



Ecology Action Centre

ENERGY TRANSITION DEEP CANVASSING PILOT

Project Report

PROJECT TEAM

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2023

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Introduction

IT'S IN OUR POWER CAMPAIGN

In 2023, the Ecology Action Centre (EAC) launched the It's in Our Power campaign to build support for the province's transition to a clean electricity grid. As part of this campaign, we investigated a new type of community engagement method known as deep canvassing, which uses active listening and empathetic and meaningful dialogue to build connections and understanding between individuals with opposing viewpoints. Initially developed for use with social justice movements in the United States, deep canvassing has recently been adapted for use around climate and environmental issues. Building on the work completed by organizations such as Neighbours United and People's Action, we investigated the effectiveness of the tactic in rural Nova Scotia in hopes of gaining a better understanding of the concerns and barriers which come up for people around Nova Scotia's transition to 100% clean electricity in Nova Scotia.

WHAT IS DEEP CANVASSING?

Deep canvassing is a community engagement strategy rooted in meaningful and empathetic conversations, grounded in lived experiences and storytelling, with the goal of broadening an individual's perspective on a given topic. In contrast to conventional canvassing approaches that may exacerbate polarization, deep canvassing employs a longer-form conversation style that focuses on building a personal connection between the participant and the canvasser. This connection facilitates sharing lived experiences related to the topic, fostering a mutual understanding of the canvasser's message. As participants reflect on their perspectives throughout this process, they often identify flaws in their underlying assumptions, resulting in a more nuanced understanding of the subject.

Through deep canvassing, our objective was to cultivate empathy, respect, and comprehension by nurturing connections, ultimately aiming to inspire positive change and foster increased collaboration. This approach emphasizes the importance of building relationships and engaging in thoughtful dialogue to facilitate genuine understanding and constructive outcomes.

PROJECT OBJECTIVE

As with many places across the country, the Ecology Action Centre has witnessed an increase in questions and concerns around addressing the climate crisis, specifically relating to renewable energy projects in Nova Scotia. Through our deep canvassing project, we hoped to build a closer connection with communities and individuals to better understand the barriers and concerns people have when supporting the transition to renewable energy through a more understanding point of view.

A deep canvassing project takes a lot of human capital to conduct. We were very excited to engage our volunteer network in the project, and the pilot was successful due to the significant participation of volunteers through all phases of the project.

