



Are you nervous to phone-bank? You're in good company!

Let's face it—phone-banking can be a little scary at first. [Even famous podcaster Jon Favreau thinks so!](#)

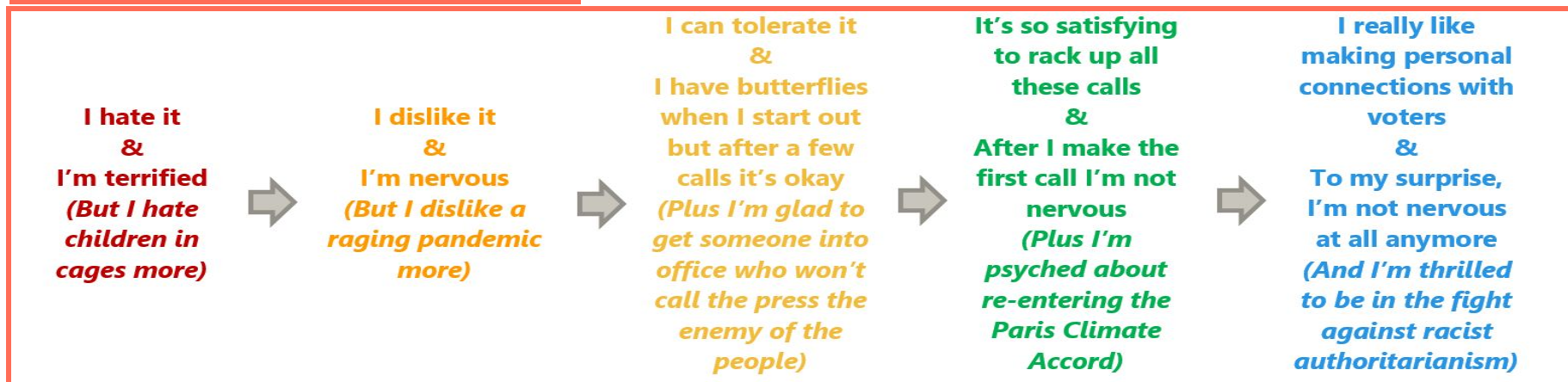
But **our democracy really *is* on the line**, and **phone-banking is absolutely critical** to turning out voters.

Listen, we gotchoo. Click on the links at the bottom of this page to find info and resources that ease phone-banking nerves, share tips for success, and – dare we say – make it fun!

And! As you get more calls to voters under your belt, you will find yourself moving to the right on **this phone-banking awesomeness scale:**



Phone-Banking Awesomeness Scale



[Why Phone-Banking is Mission-Critical](#)

[Banishing Your Phone-Banking Nerves](#)

[How to Have Conversations that Leave a Warm Glow](#)

[How to Persuade](#)

[Serenity now! Dealing with Negativity](#)

[FAQs](#)

[Resources](#)

Why Phone-Banking is Mission-Critical

Phone-banking helps mobilize voters. Full stop. Phone-banking:

- Is a highly effective method of voter contact—second only to canvassing—because the more personal the outreach is, the more effective it is.
- Is a key component of any campaign’s ground game.
- Is *especially* important in 2020, since COVID means canvassing is limited this year!
- Is particularly effective at bringing in the voters often ignored by those in power.
- Helps campaigns “clean” their lists for final GOTV, making phone-banking for GOTV much more effective—so you can feel great when you cross that trumpster off the list.



Most of all—phone-banking really turns out the vote when done at scale—and with more than 200,000 people who have adopted a state, WE’VE GOT SCALE! Your 50 calls on one day might feel like peanuts. You might have had only a few real conversations. But remember, you are just one drop in a big blue wave. **Together we are mighty!**

Thousands of people across the country are calling with you. On the first Vote Save America Weekend of Action, *volunteers made 1.7 million calls*. That’s frigging *insane*.

*(For more information on the research on the effectiveness of phone-banking, click **here!**)*



Banishing your Phone-Banking Nerves

Okay sure, phone-banking can be nerve-wracking, especially at first. But **you've got this.**

Connect to Why You're Doing the Work

There are so many reasons you may be in the fight for a more just future. Black people routinely murdered at the hands of the state. People going bankrupt when they get sick. Hundreds of thousands dead from COVID. Unemployment nearing Depression levels. Kids hungry. Kids in cages. A melting planet. Multiple states in flames. So. Much.

