

# Community Outreach Guidelines



*A practical guide for community outreach efforts*

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## Key Considerations

**Your ultimate goal is to start a conversation with your community.**

The most important thing to consider when doing community outreach is to listen to the comments and concerns from businesses and individuals in your community. We like to say that doing well in this realm requires a high level of patience because you will come across a great variety of personalities and perspectives on your proposed project. The ability to communicate with different types of people in a professional and friendly demeanor is paramount to your success.

**Communication fosters familiarity which fosters trust.**

“The oldest and strongest emotion of mankind is fear, and the oldest and strongest kind of fear is fear of the unknown.” - HP Lovecraft

This bit of weird wisdom may have originated in fiction, but holds true even in the simplest, most mundane aspects of our life. Opponents of cannabis operations are often driven by unfounded fears from generations of anti-cannabis propaganda and media sensationalism. In most cases, these fears and false stereotypes can be dispelled by putting a genuine human face and identity in place of the mystery. When people get to know you, your real words and actions begin to replace what they have heard second hand. If you can build a genuine and open relationship founded on honesty and conscientious coexistence, you may even find you can turn a staunch opponent into a loyal ally.

## Action Plan

**Step 1: Establish Your Goals and Create a Framework**

When establishing your goals, consider how your community outreach efforts play into the bigger picture. Questions to ask yourself during this process may include:

- Is our goal to see if we are a right fit for this community?
- Do we need letters of support to give us a competitive edge over other applicants?
- What themes or aspects of our business do we need input on?
- Are there any special circumstances in your neighborhoods, such as a high degree of bilingualism?

## Step 2: Draft Community Questions

Before heading out into the community, we recommend drafting the questions you will be asking so you don't miss any key topics and everyone's time is used efficiently. Included below are some of our draft questions:

- Do you support safe access to cannabis?
- What are the top three improvements you would like to see in our neighborhood?
- What are some local charities or non profit organizations that you would like our business to support?
- Would you be interested in attending an open house to see our floorplans and a brief presentation on our proposed cannabis business?
- **If they are a supporter:** Are you comfortable signing a letter that states that we spoke to you and that you are in support of our project?
- Do you have questions about our proposal?

## Step 3: Draft Support Letters

We have found that it is very helpful to draft and bring hard copies of support letters with us when doing community outreach. This makes it a lot easier for a community member to express their support without having to take additional time out of their day to do so. Included below is a draft support letter:

*Dear (Insert Governing Body),*

*I am a (business owner/community member) near (insert address of proposed project). I have been informed by a representative of the business owner that they will be applying for a (insert permit name) permit at this location.*

*I would like to submit this letter in support of this new business. I believe that we will benefit from having this type of business that is genuinely dedicated to the improvement of our neighborhood and the well-being of our community members. Their commitment to educating the community on the benefits of cannabis for health and wellness and the new jobs they will create will greatly benefit our community*

*I also appreciate that the additional taxes from this cannabis business will contribute to the jurisdiction's general fund and will help improve our neighborhood. Please ensure that their taxes are allocated to the improvement of our community.*

*Thank you,*

*(Insert community member signature, their name written out and the date they sign the letter)*

## Step 4: Compile Data

Make sure that whoever conducts the community outreach collects as much of this data as possible. After you compile this data you will have key metrics for your levels of community support and opposition. At 421 Group, we use a Community Tracker database that includes the following data:

- Entity name
- Type of Entity (organization/individual)
- Date Contacted
- Community Member, First and Last Name
- Community Member Title
- Community Member Phone Number/Email/Address
- Summary of Notes (This will be a summary of the questions you draft beforehand.)
- Support Level: For, Against or Undecided
- Support Letter: To be written and if copy on file

## Step 5: Assess and Expand Your Strategy

After assessing the data from the community outreach efforts, you may chose to expand your strategy to include the following:

**Expand Your Canvas:** After canvassing your immediate community, you can consider expanding your canvass to include a larger area. This may include calling them or sending out an email. There are tools to gather community contacts through public and private databases, which is a great way to begin your outreach.

**Host a Community Listening Event:** This serves as a great opportunity to invite members of the public to ask questions, see drawings of your proposed project, and have one-on-one conversations with you where they can share their hopes and concerns regarding your project. If possible, it is best to hold this meeting at the location of the proposed project, though virtual events are more commonplace considering the ongoing pandemic.

**Put Your Money Where Your Heart Is:** Donating to the local organizations that you and the community care about is a great way to show your involvement in the well-being of your neighborhood. This shows your community that your promises are backed by actions and that you approach your community involvement with integrity.

## Tips and Tricks

**Dress Code:** We recommend dressing in business casual attire that is comfortable. Presenting yourself as a professional individual is a great way to make a great first impression.

**Kindness is Key:** Always communicate in a friendly, kind demeanor.

**Suggested Script:** Good (morning/afternoon), I'm representing a local business owner who is interested in reaching out to (other businesses in the area/the community) about a proposed business. Do you have a couple of minutes to chat?

**Data Recording:** We recommend that you record your data as soon as possible to avoid forgetting any information. Bring a clipboard for in-person meetings.

**Business Sensitivity:** To ensure that we do not interrupt a business owner's productivity, be sensitive to their level of customers. If the location is very busy, we recommend returning at another time to avoid interfering with their business operations.