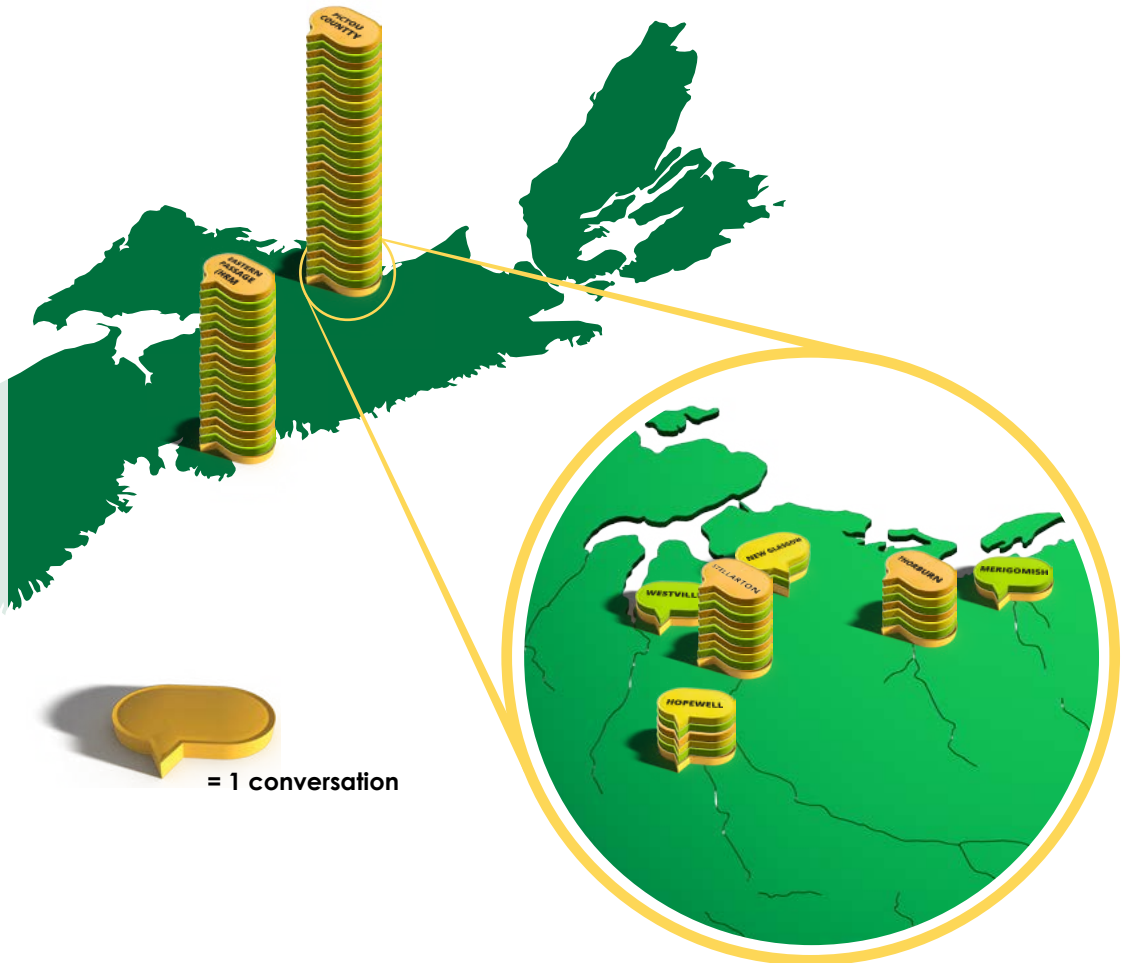


Methodology

LOCATION

Deep canvassing is a location-based tactic that uses local identity and community-based stories to connect people with an issue. Following recommendations from past deep canvassing projects, we began doing some research and speaking to community members and contacts in Nova Scotia to select a focus town or region for our deep canvassing efforts. In the experience of Neighbours United, who have done a deep canvassing project centered on the energy transition in rural BC, they recommended thinking about past and current identity of community and had worked in a community with a history and identity engrained in the resource extraction industry, one that has dealt with environmental issues in the past and has a connection to energy production. After careful consideration, we focused our canvassing efforts on the community of Stellarton and the broader Pictou County area.

Stellarton has a rich history in industry, specifically coal mining. Dating back to the nineteenth century, coal mining has long shaped the community's identity, culture, and economy. Because of this, many people in the community have a close relation-



ship to this once prosperous and important industry, with many being descendants of former miners and mine workers. While the mining industry in the region today is only a fraction of its former self, as the planet moves away from carbon-based energy sources, Stellarton maintains its strong connection to the industry, attempting to find new ways to preserve its heritage, culture, and identity.

While our efforts focused on Pictou County, the project also deep-canvassed neighbourhoods in the community of Eastern Passage. This was beneficial as it helped our many Halifax-based canvassers gain experience in door-to-door canvassing while also providing an urban community comparison to which we could compare the results of the more rural communities of Pictou County.

DEEP CANVASSING SCRIPT

Our deep canvassing team adhered to a standardized script that served as the foundation for our conversations. The script was meticulously crafted to establish a connection between the canvasser and the individual being canvassed. The development of the script was an iterative process that unfolded throughout our canvassing efforts. During this process, the script's wording, phrasing, and discussion topics underwent continual adjustments based on insights gained from ongoing canvasser experiences.



The script begins with an introduction designed to initiate building rapport between the canvasser and the participant. Following this, canvassers assess the participant's initial viewpoint by asking them to position themselves on a scale of one to ten regarding their support for the renewable energy transition. This serves as a starting point to gauge individuals' perspectives and attitudes. The script then guides the canvasser to investigate the reasoning for the participant's viewpoint. Through storytelling and active listening, the canvasser gains valuable insights into the

specific worries and considerations that the participants may have on the issue.

The script concludes by revisiting the initial question, prompting the person being canvassed to place themselves once again on the scale of one to ten. This reflective approach encourages participants to contemplate and articulate whether their stance has changed and, if so, the reasons behind this shift. The development of a structured script was instrumental in guiding our deep canvassing conversations and enhanced the effectiveness of our canvassing efforts.