As you sit down to phone-bank, it may help to gird your loins by reconnecting to why you're in this righteous fight.

Okay. Deep breath. Ready to phone-bank?

If You're a Beginner, Use a Virtual Phone-Bank (VPB)

There are two ways to phone-bank:

- 1) An OpenVPB or VPB or virtual phone-bank: you dial each person's number on your phone
- 2) An autodialer: a web-based program that dials the numbers for you and connects you to a human only when someone picks up

(Your phone-bank host will train you on these tools.) A VPB can be the better choice when you're new to calling voters, because you control the pace. Once you're comfortable and confident with the VPB, you'll be ready for the autodialer! In fact, you will most likely be *excited* to use it, since the dialer will allow you to have many more conversations than you can with the VPB. After using the VPB for a few sessions, you will be hankering for more people to pick up.

If you join a phone-bank and the focus is on using a dialer, ask the host if you can use a VPB link instead, and get trained on that tool. Also remember that when you sign up for a phone-bank, you usually have contact info for the host ahead of time. Go ahead and reach out—the host will be happy to make sure you are set up with the tool that you are most comfortable with.

Beautiful Conversations with Strangers
The Joy of Connecting with Enthusiastic Democrats
I had a great conversation when we were making calls in Texas with a woman who was 94. She was yelling about how much she hates Trump, how he's always been racist, and how she would say to his face what so many journalists are too afraid to say. She told me if I see an old woman getting arrested for telling the president what he needs to hear, it's probably her!

[Why Phone-Banking is Mission-Critical](#)

[Banishing Your Phone-Banking Nerves](#)

[How to Have Conversations that Leave a Warm Glow](#)

[How to Persuade](#)

[Serenity now! Dealing with Negativity](#)

[FAQs](#)

[Resources](#)



Get to Know the Script Beforehand

Whenever you phone bank there will be a pre-written script; make sure you're comfortable with the script, so you can talk through it in your own voice. You need to make sure you convey the key points of the information in the script and ask the right questions, but you don't want to sound like you're reading a script—instead you want to sound like you're in a conversation. Try rewriting it in your own words or read it through aloud a few times.

Go with the Flow as the Conversation Meanders

Often you will have calls that really follow the script pretty closely—people will just answer your questions and listen. But sometimes the conversation goes off script. For lots of new phone-bankers, improvising can seem challenging. But this is actually where the magic happens! Remember you're talking to a regular person and the more the call turns into a normal conversation, the more natural and fun it will be. Don't worry that you need to say the “right” thing. You're just chatting with another human!

Don't Worry about being a Policy Expert!

No one expects you to know every talking point or policy, and it's perfectly okay to say you don't know something. You're a volunteer, for Pete's sake! Trust me, the conversation is almost *never* about policy details. *However!* If it makes you feel more comfortable to have some facts handy, feel free to read up on some relevant policies or background info about the candidate. Learn key facts [here](#) about where Biden, Harris, Trump, and Pence stand on issues important to voters.

If you have anxiety about not knowing enough, this may help: **people will remember almost nothing about the *substance* and *details* of your conversation. Instead, they will remember the *feeling* they got from it.** If they get a warm feeling, they are more likely to feel good about the candidate and to feel more motivated to vote!

Beautiful Conversations with Strangers
You Never Know How These Calls Will Turn Out

I was calling Michigan and when I asked the voter if he'd encourage three friends to vote he said "yes, wait, in fact ... do you have a liaison? Someone from the Democratic party who can talk to my church about voting and voting by mail." HELL YEAH WE DO, I wanted to yell ... but I did not think that was necessarily appropriate. He had his wife look up the phone number of their pastor - I got his name, number, and the name of the church, and passed the info back to One Campaign Michigan. Souls to the polls, baby!



How to Have Conversations that Leave a Warm Glow

Think of each call as a tiny relationship you have with another person. You're reaching out to someone else because you *care*. You care about this country and the people who live here. The person you're talking to is one of those people! You want them to experience justice, feel joy, and thrive. Getting there means hearing from them—how they're doing, what they care about, what concerns them.

Sometimes you'll hear about what breaks their heart, or makes them happy. Sometimes you'll find a fellow warrior for justice and bond over the change you want to see in this country. Sometimes you'll find someone who shares your sense of humor. You may make a surprisingly deep connection with this person you just met.

