

# How EveryAction Helped VPIRG Transition From In-Person Fundraising to an Omni-Channel Digital Campaign



## Overview

Vermont Public Interest Research Group (VPIRG) is the largest nonprofit consumer and environmental advocacy organization in Vermont, with over 50,000 members and supporters. They are well known locally for their summer canvass, a powerhouse member acquisition and renewal machine that serves to build personal, face-to-face connections with their community while paying for itself through door-to-door fundraising. The canvass also acts as an organizing tool for their advocacy

campaigns and helps build a leadership pipeline of young activists within the organization. In the spring of 2020, when it became clear that the COVID-19 pandemic would make door-to-door outreach and fundraising impossible, they quickly re-strategized and pivoted to a digital approach, attempting to run a program that would bring the same level of personal interaction with their members without requiring face-to-face contact.

## Challenge

- Transitioning away from in-person canvassing to an omni-channel digital program that could accomplish the same goals of renewing memberships, raising money, collecting advocacy actions, building personal and long-term connections with the community and filling a leadership pipeline of young activists in the organization.
- Managing contact data and communication channels in a way that would provide a seamless, personalized experience to donors, rather than being duplicative or repetitive in messaging.





## Solution

- VPIRG used EveryAction's unified platform in order to run streamlined email, direct mail, phone banking, text banking, and social media outreach programs.
- They created multiple streams of content that would supplement each other but also, critically, interact with each other and respond to actions taken in other channels.

## Outcome



VPIRG achieved a comparable ROI to their traditional door-to-door fundraising canvass with an omni-channel outreach program and **exceeded budget goals.**



They achieved **125%** of the fundraising and member renewal goals set based on a pilot of the program in early April.



Built capacity and member engagement through new channels, **increasing** the data and infrastructure available for future digital contact.



## A Change of Plans

As was the case for many nonprofits, VPIRG had a solid plan at the beginning of 2020—continuing to build a statewide organizing and advocacy program, particularly through their annual summer canvass. Membership acquisition, renewal, and fundraising are the major goals of the canvass, with a baseline target of breaking even on the costs of running the operation, while creating a net gain of new and renewed members. Qualitatively, the canvass serves to educate members and build energy around a specific advocacy campaign, as well as serving as a leadership pipeline for progressive young people in the organization.

When it became clear in early March that the COVID-19 pandemic would make a door-to-door canvass impossible, Communications and Engagement Director Zach Tomanelli and the entire VPIRG team had to quickly pivot to building a digital alternative to canvassing. Having recently switched to EveryAction, he noted that “EveryAction allowed us to pivot pretty easily to doing a ‘virtual canvass’—a multi-channel outreach effort combining email, social media, phone banking, text banking, and direct mail.”

## Building an Omni-Channel Campaign

To replace the door-to-door summer canvass, VPIRG built a layered digital campaign to contact and renew their members, including emailing members to let them know a “digital canvass” was coming to their town, phone banking, text banking, running targeted social media ads, and integrating personal videos to re-create the face-to-face aspect of a canvass.

Crucially, contact data from each channel was stored in one place: EveryAction. This allowed VPIRG to create channels of communication that built on each other and provided a personalized experience for each member. Looking at where each member most often interacted allowed VPIRG to determine that member’s preferred channels and scale back communications in other mediums. With data from each channel stored in one CRM, channels were able to adapt instantly—a donor who gave in response to an email or text message would be automatically taken out of the evening’s phone bank list—ensuring that the whole operation worked together as one fundraising machine.

“ If you’re going to try a multi-channel approach, it’s so important to have instantaneous and accurate data shared between channels so that the whole thing works cleanly together. EveryAction allowed us to do that.”

Zach Tomanelli  
Communications and Engagement Director, VPIRG



Using a unified database also allowed VPIRG to effectively troubleshoot complex data issues, such as householding contact record or identifying and merging duplicates, and build personal relationships by assigning the same canvasser to do follow-up with the members they had previously spoken with. Training and onboarding new staff was fast and simple; according to Tomanelli, “In our previous system, we had to create a log-in for them in four different platforms, with EveryAction, in minutes they could be logged in, trained, and have access to all of the information they needed.”

## Effective Outreach and Fundraising In Spite of COVID-19

Although it involved hiring fewer staff and talking to fewer people than a traditional canvass, VPIRG concluded that their digital outreach efforts were an “absolute success”—achieving a comparable ROI ratio to the traditional canvass, exceeding expectations in terms of budget health, and making up a huge chunk of member retention. “It’s not that we’d never done Digital outreach before,” says Tomanelli, “but we certainly hadn’t done it at this

scale, and EveryAction allowed us to do that. On our previous system it would have been much harder.”

In future years when door-to-door canvassing is possible again, VPIRG plans to continue using the digital infrastructure that they’ve built for member contact to supplement their in-person outreach, making it a more holistic and effective experience.