SCRIPT SECTION	PURPOSE	EXAMPLES OF MAJOR CHANGES			
Introduction & Building Rapport	Establish an open and positive atmosphere that promotes sharing and trust.	Included phrase at beginning of conversation stating we are not here to sell anything. (Version 2-6)	Adjusted rapport building questions (Version 1-6)		
Initial & Final Scale Question	Obtain the participants viewpoint at the beginning and end of the conversation, each time asking why that scale rating works for them.	How much do you support more government action to reduce the impacts of climate change on people? (Version 1-3)	Do you think the government should take more action to move us off fossil fuels and towards renewable electricity (like solar and wind)? (Version 4-6)		
Storytelling	The storytelling section focused on sharing impactful community and climate stories to help the participant connect to the issue and for the canvasser to elicit any cognitive dissonance the participant may have between their view and climate change and/or renewable energy.	Used a pollution & waste success story to demonstrate effects of community action on reducing climate change impacts. (Version 1)	Demonstrated how community enacted change following a local tragedy story: the Westray Mine Disaster. (Version 2)	Tested local conservation efforts and community cleanup stories. (Version 3-4)	Replaced initial community identity story with prompt questions to elicit climate change related stories and concerns for renewable energy. (Version 6)
Make the Case & Addressing Concerns	This section was aimed at directly addressing the participants' dissonance over the issue and their original viewpoint. Following this we addressed any outstanding concerns heard during the conversation.	Tested concerns section used by the Trail, BC Deep Canvassing project, changing only minor details. (Version 1-2)	Added concerns & barriers specific to the community's we worked in. This included adding local stories and examples to address outstanding concerns. (Version 3)	Shortened section to include only three main barriers and concerns we had heard to date. (Version 4)	Added additional reoccurring barriers/ concerns, keeping as short in length as possible (Version 5-6)
The Ask	We ended the script with a call to action which came in the form of a petition or a campaign to support.	Link to petition for the federal government to take stringent action in the development of its Clean Electricity Regulations. (Version 1)	Sign up to receive more information on the Ecology Action Centre & its projects. (Version 3)	A Letter to Target Campaign where we asked residents to write to their MPs regarding the transition to renewable energy. (Version 4-5)	Created a petition calling on the Provincial Government to take quicker action in transitioning the province to renewable energy. (Version 5-6)

PROJECT TIMELINE

The development stage of this project began in January of 2023 when our deep canvassing team began researching and exploring past deep canvassing techniques, attended consultations with groups like Neighbours United, and attended training workshops with People's Action's Deep Canvass Institute. In March, we began our first round of volunteer canvasser recruitment followed by the development and implementation of our deep canvassing training program. Concurrently, we began developing a script to be used in Stellarton with our first in-person canvassing efforts occurring in early June. Acknowledging the constraints of our volunteers to travel to and from Stellarton, we began to focus our in-person canvassing efforts on the Halifax Regional Municipality community of Eastern Passage. Throughout July we had three canvassing outings in Eastern Passage.

To make deep canvassing accessible to more potential volunteer canvassers, in August, we introduced phone canvassing using landline numbers purchased from Data Axel and employed the platform, Callhub to manage our calls. After a second round of volunteer canvasser recruitment, we hosted an updated version of our canvasser training program and began phone canvassing in October. Our deep canvassing efforts concluded on December 1, 2023, which was followed by data processing and reporting.

DATA COLLECTION & ANALYSIS

During our canvassing we collected both quantitative and qualitative information. During in-person canvassing in Stellarton and Eastern Passage, canvassers recorded information such as street name and number, participant's initial and final scale rating, and notes on the conversation such as barriers or concerns heard, reoccurring conversation and story topics, and general notes and thoughts on how each conversation went. Canvasser's tracking sheets were collected following each canvassing outing, with further information collected during canvasser debriefs with a deep canvassing team staff member on the script's effectiveness, emotions and feelings raised during each conversation, and overall canvasser thoughts on canvassing efforts. Apart from serving as a crucial method for gathering information, this also offered a safe and supportive environment for canvassers to process emotions after their canvassing outings. During phone canvassing, similar information was also collected. The platform used to complete these calls allowed data to be collected and sorted through the platform. Additionally, each call was recorded, each of which was reviewed, and additional information was gathered. Canvasser debriefs were also offered after phone canvassing sessions.



