



How To Circulate Initiative and Referendum Petitions: Oregon

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INITIATIVES AND REFERENDA

Citizens in Oregon can propose and pass laws directly through what is called the “initiative process”. They also can effectively veto laws passed by the legislature and governor through what is called the “referenda process”. In both cases, questions are put to voters in an election provided enough support for them is demonstrated through signed petitions circulated among the electorate. Initiative and referenda may impact a small electoral district, a city, a county, or the entire state. We are envied by millions of activists.

This document gives you what you need to be an effective signature gatherer. Initiatives and Referenda represent real power for grass roots volunteers because they make us “citizen legislators” with the collective ability to trump the legislature, the governor, and even rewrite the Oregon constitution.

1 HOW DO I VOLUNTEER?

Unlike other activities, volunteering to gather signatures involves more than just saying “I volunteer”. Petition drives can be intense. A large number of signatures often need to be gathered very quickly, particularly as deadlines approach. **Above all, signatures must be gathered correctly to prevent them from being disqualified.** All of this requires a willingness to be trained and a bit of precision from you. Also, local coordinators responsible for signature drives in your area will need flexibility in how you are deployed to ensure that your time is not wasted.

2 TECHNICAL REQUIREMENTS

Oregon law has a variety of requirements that must be met when you are gathering signatures. If they are not met, many or all of the signatures you gather can be disqualified. Make sure your valuable time is not wasted by meeting all of these requirements:

1. Don't Share Sheets. Every petition sheet that can be signed by more than one person must be circulated and certified by one – and only one – individual. When circulating, NEVER allow your petition sheets out of your possession. Treat signature sheets as you would treat a large bag of money.

2. Witnessing and Other Issues. As a circulator, you must personally witness EACH signature being placed on your sheet. Each signor must be a

registered voter in the district of the petition (For a county petition, for example, signors must be registered to vote in that county. For a statewide petition, signors may be registered to vote anywhere in Oregon). No signor may knowingly sign the same petition more than once. You may not ask someone to sign if you know they are not qualified to do so. Each person must sign the petition themselves AND fill out the related information on the signature line such as their address, the current date, and their printed name. You may not correct or modify any of the information a signor places on a signature. If they make a mistake, set the sheet aside with a note and contact your captain or coordinator.

3. Dealing with Known Bad Signatures. If you discover an invalid signature on your petition sheet (For example if someone signs who is registered to vote in another state or if someone signs the sheet “Mickey Mouse”), draw a SINGLE LINE through the entry. This entry will not be counted by election officials and will not count against the effort. **DO NOT DO THIS UNLESS YOU ARE ABSOLUTELY SURE THE SIGNATURE IS INVALID.** If you are not sure, MARK THE SHEET WITH A POST-IT NOTE, give it to your coordinator, and start another sheet.

4. Certification, Errors and Turn-In. When you are finished gathering signatures on a petition sheet, you must certify that you witnessed each and every signature placed on the sheet. You do this by signing and dating the “Circulator Certification” line shown at the bottom of the sheet. **Do not vary your signature – certify each sheet by signing it in the same way you signed your voter registration form.** DO NOT sign the certification line before you are finished circulating the sheet - if you do, all signatures collected after you sign will be disqualified and any attempt to correct the date risks disqualification of the entire sheet.

If you find yourself in this position, make ANY errors, or don't know how to proceed, DO NOT CORRECT YOUR SHEET. STOP AND ASK FOR HELP. GET INSTRUCTIONS. Remember, you are making an investment in time when you collect signatures – make sure your effort is not wasted. If you decide you are done circulating a particular signature sheet, even if there are empty signature lines remaining, certify the sheet and give it to your captain or coordinator. Finally, do not make false statements or exaggerations to anyone who may sign the signature sheet. If a “spy” catches you doing this and there sometimes ARE spies,

you may have to deal with a nasty complaint and serious legal issues. Spies are usually volunteers associated with those opposing your efforts. They will sometimes try to cause you to make errors in hopes of lodging complaints and getting your signatures disqualified. On rare occasions, the Oregon Secretary of State has commissioned detectives to find and report errors in training and signature collection.

3 HOW TO GET SIGNATURES

When your coordinator gives you a signature gathering assignment, here is what you do to actually get signatures and have a great experience as well.

1. Equip Yourself. You will need a piece of cardboard or foam board slightly larger than the signature sheets as these work better than clipboards. You will also need some signature sheets and a couple of rubber bands to hold your sheets down from the wind. A hat can protect you from the sun. Wear comfortable shoes and weather appropriate clothing. Look neat and well groomed. Have extra pens on hand with black or blue ink - **do not use pencil.** If you are collecting signatures door-to-door, your coordinator must provide you with a “walking list” (a list of homes and the people who live there listed in order of street number) and possibly a map. **You must always have a copy of the initiative or referenda text on hand to be examined by any prospective signor upon request.** Often, but not always, this text is on the back of signature sheets. It can be helpful to bring someone with you to help carry things, keep you company, and find signature gathering opportunities.

2. Remember, You Are a Volunteer. Signature sheets will say that you are a volunteer, so you cannot accept compensation for gathering signatures on these sheets. **Do not attempt to buy, sell, or trade signature sheets.** If you are an employer, you may not ask employees to circulate signature sheets while on the job unless they are registered with the state as paid signature gatherers and are using different petition sheets. Employees may distribute blank petition signature sheets on the job for other people to circulate.

3. Remember Your Rights. You have the right to gather signatures on public property open to public traffic and private property with the permission of the owner. You do not have the right to obstruct or interfere with the public use of the property. When questions related to these issues arise while you are collecting signatures, open yourself to compromises that preserve your ability to collect signatures efficiently within your time frame. **If you cannot resolve these issues agreeably, call your coordinator and ask for help.** Remember, this is not the venue to spend hours debating your rights with public officials - let your coordinators do that. This is a time to focus on collecting valid signatures on your sheets quickly.

4. Make the “Ask”. Each person who gathers signatures on petitions will have their own style of approaching potential signors. Be yourself, but be assertive - people will not sign your petition unless you ask them to. **Do not think of yourself as intruding on peoples’ lives - know that you are providing a service. After all, civic involvement is a part of everyone’s life. You are offering people a chance to exercise their power without going out of their way.**

Begin by making sure your prospect is registered to vote in the district effected by the petition (*for statewide measures, voters may be registered anywhere in Oregon*). If you are not gathering signatures door-to-door, a good opening line is simply, “Are you registered to vote?” If the answer is “NO”, you won’t waste any time. If the answer is “YES,” you have opened a dialogue. Tell your prospect you are a volunteer gathering signatures for a petition that would _____. Because you are a volunteer, some people will be more open than they would be with a paid signature gatherer.

Try to engage your prospect in a BRIEF discussion about what your petition would do. You don’t want to spend too much time on any single signature prospect. Be sure that everything you say is accurate. Do not exaggerate or embellish anything. Do not go into much detail; this is where errors can be made in explaining issue. **Finally, ask them to sign the petition if they have not already signed it elsewhere.** When they sign the petition, make sure you witness them doing it. **GOOD JOB!** Now go get another one. When you are finished working with each signature sheet or if it is filled with signatures, be sure to certify the sheet as described above. When you have done this, turn in all of your completed petition sheets to your coordinator.