

# Ballot Access Guide





# Table of Contents

INTRO .....	3
LIFECYCLE OF A PETITION .....	4
RULES FOR SIGNATURE GATHERING .....	6
TIPS FOR SIGNATURE GATHERING .....	8
DELIVERING YOUR PITCH .....	9
ADDITIONAL SIGNATURE GATHERING TIPS .....	11
SIGNATURE GATHERING FAQs .....	12

# Intro

American Promise is spearheading a 50-state Citizen Uprising for one goal: to pass the 28th Amendment to get big money out of politics. This is how we re-establish common sense rules to regain balance in our democracy and guarantee free and fair elections. American Promise will provide the support, tools, and resources to every citizen who wants to act locally as part of this national wave of action.

In 27 states there is a mechanism of direct democracy: the Citizen Initiative. Most commonly known as “petitions,” citizen initiatives require a minimum number of signatures to force a public vote on an issue. This is how we the people take our ideas straight to the ballot and determine the principles we stand for.

Taking an idea all the way to the ballot is a considerable challenge, and the rules and laws governing initiative petitions vary from state to state. Through the national Citizen Uprising, American Promise is committed to supporting citizen leaders as they set out to qualify initiatives in their states.

This ballot access guide provides information about the petition process, the rules you need to know to get started, and important tips that can help your team take advantage of this incredible opportunity.

For more information about petitions in your state, contact American Promise at [uprising@americanpromise.net](mailto:uprising@americanpromise.net).

## HERE'S A LIST OF 27 STATES THAT UTILIZE THE INITIATIVE PROCESS

Alaska, Arizona, Arkansas, California, Colorado, District of Columbia, Florida, Idaho, Illinois, Maine, Massachusetts, Michigan, Mississippi, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, New Mexico, North Dakota, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, South Dakota, Utah, Washington, Wyoming

# Lifecycle of a petition



Each state has unique laws for its initiative process, but many steps are similar. Before you start collecting signatures, it's helpful to have a solid understanding of the landmarks along the way.

## STEP 1:

### DRAFT A LAW

A proposed law - sometimes known as a ballot question - is carefully written to meet all state and federal regulations.

## STEP 2:

### SUBMIT PROPOSED LAW TO THE STATE

Once a proposed law has been drafted, a petition application goes to the State for review. The review process helps the State check the proposed law to ensure it is written in the proper form and does not conflict with any state or federal regulations. The State's function is not to judge the merit of a proposed law, but to affirm that it meets all the requirements to become a law.

## STEP 3:

## COLLECT SIGNATURES

After a petition application is approved, signature collection can begin. To qualify the petition for the ballot, supporters will need to collect the minimum number of signatures required by the State. Most minimum signature requirements are based on a percentage of the votes cast for the Office of President or the Office of Governor in the most recent election.

**Example: a state may require 8% of the votes cast for the Office of Governor as the threshold for signature collection. If 400,000 votes were cast in the last gubernatorial race, then the State would require 32,000 signatures of registered voters in that state for the petition to pass to the ballot. The signature gathering periods range from 9 weeks to 2 years.**

**STEP 4:  
VERIFY AND ORGANIZE SIGNATURES**

In order to count toward qualification, petitions must be signed by registered voters in your state. An important step to ensure a petition qualifies to the ballot is to verify collected signatures against the State's voter database to make sure there are enough to meet the minimum count. Once you are confident you have met your goal, signatures should be counted and organized according to state requirements to prepare them for submission. The verification and organization process can take time, so it is very important to give your signatures to your petition organizer on a timely basis.

**STEP 5:  
SUBMIT SIGNATURES TO THE STATE**

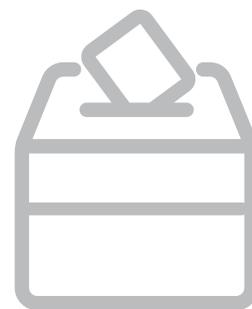
Every state has a submission process and deadline for the law to appear on the November ballot. The State is then responsible for counting and verifying all signatures. If the minimum number of signatures is met, the law qualifies for the ballot and State voters will have the opportunity to vote on the proposed law in November!

**STEP 6:  
BUILD A CAMPAIGN**

Once the law is certified for the ballot, the number one priority is to educate voters about why they should vote YES on election day. The public has varying degrees of knowledge about the Citizens United v. FEC decision and ratification process of the 28th Amendment. Some will not be aware of Citizens United while others may be very well informed on the subject. This process may involve door-to-door canvassing, writing letters to the editor, creating and placing ads, and participating on social media, all of which rely on the collective skills and creativity of citizen leaders.