These are the conversations a phone-banker lives for—and they are *much* more common than you might think!

Tips for Making Friends with Strangers: Start the Conversation Right

Phone-banking presents a fun challenge: ***How many complete strangers can you get to like you in under five seconds?*** (And by “like” I mean “be willing to talk to you, even though they have zero reason to.”) If you can build rapport with even 10% of the people who answer the phone, you are one charismatic motherf*cker.

Here are some strategies for making friends at lightning speed. Several of these strategies require going off-script—this is fine as long as you get the core points across!

- **Smile while you dial.** People can hear the warmth in your voice and will be drawn to it.
- **Don't ask if your person is available.** Often scripts say to ask if the voter is available. Given the chance, people will pretend they aren't themselves and that they aren't home—but they have a harder time resisting you when you address them directly. For example, you can say: “Hey there! Is this XXX?” Or even “Hi XXX!” (If it's really not them, they will tell you!)

Beautiful Conversations with Strangers *Sharing Critical Information*

I spoke to a woman in MI and she was *very* onboard with voting for Joe Biden because she was not a fan of trump – but she didn't know about her Senator who is also on the ballot this November. I told her about him and answered some questions and she is now prepared to vote for him too! I'm happy to have helped truly educate a voter and direct her to absentee voting resources as well!

[Why Phone-Banking is Mission-Critical](#)

[Banishing Your Phone-Banking Nerves](#)

[How to Have Conversations that Leave a Warm Glow](#)

[How to Persuade](#)

[Serenity now! Dealing with Negativity](#)

[FAQs](#)

[Resources](#)



- **Emphasize that you're a volunteer.** After you greet them and find out you're talking to the right person, say something like: "this is XXX, I'm volunteering with the Democratic Party / Biden campaign / whatever today." People have a soft spot for volunteers!
- **Don't ask them if they have a minute!** They will often say no—don't give them that chance. Just barrel on.
- **Tell them you have a few questions.** Sometimes people think you're calling to ask for money, and are more liable to hang up on you. You can dispel this impression by saying right out of the gate: "I have just a few quick questions for you."
- **As we get closer to Election Day, emphasize that you're here to help them cast their ballot, rather than ask questions.** Swing states are getting a *lot* of calls but many will appreciate the service you provide—helping them figure out where and when to vote!

Beautiful Conversations with Strangers
Helping out Voters

I was calling for Carolina Federation and I reached a woman who at first told me she didn't have time to talk. So I said "That's fine. I just wanted to let you know that you can now register to vote online." And then she started asking me a bunch of questions about registering and early voting versus mail in voting and all the deadlines. And at the end she thanked me for all the information!

Give the Gift of Listening

People may want to get off the phone as quickly as possible, so you won't always have the chance to listen deeply—but you might. Even when people *seem* like they want to rush you off the phone, you might be able to coax them into a real conversation.

When someone authentically listens to you, it's magical. You can offer that experience to someone else. As you ask the survey questions, listen for hints that they might want to talk about something related to your questions. Here are a few examples:

- **Expressing strong support for Biden.** Ask: "What draws you to him?" or "What is it you like about him?"
- **Undecided.** Ask: "What's on your mind?" or "Can you share why you're torn between Biden and Trump?"

Many scripts contain a section asking what issue is top of mind for them. This is a perfect place to listen. Ask: "Why is this issue so important to you?" or "What about this issue is so important to you right now?"

[Why Phone-Banking is Mission-Critical](#)

[Banishing Your Phone-Banking Nerves](#)

[How to Have Conversations that Leave a Warm Glow](#)

[How to Persuade](#)

[Serenity now! Dealing with Negativity](#)

[FAQs](#)

[Resources](#)



Other ways to give the gift of listening are:

- **Be okay with silence.** If you ask a question and they don't answer right away, let them take a beat. This spaciousness is restful and gives them a chance to think.
- **Use "affirmation fillers."** As you listen, there are many noises, words, or phrases you can interject (without interrupting) in a way that feels affirming to them. A few examples are: "yeah," "mm-hmm," "right?" "seriously!" "wow, interesting," and "I get it." You can also use the Terry Gross trademark "mmm."
- **Ask questions, rather than make statements.** This conveys that you are truly interested in their opinions—you want to hear from them, rather than say your piece.