Results & Findings

DEEP CANVASS PROGRAM IMPACT

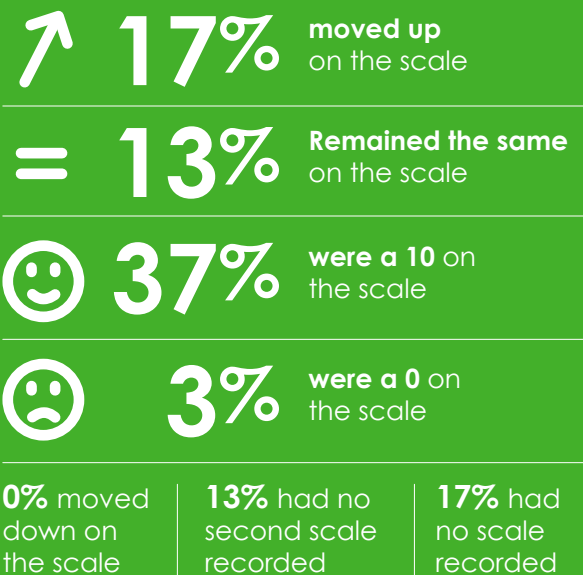
Persuasion Rate Indicator

The key measurement used in deep canvassing conversations to assess the effectiveness of the campaign is the self-reported scale rating asked of the participant at the beginning and end of a deep canvassing conversation. Also known as the persuasion rate, this difference in rating can test the effectiveness of the canvasser, and script, and acts as a before and after survey of how the deep canvassing conversation affected the participant. These internal metrics were not measured or compared with a control group and thus the results are considered generalized.

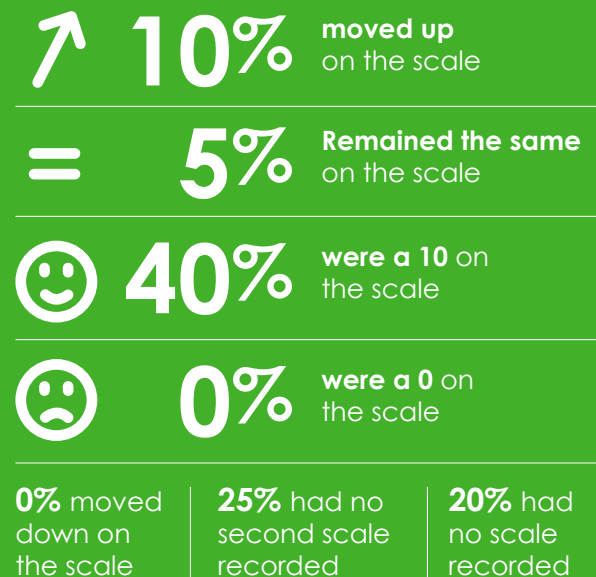
During the project, we tested two different scale questions. In our first three major script iterations, we followed advice provided by Neighbours United and approached issues relating to renewable energy through the broad context of climate change, asking "How much do you support the government taking more action to reduce the impacts of climate change?". We found the results of asking this question led to many people self-reporting they were a 10 on the scale, however as the conversations progressed

other concerns and barriers relating specifically to renewable energy were exposed. We opted to change this question in our fourth script iteration to directly ask about renewable energy, in hopes it would better reflect people's hesitancy around supporting the energy transition and allow the canvasser to more easily identify concerns and barriers to address. We, therefore, changed the question to be, "How much do you support the government taking more action to move us away from coal and fossil fuels and onto renewable energy (such as wind and solar)?" This question more effectively elicited barriers and specific concerns people faced when supporting the energy transition and helped get into more in depth conversations more effectively.

IN PICTOU COUNTY after 30 Conversations



IN EASTERN PASSAGE after 20 Conversations



In summary, out of the 50 conversations we had with residents in both Pictou County and Eastern Passage, we had an overall positive persuasion rate of 14%. This value can be partially attributed to our early stages of script development, and we did not obtain a first and/or second scale rating for 36% of conversations. Additionally, 38% of our conversations were with participants who initially identified as a 10 or were fully supportive of the government taking more action against climate change and transitioning the province to renewable energy.