**STEP 7: VOTE**

Vote – November 6th, 2018 or November 3rd 2020. On one of these days, citizens can make history!!!



# Rules for Signature Gathering



Though many of the regulations regarding petitions vary from state to state, there are some common laws and requirements.

## WHO CAN COLLECT SIGNATURES?

Any voter (age 18 and older), registered in a state, can collect signatures in that state.

## WHO CAN SIGN THE PETITION?

Any registered voter in the state can sign.

## WHAT MAKES A SIGNATURE VALID?

The registered voter must complete ALL boxes on the petition:

- Printed name – this should be the voter’s name as used on their voter registration card.
- Printed name – as it appears on the voter registration card.
- Signature
- Address where the voter is registered.
- Some petitions will require the county or congressional district where the voter lives.
- Date of signing, birthdate, and Voter ID number
- Each voter may only sign the petition ONCE.

## RULES FOR THE SIGNATURE GATHERER.

- The circulator must witness every signature collected. In other words, you cannot ask a friend or relative to collect signatures on your behalf, and you cannot leave petitions on an unattended table.
- Each voter must sign and fill in his/her own information. It must be in the signer's own hand! If family members or roommates all sign the petition, each person **MUST** complete an individual entry.
- You must accurately represent the petition to the signer to the best of your ability. In other words, you must be honest and forthright about the nature of the petition and the consequence of the proposed law.
- You may not offer any compensation for a signature. This means you cannot give away money, candy, or even hugs in exchange for a signature. As a general rule, if you set up a table to collect signatures, stock the table with petition sheets, pens, and informational campaign materials only.
- Everyone has the right to read the full text of the petition, but do not give away copies of the petition sheet to anyone. Should someone want to read the proposed law, the full text is available online at the state's Election Department website.
- You must sign the affidavit on every petition sheet you use. The affidavit usually attests that the circulator has witnessed every signature and to the best of his/her knowledge each is the genuine signature of a registered voter.

# Tips for Signature Gathering



There are three types of signature collection; public canvassing, door-to-door canvassing, and event canvassing:

**PUBLIC CANVASSING** Public canvassing is the act of utilizing public space such as libraries or post offices to collect signatures or donations from the public. This style of signature gathering can be effective because, in the right location, you may be able to speak with more people about the petition. Any public property can be a great place to canvass. As you choose the location, ask yourself: is this property a public location? Is there substantial pedestrian traffic? Is there a good place to set up shop with either clipboards or a small table? Are there distractions that will deter people from stopping to speak with you? A short list of places that are often popular with canvassers are:

**Libraries**

**Post Offices**

**College Campuses**

**Sporting Events**

**Farmers Markets**

**Grocery Stores**

**Subway Stations**

**Pedestrian Malls**

**Coffee Shops**

**DOOR-TO-DOOR CANVASSING** Door-to-door canvassing is the act of speaking to people at home, educating them about the movement, and asking them to sign your petition. Though you may collect fewer signatures per shift, some people are more receptive to a conversation in their own home.

**EVENT CANVASSING** Event Canvassing is the act of working with event organizers to gain admittance to their event. This could mean renting a table at a flea market or county fair, or asking the organizers of events at churches or clubs if you can spend 5 minutes speaking with their audience about your petition.

# Delivering Your Pitch



You will have 10-30 seconds to capture the attention of a signer, so whichever type of canvassing you choose, it is important to prepare your pitch. In the introduction, you must convey what you are doing, what it means, and why it is important. The best signature pitches start with 1) one or two broad issue sentences, 2) a personal reason you are doing this work, and 3) clarity about what their signature will accomplish. Here are some examples of how to interact with passers by:

## Goal: Get their attention and hint at the coming conversation

Are you registered to vote?

OR

Do you have a second to help me get money out of politics?

OR

Have you heard about the damage done by Citizens United?

“Are you registered to vote,” This is an especially powerful starting sentence. It tells them you are going to talk politics and hopefully gets their first response back to be a yes.

## Goal: Introduce and clarify the idea

I’m a volunteer with American Promise and we are collecting signatures to tell our elected officials we want to overturn Citizens United and get big money out of politics. We are well on our way with over 80% support across all parties. Your signature helps us get one step closer to getting on the ballot so we can all vote on this important issue next election.

OR

I’m collecting signatures to help restore a government powered by people and not money. We are trying to get this issue on the ballot in our state for the next election so we can get our elected officials working for us again.” 18 other states have already done this and now it’s our turn.