Beautiful Conversations with Strangers *Just Plain Delightful*

I asked one very enthusiastic voter if he would like to volunteer. He said he wished he could help, but he's too old. I said he *could* help though - he could talk to three friends or family members to get them to vote too. He told me he was all over it: "All my kids are voting Democrat and I tell my friends all the time! In fact I've lost friends - I berate the ones who are voting for Trump and they don't like that." So I was thanking him and transitioning to the end of the conversation, and he said "Wait, I have a question for you too." "Sure," I said, "what is it?" He said: "Why does Snow White have only six dwarves?" "Why?" "Because Sneezy is in quarantine!"

Get Curious

Your fellow Americans are really interesting. They might have what seems like a wacky point of view, and that could turn out to be utterly fascinating. Or they may have a really compelling personal story. Imagine you're interviewing a cross-section of America so you can write your memoir of the Trump years!

If you focus on why you would want to get to know them—even during a short conversation—you will be genuinely interested in what they have to say. This means *both* of you will have a good experience.

[Why Phone-Banking is Mission-Critical](#)

[Banishing Your Phone-Banking Nerves](#)

[How to Have Conversations that Leave a Warm Glow](#)

[How to Persuade](#)

[Serenity now! Dealing with Negativity](#)

[FAQs](#)

[Resources](#)



Leave a Good Impression at the End

When the voter gets off the phone, you want to leave them with that warm glow—this helps reinforce their overall good experience. You can do this in a few ways:

- **Bring back the smile.** You may have been speaking more naturally, not smiling the entire time. This is the moment to bring back that warm tone to your voice.
- **Show gratitude.** You can even say straight up something like: “I’m so grateful you took time out of your day to speak with me!” **Connect to earlier parts of the conversation, if possible.** It’s nice to thank them for something specific, like, “Thank you for sharing with me your challenges in finding affordable health care—I really appreciate hearing your story.” This will make clear that you were really *listening* to them, and truly care what they have to say.
- **Thank them for being a voter!** It’s important to use this specific phrase (being a voter), rather than thanking them for voting. *Being* a voter means that it is part of their character. Naming them from the outside as someone who *is* a voter is powerful. Research has shown that this simple phrase can raise the probability that someone will vote.
- **End with humor!** Especially if you’ve built up a little rapport with the person you’re talking to, it often feels right to cap the conversation off with a joke. For example: “Let’s go vote that whack-job out!”

Beautiful Conversations with Strangers Connecting with Folks

One time when I was calling Floridians to remind them to request a mail in ballot, I called this one man who was so kind and enthusiastic. He said he was having trouble requesting a mail-in ballot so I was able to help him get one. Then we just stayed on the phone for a few extra minutes chatting. He had so many amazing stories and was so passionate about voting blue, it reminded me exactly why it’s so important to phone bank!



How to Persuade

If you want to persuade someone, bring facts, reason, and calm logic. Right? Wrong. Marshalling a brilliant argument persuades those who disagree with you approximately zero percent of the time.

- **Remember that persuasion is about more than changing someone's mind about a candidate.** Often you want to persuade someone to *vote*—rather than persuading them who to vote *for*. Appeal to the fact that their vote is their voice and their power. Appeal to what Barack Obama said at the Democratic Convention—there are people who want to keep their wealth and power who benefit when regular people don't vote—those people don't *want* us to vote. Let's take our power back.
- **Allocate your time to our base or the “persuadables,” *not* the opposition.** About 20% of the population is our base (progressives), about 20% is the opposition, and about 60% is persuadable. Don't bother with the opposition—you will not be able to change their minds about anything—spend your time with the other 80%.
- **Find areas of agreement.** People often listen to others to find where they *disagree*—even if you mostly disagree, listen to find what you *agree* with. If you agree with the voter, they will be more likely to be open to hearing what you have to say later.
- **Connect to values.** Focus on the values you share with them. For example, they might talk about wanting their kids to be safe—and you can expand that to be about wanting *all* kids to be safe and healthy.
- **Don't debate—ask questions. Let them lead themselves to a position we want them to take.** All the advice about how to listen applies here. If you debate someone, they will only dig their heels in and harden their opinions. Instead, ask questions that draw them out. All humans believe they have a lot of *reasons* to believe what they do, but mostly they are wrong about this. If you keep asking questions, they might suddenly wonder why they believe something, and be open to something different. Instead of *you* making a good argument, let *them* make their own argument.