Both Eastern Passage and Pictou County reported a similar number of participants who identify as a 10 on the scale question or in other words, were fully supportive of the government taking more action. While data suggest that

people in Pictou County were more likely to both move up a scale rating and also stay the same than their counterparts in Eastern Passage, this can at least in part be due to a higher proportion of conversations in Eastern Passage where we were not successful in getting through the full script, and therefore a second scale was not recorded.

Participants That Took Action

The next measure we used to test our deep canvassing efforts' effectiveness was observing the number of participants who signed up to take action. At the end of our script, we trialed several different calls to action. These include a petition for the federal government to take more stringent action in developing its clean electricity regulations, for participants to sign up to receive updates from

our organization, asking people to sign up and participate in a letter to target campaign around the province's clean electricity transition, and a petition asking the provincial government to take more action in transitioning the province to renewable energy. Despite the variety of calls to action, the number of participants who signed up to take action remained low throughout the project. Overall, out of the 50 conversations we had, 13 participants, or 26% of participants signed up to take action by either signing a petition or to receive more information about our organization and/or campaign.

Emotional Connection

A deep canvassing conversation is structured so that the canvasser can create an emotional connection with a participant. By making an emotional connection with

a participant, they are more likely to open up to our canvassers, the first step in getting them to be more supportive of the government taking action despite their underlying concerns. This is done through sharing impactful stories of lived experiences instead of exchanging facts. Emotional connections were self-reported by our canvassers when they felt they made a meaningful connection to a participant, where the participant was able to open up and share their own experiences. Our canvassers reported having a high number of emotional connections with participants, with 42 people or 84% of conversations reportedly making an emotional connection with the participant. The number of emotional connections made while phone canvassing (80%) was slightly less than those made while in-person canvassing (86%).

84%

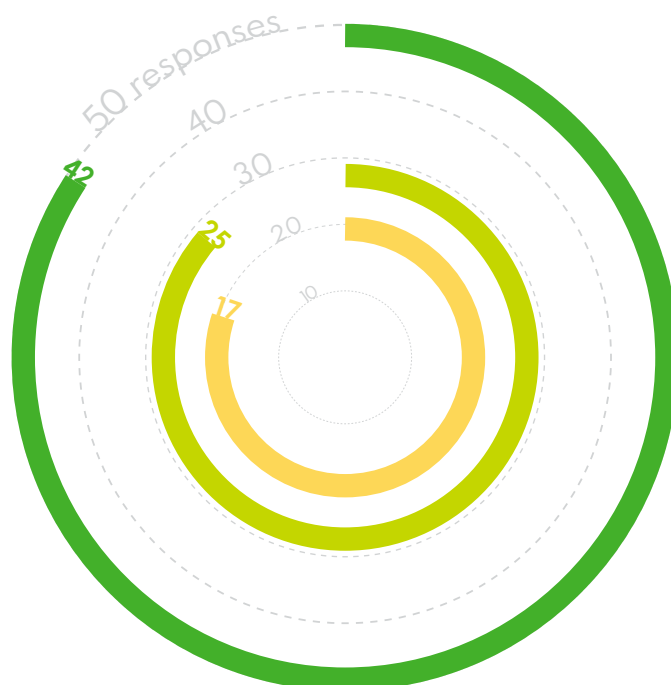
Emotional Connection in Total Conversations

