ngpvan

Organizing Best Practices: Turf Cutting

Turf Cutter allows you to segment households in your canvass list geographically to make knocking doors easier for your canvassers and streamline your organizing efforts. This guide gives you a broad overview of the Turf Cutter tool — read more in our **Turf-cutting and canvassing best practices guide** and **Feature Overview: Organizing turf help doc**.

Creating a list

Creating a list of voters is the first step to running a canvass. From the Lists tab on the homepage, you can navigate to either creating a new list, returning to a previous list, or accessing a list that has been saved into a folder.

Read more about creating a list

Choosing how to cut turf

There are three ways to cut turf in VAN: manually, automatically, or through Distributed Contacts. Each method has its pros and cons — the table below outlines the differences and best scenarios for each option so you can make the best decision for your campaign or cause.

Pros

Manual cutting	Auto-cutting	Distributed Contacts
• Serves as the gold standard of turf-cutting • Allows for precise cuts to account for variable conditions (natural barriers, major roads, etc.) • Permits cutting different door numbers in each turf • Creates unique list numbers per turf • Makes it easy to cut isolated households in turfs (i.e., one or two households that are geographically far away from others) • Allows you to check turfs in and out based on list number • Lets volunteers know where they're going in advance and select their turf • Supports team canvassing • Offers ability to track progress through turfs	• Can cut turfs automatically based on the number of turfs or addresses per turf you want • Creates unique list numbers per turf • Allows you to check turfs in and out based on list number • Lets volunteers know where they're going in advance and select their turf • Supports team canvassing • Offers ability to track progress through turfs	• Saves time because manual cutting isn't required • Uses one list number only • Cuts turf with doors closest to canvassers (within a preset radius) • Makes it easy for autonomous volunteers or people who cannot attend a launch to canvass independently

Cons

Manual cutting	Auto-cutting	Distributed Contacts
• Requires the most time • Requires turf cutting training for staff and volunteers	• Often requires staff and volunteers to shift boundaries to account for major roads, geographic barriers, etc. • Can include households that are faraway in otherwise dense turfs	• Volunteers do not know the location of the turf before downloading the list • Requires staff to ensure there are enough doors for canvassers in the saved search • Staff cannot see where remaining doors are • Does not support team canvassing

Turf-cutting best practices

Whether you're cutting turf in rural areas, suburban neighborhoods, or urban communities, there are a few best practices you should follow when cutting turf for your volunteers. Following these tips will help you ensure a safe, efficient, and effective canvass.

1. **Avoid major road crossings when possible**.

   While road crossings are sometimes unavoidable, do your best to prevent them for your volunteers' safety. Neighborhood roads are usually easy and safe to cross while canvassing. Major roadways and highways are not, so they should be avoided as much as possible.

2. **Look out for natural barriers (waterways, fields, mountains, etc.)**.

   Sometimes, natural barriers will not allow your volunteers to access a certain part of their turf. Try to scope out the area ahead of time using the satellite view in the turf cutter to make sure your volunteers will be able to navigate their turf easily (without having to cross rivers or climb mountains).

3. **Keep your doors as close as possible**.

   Canvassers shouldn't have to walk more than a block or so between doors. If your turfs are too sparsely populated or spread out, it may be best to consider driving between doors.

4. **Cut enough doors for your volunteers**.

   How many doors should be in a turf packet can vary depending on your script, volunteers, turf density, and many other factors — however a rough guide is 30-50 doors per packet. You want to make sure your volunteers finish their packets, feel like their time is well spent, and have a good time on the doors. If you're canvassing in pairs, you can either give pairs two turfs or cut larger turfs of 60 to 80 doors as they will move through the doors faster than a single canvasser. As you get to learn your turfs and canvassers' preferences, you can better customize your turf-cutting in the future.

[Read more about cutting and managing MiniVAN turf](#)

[Watch a Turf Cutter tutorial](#)

Refreshing Turfs: when, why, and how

Refreshing your turf makes sure your canvassers have the most up-to-date lists and information while on the doors. Refreshing your turfs re-runs the underlying saved search that powers your turf packet — removing voters who no longer meet the search criteria (such as people who have already voted) and adding in new people who do (such as newly identified supporters). Refreshing your turf does not mean re- cutting your turf — the turf shapes in your map region are retained.