Beautiful Conversations with Strangers Connecting with Folks

I talked to a woman in Pennsylvania who hadn't decided who to vote for. She had believed a lot of things that aren't true about Biden. In talking to her I learned how concerned she is about just getting her bills paid – she was laid off due to COVID. Mostly I sympathized with her about that, but I also told her about Joe's plan to create five million good-paying jobs. We talked for a while – at the end she surprised me by telling me she had decided to vote for Joe!!



Serenity Now! Dealing with Negativity

Not every phone call will be great, but there are strategies for staying pretty Zen throughout it all.

- **The voter hangs up on you.** Awesome! You're on to the next dial and racking up your call numbers. They most likely are from the opposition and did you a favor by not wasting your time talking to you. And if they're *not* from the opposition and just hung up because they're in a bad mood, someone else will get them next time around.
- **The voter gets irritated.** Consider that people who get irritated at you might be hurting, or having a truly terrible day. If you can kindly wish them well—e.g. tell them you're so sorry to bother them and wish them a good weekend—that will make their day just a little bit better. As you are emotionally generous with them, you will feel better!
- **The voter shouts “MAGA 2020!”** You get the satisfaction of rolling your eyes at this utter nonsense, and knowing you are culling the list for later callers!
- **The voter talks your ear off about QAnon.** Honestly these people are *fascinating*. It's hard not to spend a long time with them just to hear the insanity. Tell them you see Hillary strolling by with Elvis, so you have to go. KIDDING! Politely wish them a good day, and move on.
- **The voter hurls insults at you.** First, know this hardly ever happens! And often it is funny. But sometimes people do say things that tempt you to lose your faith in humanity altogether. If this happens, keep calling until you talk to at least one wonderful person who *restores* your faith in humanity, and then take a break. Go for a run, or have a stiff drink. If you've made fewer than 50 calls, return to the phone after your break! 65-100 calls is really more your speed. Remember, you are a democracy-saving badass mofo.

If all else fails, gamify! Indivisible has developed [Phone-Bank Bingo](#) cards! Use them online, print them out, share them with your friends. You can share them with a phone-banking group, and compete with fellow callers! Suddenly you will *want* voters to be rude so that you can cross that bingo square off your list!





Phone-Banking FAQs

Q: What if someone asks me a question I don't know the answer to?

A: First of all, this hardly ever happens. Second, it's totally fine to say you're a volunteer and refer them to a website! Third, often scripts have hyperlinks in them with talking points, or info right in the script. To make sure you know what's there, it's good to review the script beforehand so you're not finding this on the fly.

Q: I've had people tell me that if they get one more call from the campaign they will vote for the other side. Shouldn't we stop making so many calls?

A: Absolutely not. Research shows that repeated contact *increases* the likelihood that people will vote. Imagine someone who stays away from the polls or casts a vote for someone they don't like—*just* to get back at some random phone-banker who will never know about the revenge vote (or non-vote)... That person doesn't exist.

Q: How can I commit to phone-bank for an hour if there are a lot of interruptions at my house? (Kids, barking dogs, doorbell, etc.)

A: Not to worry! You can always stop and start. And since most calls are pretty short, the odds of any *single* phone call being interrupted is pretty small. Plus, if you're interrupted by kids / dogs / doorbell (AKA real life), this will only humanize you and endear you to the person you're talking to!

Q: Is it okay not to read the script word for word?

A: Not only is it okay, but it's encouraged to put the script into your own voice! As long as you hit the key points and ask the survey questions, you're all good. You want it to sound conversational—not as if you're reading from a script.

Q: What messaging works best to change someone's mind?

A: None. It is very hard to convince someone of something they don't already believe. However, this does *not* mean you can never change anyone's mind—you can! Through gentle questioning and empathic listening, you can loosen their attachment to current ideas, and create space for them to come to their own conclusions that align with progressive values. The reason this is possible is that people who are persuadable tend to have a mix of progressive and conservative viewpoints. If you can activate their progressive viewpoints through conversation, you may be able to persuade them. (If it is clear they are staunchly in opposition to progressive viewpoints, don't waste your time. If they want to engage with you, they may be in the persuadable category.)

