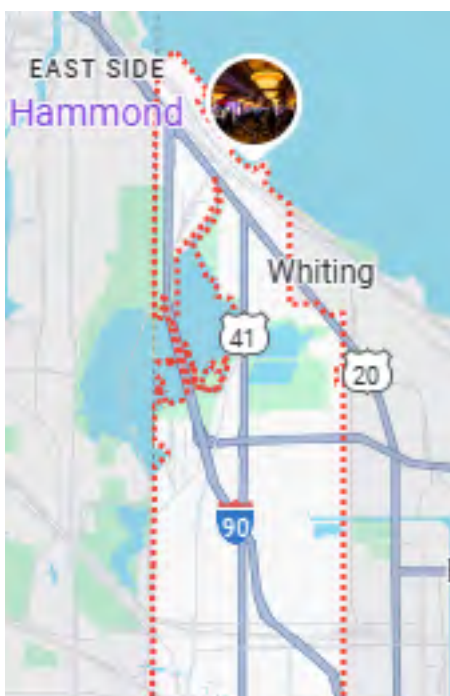


Case Study: Door-to-Door Canvass in Northwest Indiana

Community Context



Hammond, IN – Google Maps

Northwest Indiana has long been one of the most industrialized corridors in the country. The cities of **East Chicago**, **Hammond**, and **Whiting**, situated on the southern shore of Lake Michigan, are dominated by oil refineries, steel mills, and chemical plants. The **BP Whiting Refinery**, one of the largest in the U.S., anchors the area—bringing jobs, but also frequent accidents, flaring events, and generations of toxic pollution.

- **East Chicago:** More than half zoned for industry, with residents—predominantly Latino—living in the shadow of steel mills and chemical plants.
- **Hammond:** A working-class, racially diverse city marked by high asthma and cancer risks allegedly linked to industrial emissions.^{1,2}
- **Whiting:** A smaller, historically white town where BP has invested heavily in beautification and civic projects, creating complicated dynamics of both reliance on and distrust of industry.

These communities are known as “**sacrifice zones**”—bearing disproportionate burdens of fossil fuel pollution and health risks.

About JTNWI

Just Transition Northwest Indiana (JTNWI) was founded to confront this legacy and support a transition to healthier, more equitable communities. For its first years, JTNWI focused broadly on climate justice in northern Indiana. The proposed **MachH2 Hydrogen Hub**—anchored at the BP Whiting Refinery with a massive blue hydrogen facility and CO₂ pipeline—became a turning point. **Blue hydrogen** is made from natural gas, with carbon emissions captured and stored underground instead of being released. It requires pipelines to transport both the hydrogen to users and the captured carbon dioxide to storage sites. JTNWI recognized the urgent need for **door-to-door education and organizing** to counter corporate narratives and ensure residents’ voices were heard.

The Canvass Strategy

Launched in June 2023, the canvass aimed to educate residents, capture community concerns, and build local leadership around the MachH2 project.

¹ Franciscan St. Margaret Health–Hammond. (2016). [Community Health Needs Assessment—Hammond](#).

² Molina, T., Clark, M. and Fry, D. (2026). [Is Pollution from the Steel Industry Behind Cancer Rates in Gary, Indiana?](#) *CBS News Chicago*, May 27, 2025.

Key Elements:

- **Team of 10 canvassers** (stipended and volunteer), trained with support from Citizens Action Coalition.
- **Bilingual outreach:** Spanish-speaking canvassers paired with English speakers; all flyers translated into Spanish.
- **Relational approach:** Canvassers led with personal motivations and tailored conversations to cues—such as kids in the yard, union stickers, and neighborhood pride.
- **Data collection:** Walk sheets tracked awareness and top concerns (health, safety, property rights, labor).
- **Invitation to action:** Instead of petitions, residents were invited to a Community Conversation at the Hammond Public Library, featuring food, art, and expert speakers.

Lisa Vallee, JTNWI's first-time canvass director, lived just a mile from the BP Whiting Refinery—"on the front steps of the pipeline." Her personal stake gave urgency and authenticity to the campaign. With support from seasoned canvasser Bryce Gustafson at Citizens Action Coalition, who had deep experience canvassing rural parts of southern Indiana on carbon capture, Lisa built the training and resources that made the canvass possible.

Canvass Resource Center

To support canvassers, JTNWI created a [Canvass Resource Center](#)—a shared hub of materials and background information. It included:

- The final **No False Solutions canvass script** and campaign webpage.
- **Community agreements** outlining values and expectations.
- **Bilingual flyers** and campaign literature.
- **Educational resources** such as [Hoodwinked in the Hothouse](#), the [Jemez Principles for Democratic Organizing](#), and articles on carbon capture and storage (CCS) and hydrogen.
- **Safety stories and lessons** from pipeline ruptures in Mississippi and Louisiana, used to emphasize risks of CO₂ infrastructure.
- A **dos and don'ts guide** for door knocking, covering preparation, safety, and conduct at the door. Canvassers were reminded to:
 - Always have a buddy, dress for conditions, bring water, literature, maps, and a charged phone.
 - Avoid knocking after dark or approaching doors with red flags, such as aggressive signage.
 - Be conversational rather than reading from a clipboard, and never enter a home if uncomfortable.
 - Take the high road if someone is unsupportive, and move on quickly rather than argue.
 - Record detailed notes after each interaction for future reference and follow-up.



Source: Just Transition Northwest Indiana

The **No False Solutions canvassing script** structured conversations in four steps:

- **Intro & Awareness:** Friendly introduction, asking if residents had heard of the project.
- **Information Sharing:** Clear explanation of the CO₂ pipeline and hydrogen hub, why they are “false solutions,” and why BP’s track record raises concerns.
- **Concern Question:** Inviting residents to share their own worries or experiences.
- **Invitation:** Offering a next step, such as joining a community conversation, RSVPing via a QR code, or sharing your contact information.