With the rise in early voting and voting by mail, it's crucial to be able to remove people as you receive up-to-date early voting information. By refreshing your turfs, you can focus your efforts on voters who haven't returned their ballots or voted early and provide your canvassers with new lists with the most updated information you have.
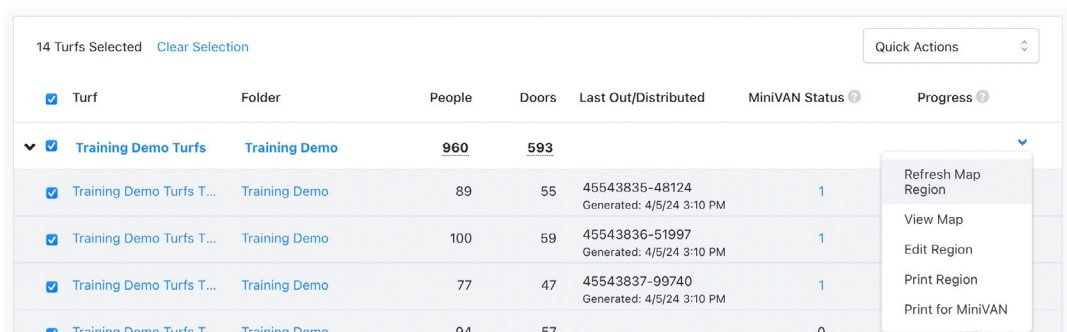
When should you refresh turf?

Turfs should be refreshed:

- After packets have been knocked.
- If you're revisiting an area again.
- When taking a second pass through the same lists.
- If there is an early voting data upload.
- If you have a big universe change.
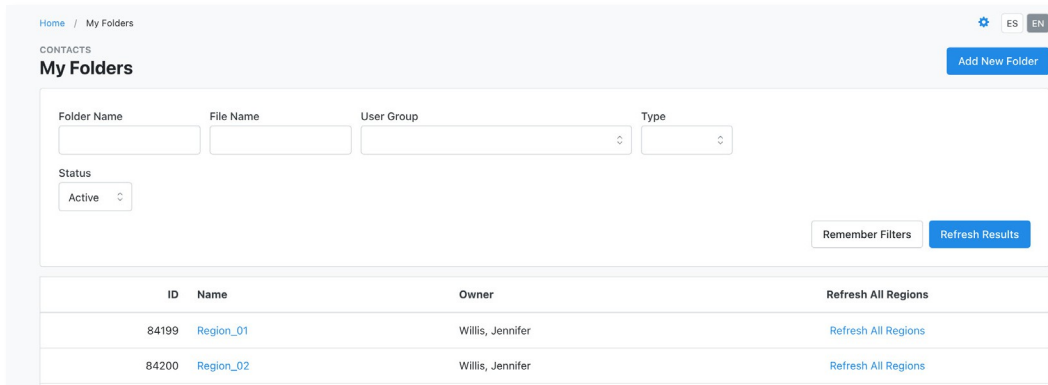- On the Monday of GOTV weekend.

How to refresh turf

Refreshing turf is easy — let's dive into the two ways you can refresh your turfs in **Turfs** and **Folders**.

From **My Turfs**, select the Map Region that needs to be refreshed. Then, navigate to the right side of the screen and click the down arrow to reveal a drop-down menu. Click **Refresh Map Region**. The underlying Saved Search will run and make adjustments to your turfs based on the parameters you've set, and the Last Out/Distributed, MiniVAN Status, and Progress columns will be cleared out. You'll need to regenerate list numbers or reprint your turf to distribute to volunteers.

From **Folders** or **Turf Manager**, select the map regions you want to refresh and click **Refresh**. The refreshed Map Regions will then be placed in the **MiniVAN Queue** (which you can access from the Main Menu) that will let you know when the refreshing is complete. Note that not all users may be able to bulk refresh turf, reach out to your administrator if you do not have access.

After you refresh your turf select **View Map** to see your turfs. Some turfs may need to be adjusted to account for voters who were added or removed based on re-running the saved search.

Read more about turf-managing FAQ

To learn more about turf-cutting, download our **Turf-cutting and canvassing best practices guide**