[Why Phone-Banking is Mission-Critical](#)

[Banishing Your Phone-Banking Nerves](#)

[How to Have Conversations that Leave a Warm Glow](#)

[How to Persuade](#)

[Serenity now! Dealing with Negativity](#)

[FAQs](#)

[Resources](#)



To activate progressive viewpoints, ask a lot of questions: “That’s interesting—I’d love to hear more. Why do you think ____ is the case?” “What worries you about X?” “How do you see X as related to Y?” Once they get their viewpoint out, you can link to a value they have, and share your own story about *your* viewpoint. “It sounds like you’re really worried about the future of the economy—I am too. My son is unemployed and I’m really worried about how hard it is to find a job. I like Joe’s Build Back Better plan—he’s thinking about how to support small businesses, and to stop layoffs of teachers and firefighters and people like that. With that kind of support for the economy, I will worry less about my son’s future.” It is doubtful that the person you called will say “oh, you were right all along!” But you may sense a shift, and you may have activated their progressive viewpoints.

Resources

Evidence for the Importance of Phone-Banking

- **Effectiveness:** Political scientists have done hundreds of experiments on voter contact methods, and one of the most robust findings is that *the more personal the outreach, the more effective it is*. While phone-banking is usually not found to be as effective as canvassing, it can come close—especially when done well. High-quality research on personalized calling found that *calls can raise turnout rates almost four percentage points*.
- **Bringing in the voters typically marginalized in the political process.** *Research focused specifically on groups often ignored by those in power* found that calling these voters can actually shift their self-image from someone who is disengaged to an active participant in democracy. The fact that someone cares that they vote—that they use their power—can be very meaningful. It is especially helpful if these voters are contacted multiple times. We need first-time voters! *Remember what AOC said*: “Our swing voter is not red-to-blue. Our swing voter is the voter to the non-voter, the non-voter to the voter.”
- **Cleaning lists for GOTV.** During GOTV, we want the lists to be as accurate as possible—we want the right numbers, we want to target the right people (our base for turnout, and the persuadables to persuade), and we want to get the people *off* the list who will just be a time-suck (the opposition). *This means that pre-GOTV calling might not feel that useful, but it is critical work*. Got a lot of wrong numbers? Great! They’re off the list and no one will waste their time during GOTV. Talked to too many people who hate your candidate? Perfect! They’re off the list. Talked to some grumpy but undecided Republicans? Jackpot! We just might be able to turn some of those out for Democrats when voting starts.

[Why Phone-Banking is Mission-Critical](#)

[Banishing Your Phone-Banking Nerves](#)

[How to Have Conversations that Leave a Warm Glow](#)

[How to Persuade](#)

[Serenity now! Dealing with Negativity](#)

[FAQs](#)

[Resources](#)



Great (and Short!) Videos on Phone-Banking

- [Improve your Phone-Banking Skills](#) (3:57) From: The Democracy Labs, featuring Rodrigo and his extremely soothing voice.
- [Phone-Banking: Tips and Techniques to Help Get out the Vote](#) (5:36) From: Seasoned Media Vets for Change, featuring Westside Democratic HQ in Los Angeles.
- [What, Me Phone-Bank?](#) (about 15 mins) From The Marsh (playhouse in Berkeley), by Charlie Veron (playwright and performer) and his partner Myra Levy (who co-hosts the Phone-Banking for Introverts trainings—see below). This is part of a longer video, and begins at the 14:15 time stamp.

Wonderful Testimonial on Learning to Love Phone-Banking

- [Phone Banking: Conquering Your Fears, Making a Difference](#), by Marie Jonas, from Sister District.

Training

- Phone-Banking for Introverts (and Friends), from Swing Left SF. This training happens every two weeks but they post only one event at a time. Google “Phone Bank Training for Introverts” to find the current event link.

Hiding your Outgoing Phone Number

If you’re using a VPB and want to keep your number private, you can route the calls through a temporary phone number with the area code of your choice. (Using an area code from the area you’re calling also may increase the number of pick-ups you get.)

- **Google Voice.** Using a Google Voice app on your smartphone, you can get a free phone number for calls, text messages, and voicemail. Here is a [link to information](#) on setting up Google Voice.
- **BurnerApp.** The BurnerApp is for Android or iOS. You can subscribe to a temporary phone number for \$4.99/month, with a 7 day free trial period. You can initiate your subscription from your phone or from your computer (burnerapp.com). More information is available [here](#). Calls and texts from your BurnerApp number count against the voice and data limits of your phone plan.