The script emphasized **listening, creating space, and connecting personal concerns** (health, safety, jobs, property) to the risks of hydrogen and CO₂ pipelines.

The Resource Center not only trained canvassers in the technical content, but also grounded the work in principles of **democratic organizing, justice, and care**. This structure enabled first-time canvassers to feel prepared and supported in addressing complex, technical issues.

Outcomes

- **2,000+ doors knocked** across East Chicago, Hammond, and Whiting.
- **500+ meaningful conversations**, with over 60% of residents hearing about the project for the first time.
- **Community Conversation** drew ~60 people, including residents and rural landowners along the proposed CO₂ pipeline route.
- **Leadership development:** Canvassers stayed connected, became dues-paying members, and continued volunteering with JTNWI.

The canvass seeded long-term organizing: a “**No False Solutions**” narrative, a “**No Dirty Hydrogen in the Midwest**” rally, and new alliances with farmers, youth, and environmental justice partners.

Spotlight: A Youth Canvasser Who Changed the Game

One of the most powerful stories to emerge was that of a **17-year-old volunteer from East Chicago**.

- Though quiet by nature, he impressed during his interview with a deep knowledge of local industrial zoning and pollution.
- He refused a stipend, insisting he wanted to contribute as a volunteer.
- On the doors, he spoke proudly of his hometown, connecting authentically with neighbors.
- He later introduced JTNWI to students at Bishop Noll High School, leading to a collaboration on an art gallery exhibit about just transition and CO₂ pipelines.



Source: Just Transition Northwest Indiana

- His initiative brought new voices from the youth, artists, and educators into the movement—showing how a single canvasser can spark ripple effects across a community.

Spotlight: Canvass Cues and Training

A unique aspect of JTNWI's canvassing was the training on canvassing cues—observing signs at the door to guide the conversation.

- **Union signs in the window** could open dialogue about jobs and labor rights.
- **Children in the yard** signaled an opening to discuss health and safety.
- Even small details—like a decorative goose statue in the yard—became inside jokes among canvassers about finding a “good house.”

This method helped canvassers quickly connect with what mattered most to residents, leading to more meaningful and tailored conversations. It turned complex technical issues into personal exchanges rooted in lived experience.

Lessons Learned

- **Health and safety were the strongest hooks.** Residents connected hydrogen risks to their lived experiences of BP accidents and industrial pollution.
- **Trust builds power.** Relationships forged at the door led residents to become donors, volunteers, and even national advocates—like one community member who traveled to Washington, D.C. to testify.
- **Accessibility matters.** Bilingual materials, stipends, and art-based engagement made complex topics understandable and inviting.
- **Youth leadership is catalytic.** The high schooler's involvement opened pathways into schools and cultural spaces that organizers hadn't imagined.
- **Messaging must evolve.** Shifting from “Stop the BP Pipeline” to broader frames like “No False Solutions” helped connect local struggles with national EJ narratives.
- **Unexpected allies matter.** Farmers and property owners miles away from Whiting became part of the coalition when they learned the CO₂ pipeline would run through their land.
- **Training and partnerships strengthen capacity.** Citizen Action Indiana's rural canvassing experience informed JTNWI's approach, giving new canvassers the confidence and tools they needed to succeed.
- **Leadership from the frontline matters.** Having a canvass director who lived in the refinery's shadow made the campaign deeply grounded and credible.
- **Shared resources empower volunteers.** The Canvass Resource Center provided consistent training, knowledge, and inspiration that strengthened the campaign's foundation.

Tips & Reflections for EJ Organizers

- **Start with listening, not persuasion.** Many residents had never heard of hydrogen hubs—meeting them with curiosity built credibility.
- **Center lived experience.** Technical explanations were most effective when connected to personal stories of refinery flaring, asthma, or property loss.

- **Design multiple entry points.** Not everyone signs a petition, but QR codes for community events, art projects, or food gatherings provided alternatives.
- **Support canvassers as leaders.** Providing stipends, mentorship, and opportunities to shape messaging kept canvassers invested beyond the campaign.
- **Don't underestimate "small" wins.** A single youth volunteer or a resident who attends just one meeting can open entirely new organizing pathways.
- **Frame locally, connect nationally.** "Do you trust BP?" proved more powerful than abstract climate policy. But linking to "No Dirty Hydrogen" tied local resistance into a broader movement.
- **Prepare for the long haul.** Even as federal hydrogen hub funding stalled, the relationships and skills built through the canvass continued to fuel organizing against new fossil fuel threats.
- **Partnerships amplify impact.** Collaborating with groups like Citizens Action Coalition brought expertise from other parts of the state and helped adapt lessons across urban and rural contexts.
- **Resource hubs make the difference.** Centralizing scripts, flyers, safety information, and educational tools built confidence among new canvassers and created a model others could replicate.



Source: Just Transition Northwest Indiana

Takeaways

This case study based on the experience and lessons from Just Transitions NW Indiana demonstrates that door-to-door organizing remains one of the most effective ways to break through apathy, build relationships, and create leadership pipelines in frontline communities. Despite federal rollbacks that have slowed the Mach2 hydrogen hub's development, the fight for environmental justice in Northwest Indiana continues. Just Transition Northwest Indiana remains the region's leading community watchdog—keeping residents informed, organizing new leaders, and ensuring that frontline voices shape what comes next. By meeting people where they are—in their homes, schools, and cultural spaces—organizers can transform awareness into action, even on highly technical issues like hydrogen and carbon capture.

This effort demonstrates that hydrogen hub resistance is more than a fight against a project—it's a vehicle for fostering community power and imagination in places often written off as sacrifice zones.