




## MEMORANDUM

Date: May 1, 2023

To: Kate Stewart, Chair, Government Operations and Fiscal Policy Committee  
Andrew Friedson, Member, Government Operations and Fiscal Policy Committee  
Sidney Katz, Member, Government Operations and Fiscal Policy Committee

From: Kristin Mink, Councilmember 

**Subject: Proposal for a County Council Contract for Local Canvassing**

Members of the County Council have a shared priority of including more voices and a more diverse representation of our County's residents in the legislative process. This requires breaking down language barriers and increasing intentional outreach to residents who are less likely to voluntarily engage with our County government. This effort will not come without a price tag, but we do have cost-effective, proven methods at our disposal.

A tool already used to great effect in Montgomery County is multilingual, conversation-based canvassing by a local nonprofit called Everyday Canvassing.

Everyday Canvassing knocks on thousands of doors to deeply engage communities that are systematically underrepresented in their access to government. Trained canvassers who speak many different languages ask residents open-ended questions, holding often lengthy interviews and frequently following up by phone. Everyday Canvassing then aggregates the resulting qualitative and quantitative data and presents it to policy-makers for consideration.

While working on a project basis for the Planning Department, Everyday Canvassing asks questions such as "What do you like about your community and the University Boulevard area, and what do you think we should change?" They also recruited participants for the Collaboration Council's focus groups on Out-Of-School Time, and worked with partners of the Department of Health and Human Services to provide targeted outreach for community vaccine clinics in Takoma Park, Long Branch, and White Oak.

Chris Cihlar, the Director of the Office of Legislative Oversight (OLO), has confirmed that such a service would be of great use to the OLO in their completion of reports. Councilmembers could also find value in using a service like this to inform our policy goals.

Because the individual outreach will also encourage more residents to engage proactively in the policy-making process in future, this service provides both short- and long-term returns towards the Council's goal of bringing more – and more diverse – voices into the legislative process.

**I propose that the Council issue a request for proposals for a company or nonprofit organization to provide on-call canvassing services to the OLO and Councilmember offices (“small projects” below).** The Council may also wish to co-create County-wide annual surveys on issues of shared interest (“large projects”).

**Cost analyses with Everyday Canvassing provide that two possible cost levels for a one-year contract with an organization such as theirs could include the following work products:**

A) TOTAL COST: \$150,000

- 1 large project (13,000 doors knocked resulting in 1000 interviews), and
  - 3 small projects (1500-2500 doors resulting in 150-200 interviews)
- or*
- 7-8 small projects

B) TOTAL COST: \$300,000

- 1 large project, and
  - 9 small projects
- or*
- 14-16 small projects

**OLO is well positioned to manage this type of service.** Their management of our external audit contract provides a good model. The external audit contract is funded through a non-departmental account overseen by OLO. While the work is performed by the contractors, OLO manages the scope of the contract, ensures that the work is adequately completed, and oversees the work product reporting processes on behalf of the Council. OLO puts the contract out for bid every four years.

Chris believes his office would need to work with the contractor to develop the surveys and determine a representative canvassing sample, but that oversight of the canvassers could easily be done by the contract awardee.

OLO believes it can manage the contract with no additional staffing and minimal work impact. Chris estimates it would require a similar level of management as the external audit contract, approximately one quarter of one staff member’s annual time.

**I’m writing today to request that the Government Operations and Fiscal Policy Committee add funding for this effort to the reconciliation list as a high priority.** I recognize that given fiscal constraints, adding a budget item is a tall ask. However, I hope the Council will agree that our shared goal of including a more diverse and representative cross-section of our County in the legislative process is a “must-have” not a “nice-to-have,” especially with a cost-effective and proven method at our disposal.

Thank you for your consideration. Please contact me with any questions you may have.