86%

Emotional Connection While In-Person Conversations

80%

Emotional Connection While Phone Canvassing



WHAT WE HEARD ABOUT RENEWABLE ENERGY

Stance on Renewable Energy

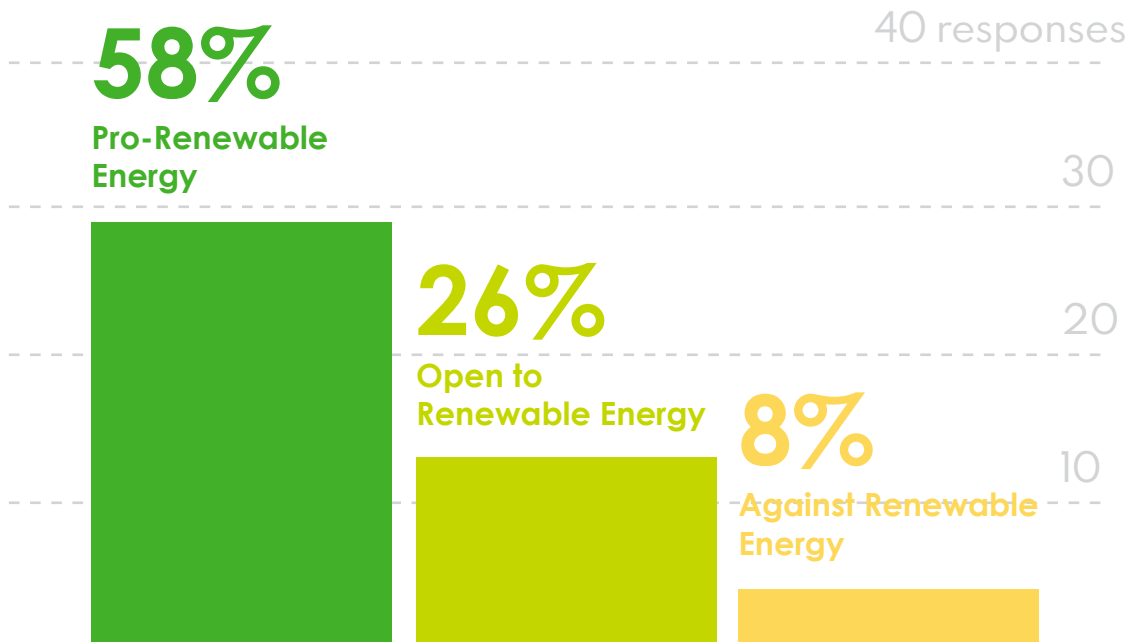
When examining the effectiveness of our overall deep canvas program, there were surprisingly few major differences observed between the 30 conversations we had in Pictou County versus the 20 conversations we had in the more urban community of Eastern Passage. However, this was not the case when it came to people's stance and supportiveness for the government to take more action to transition the province onto renewable energy. Located in the Halifax Regional Municipality, Eastern Passage was chosen as an urban comparison for conversations we had in rural areas of Pictou County. In Eastern Passage, we found that around 90% of the

people we spoke with were fully supportive of renewable energy as a means of supplying power to the province and another 10% were open to the idea. In the 20 conversations we had in the community, no one expressed clear opposition to a transition to renewable energy. In comparison, while in-person canvassing in Stellarton and phone canvassing in communities throughout Pictou County, we determined that only approximately 37% of participants were fully in favor of renewable energy and another 40% were open to it. As a result, 13% of participants expressed clear opposition to renewable energy with another 10% of participants having no clear stance.

During our canvassing efforts in Eastern Passage, we found a notable increase in support for renewable energy compared to our conversations

in Pictou County. Overall, we found that on average 58% of the people we spoke to were supportive of renewable energy to power the province with another 28% of people open to the idea. In total, only 8% of people we spoke with were against renewable energy with another 6% of participants unsure of their stance.

This data was subjective, derived from debriefs with canvassers and recordings, and based on key indicators such as willingness to support renewable energy, concerns and barriers mentioned during the conversation, and whether the participant took action by signing a petition or to learn more information. We also recognize that we have a small sample size but hope to use this initial data to inform further conversations and advocacy.



Concerns & Barriers to Supporting Renewable Energy

A key component to this project and to developing an effective script was understanding the concerns and barriers that stop people from supporting renewable energy projects and the government taking more action to transitioning the province to rely entirely on clean energy. These concerns and barriers ranged greatly, however could be classified into the following categories:

- Concerned about personal financial cost
- Lack of trust in government to oversee the transition







- Unrealistic solutions: Do not trust the technical feasibility of renewable energy or clean technologies
- Overwhelmed by the scope of the problem
- Worried about job and livelihood loss
- Lack of urgency

The most common barrier preventing participants from supporting the transition to renewable energy was distrust in the government (this typically focused on provincial and federal governments, not local governments). This concern was brought up in approximately 34% of our conversations with participant's main concerns being rural communities are typically left out of government

care and that the government only cares about its own interest and not about the cost and livelihoods of individuals. This concern frequently appeared with concerns of energy affordability and concerns for personal financial cost if the transition to renewable energy were to happen. This barrier was represented in 30% of the total conversations we had followed by a lack of trust in the technical feasibility of renewable energy and clean technologies which was represented in 24% of our total conversations.

