

2.C Petitioning Timeline and Number of Signatures Needed

A) Timeline for Submitting Petitions and Setting Your Start Date

Petition drives must be completed in 60 days or less. If you start on a Wednesday or Thursday, you'll have less than 60 days, because the Clerk's office is only open five days a week. The following information is based on statute 9.20 and 8.37. Here's a summary:

60 days for petitioning (statute 9.20)

15 days for clerk examination

10 days to correct insufficiencies, and clerk certifies if corrections result in adequate signatures

30 days for council/board passage after the date the clerk certifies the signatures

70 days for ballot preparation (statute 8.37)

185 days = 60 days collecting signature, plus 125 days before the next Spring or Fall election.

The bottom line is that most campaigns should start collecting signatures at least six months before the targeted election day.

Consider collecting signatures *during* either the Spring (April) or Fall (November) elections. This doesn't require that you start on that election day. But if election day in your 60 day petitioning window it might be worth catching as many people outside the polls on that day. Where this has been done, groups have collected on average about 50%, with a max of over 100%, of their required signatures on the election day. For more on this read Collecting Signatures on Election Day.

Note: If you start your drive late and you can't meet the timeline for the upcoming election, it's OK. The referendum gets delayed until the following Spring or Fall ballot. For example: If you start signature collection to target the April election and you determine that you will not have enough signatures for that election day, continue to collect signatures. If you make the 60 day window, the municipality has to put it on the ballot on the following election. That would be the next November, if there is a November election. If not, then it would be on the ballot the next April.

We have a spreadsheet in which you can run timing scenarios if you would like. Find "2.D-Petition Timing Spreadsheet.xls" in this handbook.

B) How many Signatures do You Need to Force a Referendum on the Ballot?

If you get enough signatures on petition forms calling for a referendum, your city or village must put the referendum on the ballot. So how many signatures do you need?

Wisconsin Statute (9.20) that sets the rules. This statute says that if you get the amount of signatures equal to at least 15% of the number of persons in the municipality who voted in the most recent, regular, governor's race, the city or village must put the resolution language on the petition on the next ballot based on the Timeline discussed in A) above. And if the referendum passes with more than 50% voting "YES," they must pass the resolution you submit – without changing the language. They can just pass directly the resolution you submit – without changing the language. We prefer they put a referendum on the ballot – as discussed elsewhere.

Also, because there is always a chance that the clerk will not accept some of your signatures, we suggest you initially target 20% - so you have a buffer. If while you are collecting signatures, you don't see many where the information is not clear, and you are confident in enough signatures after you pass the 15% mark, you can consider lowering your goal to 17-18%.

You can find the number 15% and 20% figures for your city or village in the pdf document we have created as “2.E Governor Vote Totals 2018.pdf” in this handbook. Use ctrl-F to find your community in this list.

We have also created a spreadsheet in which you can track and count the signatures you have collected. You might want to do this if it would help you track good signatures or if you want to keep a copy of the signatures for your pre-ballot efforts - such as lit drop to remind them to vote. Not all communities use this spreadsheet.

One caution we note is where a city crosses county lines. If your city or village is in two counties, make sure you capture all of the wards for your city for both counties. An example of this is New London – it is partially in both Waupaca and Outagamie counties. Either Jim Crist or George Penn can help you calculate the number of signatures for your community if you wish.

We also recommend that when you meet your municipal clerk to start to build a relationship, you ask her/him to give you the number of signatures s/he believes you need. When s/he gives you a number, we suggest you do not argue with him/her if their number is different – unless hers/his is significantly higher. We suggest that if the clerk’s number is lower than yours, go by your number. If the clerk’s number is higher than yours, we suggest you go with her/his number.

C) What if you get to the 60-day point and you don’t have enough signatures?

This has happened in two communities in WI. You have two options:

- 1) You might consider continuing to collect signatures if you are close AND you did not collect a lot of signature on the first few days of signature collection. If you continue to collect, the signatures you collected on the first and subsequent days will become disqualified for each day you continue. You will have to do the math to determine if this will help.
- 2) In both communities where we did not meet the 15% threshold, the United to Amend groups brought the signatures they had to the council and asked them to put it on the ballot anyway. While the councils could have said no, both put it on the ballot – without changing the language. And when it passed with more than 50% in both communities, the cities passed the resolution.

This is one of many reasons that we suggest to each local UTA group to build relationships with the clerk *and* board members up front – with respect and kindness. The board or council is made up of citizens like you – and most of them can see that our democracy is threatened by the big money in politics. Our suggestion is less to sell your municipal representatives, and more to educate them with respect – so you don’t lose them.