## Goal: Ask for their signature

80% of American citizens of all political viewpoints agree on this.  
Can I count on your signature here today?

OR

Please sign right here to add your name to the thousands who have already asked to be heard next November.”

**Handing them the petition and a pen during this sentence is a quiet and effective way to get the signature.**

## Goal: Finalize their signature

At this point they may have agreed to sign or asked for a little more information.

This isn't a “yes” or “no” vote. Signing this petition just helps us get the issue on the ballot so we can have this important conversation during the next election.”

OR

What other questions can I answer to encourage you to support this work?”

OR

Would you like to read a little more about this important issue?

**Showing them more information with a handout or even highlighted parts of the petition will often get people on the fence to sign.**

## Goal: Thank the signer and encourage him/her to learn more

Thank you so much. If you want to learn more about this effort visit us online at [www.americanpromise.net](http://www.americanpromise.net).

OR

I'd love to have your help during our upcoming campaign.  
May I follow up with you with more information to share with your friends and family?

It may feel strange, but practicing this pitch with fellow volunteers is an important part of this process. You will eventually get comfortable using your own approach and you will see a difference in how potential signers respond to your questions!

# Additional Signature Gathering Tips



- Work in pairs as often as possible. It's always more fun, there is confidence in numbers, and it is easier to handle multiple conversations at once.
- American Promise can help you get signage and information cards but keep in mind that homemade signs are often more powerful in delivering the message that you are leading the way on this campaign.
- Remind people that you are volunteering your time with this campaign. Everyone has passions and people are much more likely to listen to you when they understand you are working on yours.
- Never be afraid to admit that you don't know the answer to a question. Often it's a great excuse to pull up more information on a mobile phone and keep the person engaged in a conversation. Most people appreciate the extra effort.
- Start by collecting signatures from friends and family and practice your pitch while you do it. This has an added benefit as well – people are more likely to sign a petition when they see existing signatures already there!
- You are going to run into people who aren't registered voters. Be prepared with some free voter registration cards from the DMV, post office or library and hand them out to folks who aren't registered to vote.

# Signature Gathering FAQs



## Why are we collecting more signatures than the State requires?

The number of signatures required by the State to qualify for the ballot is actually the number of valid signatures of registered voters. We suggest collecting about 30% more signatures than required to be sure there are enough valid signatures to qualify.

## Why can't I deliver my signatures to the State after I've collected them?

There are two very important reasons why you need to submit your signatures to American Promise and not the State:

- Before we submit any signatures to the State, we check every signature against the State voter database, cross out any duplicate signatures, and make sure our overall validity percentage is high enough to qualify for the ballot;
- Most states have strict rules about how petitions are submitted. Sometimes they need to be boxed, labeled, or accompanied by various affidavits and documents, and many states have the rule that all petition signatures must be submitted at one time.

## Why can't I print my own petition sheets?

Though a few states have a standard petition form that can be found online, most states have strict requirements for the composition of the petition form, and the signatures can be deemed invalid if the form itself deviates from the requirements. Therefore, it is best to use professional printers to ensure our margins, fonts and colors meet all State requirements.

## Can I use the voter information from the petitions to create a mailing list?

No. It is against the law to use any information provided by the voters for anything other than qualifying the petition to the ballot.

## What are my rights as a signature gatherer?

The most important thing to remember is that petition circulation is a Constitutionally protected form of free speech. You have the legal right to collect signatures on any public property.

Examples include places such as libraries, state funded college campuses, public sidewalks, and federal buildings. There are also many types of private property where you can canvass or collect signatures with permission. Examples include post offices, shopping centers, and often public transportation stations.

The designation between public and private property isn't always a clear indication of whether you can canvas at a location. For instance, some supermarkets will allow circulators to collect signatures in a designated location in front of the store, while many shopping malls and public transportation stations will issue a special permit for circulators.

Door-to-Door canvassing is also protected under freedom of speech, and the Supreme Court has roundly upheld the unabridged right of citizens to do so. Your municipality may not require you to apply for any permit or license for door-to-door campaigns, though there are often local laws limiting how early or late in the day canvassers are permitted to work



OTHER TITLES AVAILABLE IN OUR TOOLKIT:

**Building Your Campaign**

**How to Build Strong Team**

**What You Can Do Today**

**Spread the Word**

**Citizen Uprising in Your State**



AMERICAN PROMISE

[www.americanpromise.net](http://www.americanpromise.net)