Similarly, regarding participant's overall stance on renewable energy, we also see a clear divide between the frequency at which bar-

riers/concerns are brought up in Pictou County and Eastern Passage. In the 30 conversations we had in Pictou County, lack of trust in the technical feasibility of renewable energy and clean technologies made up approximately 37% of concerns heard, whilst in Eastern Passage this concern was recorded in 5% of the conversations. Similarly, distrust in the government and concerns about personal financial cost were mentioned in 40% and 33% of conversations respectively in Pictou County but both were only heard in 25% of the conversations in Eastern Passage. Lastly, job and livelihood loss were not recorded as a concern for residents in Eastern Passage but was heard in 20% of the conversations heard in Pictou County.

	 Concerned about Personal Financial Cost (Personal Affordability)	 Don't Trust Government to Implement Transition	 Solutions are Unrealistic and Lack of Trust in Technical Feasibility of Renewables	 Overwhelmed by the Scope of the Problem or Climate Change is too Big of Problem	 Job Loss and Change to Livelihood	 Lack of Urgency
Eastern Passage	5	5	1	1	0	2
Pictou County	10	12	11	2	6	3
Total	15	17	12	3	6	5
Frequency Heard	30%	34%	24%	6%	12%	10%

Deep Canvassing as a Tool

The origins of deep canvassing can be traced to its use on social justice issues in the United States, specifically around LGBTQ+ and labor rights. Using empathetic conversations and active listening, deep canvassing proved to be an effective means of changing public opinion and decreasing prejudice against the LGBTQ+ community (People's Action Institute, 2020). Over time studies of its effectiveness verified this impact, suggesting a deep canvassing conversation can have long-term and lasting effects on those with conflicting viewpoints on an issue. The effectiveness of deep canvassing is dependent on several factors such as the issue itself, its context, and the methodology used to develop and implement the program,

Building on the examples and tactics used in the United States, in 2021 the organization Neighbours United (formerly the West Kootenay EcoSociety) began adapting deep canvassing to be used for addressing concerns of climate change (Neighbours United, 2022). After several years of development, the pilot project was declared a success when they successfully managed to influence enough people in the ore-processing town of

Trail, BC to declare a goal to achieve net-zero emissions by 2050 (Neighbours United, 2022). This first successful volunteer-based deep canvassing program on climate change soon sparked organizations across the country to begin developing their deep canvassing program based around issues ranging from promoting better forestry practices in BC to combating the influence of oil and gas industries in Alberta. While many of these projects are still ongoing, deep canvassing is slowly becoming recognized as an effective tool for organizations to combat increasingly polarized issues.



DEEP CANVASSING FOR THE ECOLOGY ACTION CENTRE

Deep canvassing has proven to be an effective tool for organizations like the Ecology Action Centre to seek the root of people's opinions and viewpoints on often polarized topics such as renewable energy. In rural Nova Scotia, doubt and skepticism around renewable energy are prevalent. The reason for this is nuanced and complex, and stems from many factors such as a higher reliance on personal vehicles for transportation, and engrained identity in resource extraction industries such as mining, forestry, and fossil-fuel based electricity generation.

Deep canvassing allowed us to gain a nuanced understanding of how complex issues affect Nova Scotians. Through one-on-one conversations based on empathy and storytelling, we are beginning to better understand location-specific values, challenges, and misconceptions. This provides valuable insights for tailoring organization communication messaging and strategies and provides a localized approach to handling future issues as they arise.

Additionally, this tool can also help us bridge the divide between differing attitudes and perceptions of environmental issues. Deep canvassing brings individuals together on common ground, helping foster a sense of community and shared values and goals. The skills and tactics deployed on a deep canvassing program can help guide targeted

campaigns and community engagement efforts to help address a variety of environmental and social issues.

Our deep canvassing efforts not only worked to change differing viewpoints but also to gain a deeper understanding of the concerns of rural Nova Scotians and how they differ from urban areas. Deep canvassing in Eastern Passage exhibited higher levels of support for renewable energy (90%) than in rural Pictou County (37%). Additionally, by identifying participant's concerns and barriers, such as distrust in the government and concerns about personal financial cost, we are provided valuable insights that can help future advocacy and education work in rural Nova Scotia.

Again, recognizing the small sample size of our conversations, we will continue to be careful in overly emphasizing trends and continue to explore what we have started to see emerging from the data through further conversations and study. However, the high rate of emotional connection (84 %) felt by canvassers during the conversations highlights the value of taking the time for nuanced and sometimes difficult emotional conversations in supporting individuals in this transition.



