the canvassing event.
- **Neighborhood Captain** – Coordinates teams, meetings, routes, communication protocols, training, reporting and closeout on event day.
- **Support Lead** – Ensures all needed locations, materials and equipment are acquired, ready and in place for the event. In addition, helps coordinate vehicles, staging areas, refreshments, supplies and other needed logistical support.

Working with News Media
Local media outlets may be interested in covering canvassing events and staging areas. However, the pre-event canvassing will not usually be of interest to the media.

Selecting Staging Locations
Generally, start the pre-event canvassing from the location that will be used for the installation rally. Plan for a staging area in a central location in or near the targeted neighborhood and available for prior day setup. Coalition partners may be able to help access or arrange for a suitable area. Some examples of good locations are park facilities or fields, places of worship with large parking lots, schools or colleges, fire departments and community centers. Consider the following features when selecting a venue:

- Central and visible location
- Available parking
- Adequate space
- Visible staging area
- Reasonable cost and site agreement terms
- Accessibility for individuals with disabilities
• Food serving area  • Accommodations for those with access and functional needs
• Restroom facilities  • Proximity to the targeted neighborhood
• Safety and security  • Distance to public transportation, especially if in an urban area

Ensure the venue has a strong visual presence in the community on the day of the event. This presence provides a great opportunity to raise additional community awareness of fire safety and other key community programs.

Planning for Communication with Teams
To ensure that organizers are able to stay in close contact with teams during the event, follow these guidelines:

• Arrange for each canvassing team to have at least one fully charged operational cell phone and a list of team emergency contacts.
• Make sure team members have designated points of contact within the team, contact lists for team members, contact lists for event organizers, radios or cell phones, and maps of the locations being visited.
• Contact the local police to let them know that members of your campaign coalition will be in the area. If they are not already partners of the event, ensure the local police or sheriff’s department is informed.
• Plan for periodic team check-ins with leadership to provide updates, relay visited locations and requests for assistance, such as support from a bilingual team member or requests for more materials.
• Whenever possible, arrange for one or two Red Cross vehicles (or public vehicles such as fire department or school vehicles) to drive continually through each neighborhood to check on the progress of the event, facilitate communication and restock supplies. These vehicles may also be used to transport volunteers to restrooms and to provide resources like water or snacks.

Organizing Pre-Event Canvassing Materials and Equipment
Having the right materials and tools for the job is essential to event success. Discuss with coalition partners whether they can help obtain needed materials. Below are the types of materials that may be needed for the staging locations.

• Name tags and markers  • Campaign posters and signage
• Pop-up tents  • Campaign brochures and handouts
• Water and snacks  • Other coalition member or Red Cross program and service handouts
• Photo waivers and instructions to managers for cases when waivers are not signed  • Local maps and directions for volunteers
• Technology equipment (e.g. power strips, computers, internet connection, speakers, microphones, etc.)  • Lists of teams and contact information
• Pens, highlighters and notepads for participants  • Transportation information
• Newsprint posters and markers  • Volunteer t-shirts or Red Cross vests (preferably reflective)
• Clipboards  • Tables and chairs
• Bags to hold items for distribution

Planning Pre-Event Canvassing Schedules
It is important that volunteers follow the schedule provided by the neighborhood captain. Create an event schedule to be presented to each volunteer during the sign-in process. While planning the schedule, be sure to identify and include the following:

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• Start and end times;
• Meeting and check-in times and methods (e.g. in-person including location, call-in, etc.);
• A kickoff meeting before sending teams into the field;
• Breaks and lunch times and locations;
• Travel times and methods (e.g. walking, driving, drop-offs, etc.)
  o Think creatively about getting people to where they need to go.
  o Past efforts have used fire trucks, partner agency vehicles and school buses for transportation.
  o You can use ArcGIS, Google Maps or other tools to help plan routes and estimate travel times.
• A wrap-up meeting.

Planning for Registering/Signing-In Volunteers

In order to plan for the right number of routes through targeted neighborhoods, it will be helpful for volunteers to pre-register. More information will be coming soon on pre-registration and on tracking the participation of volunteers who are not pre-registered.

Upon arrival at the staging location, all volunteers will need to sign in and give emergency contact information. Organize the sign-in station so that volunteers can receive any updated information, team assignments, equipment and materials needed for the event when they sign in.

Organizing Teams on the Pre-Event Canvassing Day

Work together as a leadership team to recruit volunteers from among coalition partners and the wider community to carry out all needed duties. The number of teams and canvassers needed will be determined based on the number of homes targeted for each event. Use the guidelines below to assist with the planning and organizing of the pre-event canvassing teams:

• Include a minimum of two volunteers for each pre-event canvassing team.
• To cover an 8-hour event, two shifts of 4 hours are recommended.
• Important! Team members are not to enter a resident’s home at any time during the pre-event canvassing.
• If the targeted neighborhood includes residents who speak languages other than English, planning to pair bilingual volunteers with teams or to have bilingual volunteers available to join the team quickly works best. As much as possible, identify and plan for language needs in advance, engaging coalition partners for their assistance.

Planning Pre-Event and Day of Event Volunteer Training

Pre-event canvassing will require minimal training, but plan for some on-the-spot training for teams. Even if participants pre-register and are able to watch training videos in advance, plan to incorporate training for volunteers who show up on the day of the event and want to help.

Planning for Safety

Plan to provide a brief safety overview before canvassing teams depart the staging location. Focus the overview on what to do if issues arise or if team members do not feel comfortable with a situation.

Planning End of Day Meetings

Plan for an end of day meeting for each canvassing event. End of day meetings provide an opportunity to celebrate successes and will help in planning for future events. In your planning, include instructions for volunteers, employees and event leaders to meet at a pre-determined location for the meeting. Plan an agenda that includes:

• Completing a written feedback form;
• Debriefing on how the day went;
• Discussing highlights and successes;
• Identifying opportunities for improvement, lessons learned and challenges encountered;
• Recognizing and thanking all participants and partner agencies for their contributions.

Additional Pre-Event Notification Methods
If local conditions do not support pre-event canvassing of targeted neighborhoods, or if additional notification is necessary, the following pre-event notification techniques may be used:

Community Flyers
Regardless of where you drop off or post flyers, ensure you are following local rules and regulations. Examples of locations for flyers:

- Places of worship
- Community centers
- Libraries
- Community businesses
- Local schools
- Food banks
- Community service providers
- Advocacy organizations

Branded flyers are currently in development and will be available through your local Red Cross chapter.

Direct Mail
Direct mail is another way to notify residents of your upcoming presence in their community. Branded postcards are currently in development and will be available through your local Red Cross chapter.

Reverse 9-1-1 System
If your local emergency management agency uses a reverse 9-1-1 system, it may be a useful tool for notifying large portions of a targeted community about your upcoming event. This notification system typically takes the form of a mass notification system (generating text messages, phone calls or emails) that can be used to provide the date and time of upcoming events in a specific community. Consult with your local emergency management agency if you wish to pursue a reverse 9-1-1 system as an option.

Tabling
Having a presence at local community events is an additional way to raise early awareness of the Home Fire Preparedness Campaign. Community festivals, school and library book fairs, neighborhood yard sales and other events are good opportunities to notify the community prior to the installation rally.

Partner Sharing of Information
Local coalition members, other partner agencies and news media may be willing to spread the word as well. Partners often provide information resources like bulletins or announcements during meetings to their constituents. These partners can be invaluable in endorsing the local coalition’s efforts and securing access to homes for the smoke alarm installation rallies. It can be helpful to gain more buy-in when we meet one-on-one with leaders of partner groups or make presentations in their community.