



Oregon Initiative Petitions and Referendums

Oregon allows direct initiatives, where voters can place proposed measures on the ballot if sufficient valid signatures are collected. This is part of Oregon's broader "Oregon System" of direct democracy, which includes initiative petitions, referendums (to challenge laws passed by the legislature) and recalls. The process is governed primarily by Oregon Constitution Article IV, Section 1, and Oregon Revised Statutes Chapter 250.

In Oregon, an initiative petition is the formal document and process used by citizens to propose new laws (statutes) or amendments to the Oregon Constitution through direct democracy, bypassing the state legislature initially.

The Initiative Process

It allows registered voters to propose laws or constitutional amendments via a petition. The process is administered by the Oregon Secretary of State's Elections Division.

How It Works

1. **Prospective Petition:** Chief petitioners (up to three individuals responsible for sponsoring the measure) file a prospective petition with the Secretary of State, including the proposed text, disclosure of paid circulators (if any), and other required forms.
2. **Ballot Title Process:** A ballot title is drafted (impartial summary of the measure), which can be challenged or modified.
3. **Signature Gathering:** Once approved for circulation, petitioners collect signatures from registered Oregon voters. The number required is a percentage of votes cast in the last gubernatorial election (typically 6% for statutory initiatives and 8% for constitutional amendments, though exact numbers vary by election cycle).
4. **Verification and Qualification:** Signatures are submitted (no later than four months before the general election) and verified. If sufficient valid signatures are obtained, the measure is placed on the ballot for voters to approve or reject.
5. **Placement on Ballot:** Qualified initiatives appear on the November general election ballot in even-numbered years.

The Referendum Process

It allows the adoption or rejection of a bill/Act passed by the legislature (i.e., to potentially repeal or block it).

- **Scope:** Applies only to non-emergency Acts (laws without an emergency clause declaring them necessary for immediate preservation of public peace, health, safety, or state government support). Emergency measures are exempt from referendum.



- Types:
 - People's referendum (citizen-initiated): Voters collect signatures to place the Act on the ballot.
 - Legislative referral (also called referral): The legislature itself refers a measure (new law, constitutional amendment, or other proposal) directly to voters for approval/rejection. This is distinct from the citizen referendum but uses the same ballot mechanism.
- Process Overview (for citizen-initiated referendum):
 1. A bill becomes law (signed by the governor or deadline passes without veto).
 2. Chief petitioners (up to three sponsors) file a prospective petition with the Oregon Secretary of State's Elections Division after the Act takes effect (or becomes law).
 3. A ballot title/summary is prepared (impartial description), which can be challenged.
 4. Petitioners gather signatures from registered Oregon voters. The number required is typically 4% of the total votes cast for governor in the most recent gubernatorial election (exact number varies by cycle; historically lower than for initiatives).
 5. Signatures must be filed within a strict deadline—generally within 90 days after the end of the legislative session (or after the Act becomes effective).
 6. If sufficient valid signatures are verified, the measure appears on the next general election ballot (November of even-numbered years).
 7. Voters decide: If approved (majority yes), the Act stands; if rejected, it is repealed (or never takes effect if suspended during the process).

Oregon distinguishes this from an initiative (which proposes new laws or amendments proactively) and from recalls (targeting officials). Referendums are reactive to legislative actions.

For the most up-to-date details—such as current signature thresholds, exact deadlines, required forms (e.g., SEL 310 Prospective Petition), and manuals—consult the official Oregon Secretary of State Elections Division website at sos.oregon.gov/elections (sections on initiatives, referendums, and referrals). The process is governed by Oregon Constitution Article IV, Section 1, and Oregon Revised Statutes Chapter 250.