Conclusion

Originating from social justice movements in the United States, deep canvassing has been proven to be an effective tool in combating racism, discrimination, and labor rights infringement. Building on the work and experience of numerous communications tactics and messaging, deep canvassing takes a structured approach to communication and storytelling to sway the opinions of differing individuals. Because of this, deep canvassing is slowly becoming a crucial tactic for organizations to fight the growing polarization amongst a wide range of issues. In recent years, it has been adapted to the nuanced and unique challenges of climate change, opening new opportunities to organizations like the Ecology Action Centre. In 2023, the Ecology Action Centre piloted Nova Scotia's first deep canvassing project, learning both from the findings of the project and how deep canvassing may play a role in future advocacy and education work. Despite the project having to overcome many challenges and obstacles, the deep canvassing efforts proved valuable in allowing us to learn more about the opinions and concerns of people in Pictou County and Eastern Passage.

The Ecology Action Centre's Energy Transition Deep Canvassing Project demonstrated

its impact through several key indicators, including our script's persuasion rate, the number of emotional connections made with participants, how many participants took action following our conversations, and showcased the unique emotions, values, and concerns people in Pictou County and Eastern Passage have around climate change and renewable energy. Despite challenges in our script development our persuasion rate was held at 14%, with 18% of conversations missing a scale rating and 38% of participants engaged identifying that they fully support a transition to renewable energy. From the 50 conversations completed, our canvass team reported making an emotional connection in 84% of conversations which helped convince 28% of the participants we spoke with to take action by either signing a petition, sending a letter to target, or signing up to learn more about the Ecology Action Centre and our ongoing projects. Similarly, the project offered other insights including a notable difference in people who support renewable energy in Eastern Passage versus those in Pictou County. Lastly, we gained a deep understanding of the concerns and barriers people we spoke with faced when it comes to the transition to renewable energy with issues like distrust in governments

(34%), concern for personal finances (30%), and doubts of the technical feasibility of renewable energy (24%) becoming the top three reoccurring themes.

In all, this demonstrates that aside from a being tool to change the minds and opinions of individuals, deep canvassing has the additional benefits of examining the complex concerns and barriers of why people do not support or see the urgency in combating the climate crisis. Through deep listening, we can not only bridge the divide between opposing viewpoints but also come to understand the nuanced barriers and feelings people have around an issue such as climate change. Learning from this community engagement tactic can thus help tailor organization communication strategies and lead to more effective and targeted campaigns. Additionally, the skills developed through deep canvassing such as storytelling, active listening, and showing compassionate curiosity, can help us all address the growing polarization of issues in the world today.

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Acknowledgement

First and foremost, we extend our appreciation to the invaluable contributions of our volunteer canvassers. Their enthusiasm, commitment, and willingness to engage with communities were the driving force behind the project's outreach. Special thanks go to Nigel Owen, Emma Murphy, Ian Mallov, Jeani Mustain, Kunyi Mangalam, Teal Burns, Zach Scantland-Griffiths, Laura Murrant, Dana Decent, Mary-Cate Driscoll-Sangster, Leah Terry, and all contributors. This endeavor would not have been possible without the collective effort, passion, and commitment of many, and we sincerely thank you for the support we received.

We also express heartfelt appreciation to everyone at the Ecology Action Centre who provided guidance and support for the project. Your hard work, creativity, and resilience significantly contributed to the project's effectiveness and impact. A special acknowledgment goes to Joanna Bull, Brandy Rivers, and Anna Zinenko for their dedication to the project. Our gratitude

extends to Neighbours United and People's Action's Deep Canvass Institute for their pivotal role in training project staff and consulting on the project. We also want to extend our sincere gratitude to the European Climate Foundation's Pool Fund for International Energy (PIE) for their generous and invaluable support in funding our deep canvassing project. This project would not have been possible without their financial assistance.

A special thank you goes out to all participants who engaged in the deep canvassing process. Your openness, insights, and willingness to share perspectives have been essential in shaping the narrative and impact of the project. We are particularly thankful to the residents of Pictou County, specifically Stellarton, and those in Eastern Passage for their active participation and thoughtful contributions.



Ecology Action Centre