

HOW TO GET REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS ON THE BALLOT —AND PASS IT

The majority of voters support reproductive freedom, including access to abortion, miscarriage care, IVF, and birth control. Americans across party lines don't want politicians and the government involved in personal decisions about starting or growing their families.

And we mean that – across party lines, Americans of all political persuasions actually agree on this issue. Unlike what the media would have you believe, it isn't controversial at all. From Kansas to Vermont, from Michigan to Montana, every single time reproductive rights are on the ballot, reproductive rights win.

In Michigan in 2022 and Ohio in 2023, Red Wine & Blue worked with other groups to help pass the ballot initiatives that enshrined reproductive rights in those state constitutions. Here are our best tips for getting a ballot initiative on your ballot and helping women mobilize their family, friends, and neighbors to pass it!

SIGNATURE GATHERING PHASE:

Key Takeaways

- Create a welcoming volunteer experience
- Use plain language
- Organization is key
- Be positive and motivating



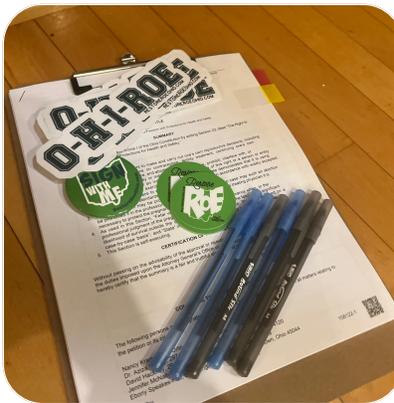
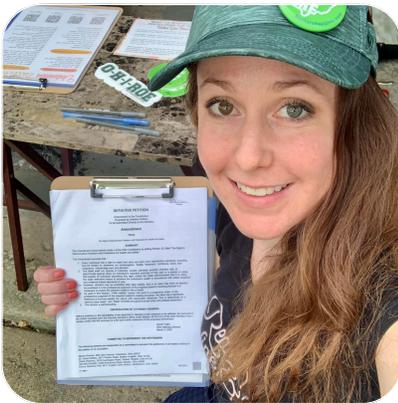
Each state has its own rules about how to get an initiative on the ballot, but they all involve gathering petition signatures. If done correctly, signature gathering can build a strong volunteer base not only for getting your ballot initiative passed, but also for building your network, group, or organization for the longer-term.

- Your number one goal is to create a welcoming volunteer experience. For many people – especially those getting involved for the first time – gathering signatures is out of their comfort zone.
 - Use plain language that makes your volunteers feel confident and seem approachable. For example: “Do you want to sign a petition to keep politicians out of our personal decisions?” “Protect access to abortion, IVF, and birth control.”
 - Avoid political-sounding jargon that doesn’t sound like something your friend would say. For example: “The *Dobbs* decision,” “pro-choice/pro-life.”
 - Provide useful training that includes how to ask people to sign the petition.
 - At Red Wine & Blue, we really focused on making our trainings fun, conversational, and welcoming for people who may not have gotten involved before.
 - We also offered trainings at different times of the day to fit people’s schedules and hosted Train in 10, a condensed 10-minute training video. People could get trained at any time that was convenient for them!



- When it comes to making an effective ask, being direct is key. This is the BEST way we found to get to “yes” on signature collection: “Will you help get women’s healthcare on the ballot in November?”
- Make the trainings positive and motivating – remind people that we can all make a difference together. End on an upbeat note!

- Organization and preparation are key!
 - If possible, start planning and be in your top target areas early. Tip: Your target areas are where you have volunteers and where signatures are most needed.
 - Try to work in coalition with groups whenever possible. Going to where people already are to collect signatures (farmers' markets, concerts, festivals, sports games, etc) is a much more efficient use of time than going door-to-door!
 - Be prepared with petitions on clipboards, bags with literature, and good walking shoes.
 - If you're gathering signatures for multiple petitions, have them all ready.
 - Build trust on the leading issue (reproductive rights) and then introduce the other petitions.



- Go over the petition box-by-box with people. Know what mistakes people usually make while filling out petitions so you can make sure folks get it right. This will depend on your state's laws, but in general look out for:
 - Abbreviations for street and city names
 - Using a nickname instead of their legal name
 - Not using black or blue ink
 - Not signing where it says sign and printing legibly where it says print
- When planning an event, put all volunteers on a text thread. Follow up after the event with a thank you and the number of signatures collected for motivation. Post a selfie of the group on social media with the number of signatures collected to motivate others!



- Mailing petitions to volunteers can help expand your reach. At Red Wine & Blue, we were hearing from people who weren't near our events, but still wanted to sign! Mailing petitions was a cost-effective way to help people turn in signatures and made people in rural areas who are often overlooked feel supported.
- Create some swag – people love stickers!
 - T-shirts can also help volunteers feel more official and confident.



- Media tends to be more interested after all signatures are collected – make sure to claim credit for your work.
 - Social media is a great tool to tell your story before the press begins to be interested (and also after!).
 - Op-eds and Letters to the Editor are also great ways to get the message out.
 - Coordinate with the coalition to make sure that you are all aligned on the message, but emphasize your group's unique perspective.
 - Have a diverse group of “messengers” aka people who would be willing to speak to the press.



IN THE PRESS



Backers of reproductive rights amendment to Ohio's constitution start gathering signatures



MI group working to put abortion rights on November ballot



The Lessons of Ohio's Abortion-Rights Victory



Michigan women fight to preserve abortion, 1 chat at a time



- Look at local news to see if any reporters have covered ballot initiatives or reproductive freedom before – those are the first people to reach out to.
- When press coverage starts, keep track of the reporters – they may be interested in speaking to your group too!
- If a reporter reaches out to you, check their previous articles and social media before speaking to them.
- Trust your gut if you're approached by a reporter at an event! Opposition groups will sometimes send people to events pretending to be reporters and then deceptively edit the videos.
- Remember: anything you say to a reporter is “on the record” (aka can be used in an article).
 - If you don't want something included, you have to ask whether it can be “off the record” and wait for the reporter to agree before you speak.
 - However, we do not recommend talking to reporters “off the record.” It is safest to treat every word as though it's public.
- Create a centralized website for all signing events within the state if possible. This can be hard to do with multiple groups working together as a coalition but it creates an easier process for the volunteers.
 - Provide useful talking points in plain language that people who aren't usually politically involved would use.
 - Include information on the website about the importance of directly asking people to sign the petition.

OK, so you've done the signature collection and gotten your initiative on the ballot – Congratulations!! Take a nap, celebrate your win, and get ready to get to work getting it passed.



GET OUT THE VOTE (GOTV) PHASE:

Key Takeaways

- Use every opportunity to build community
- Know the disinformation and drown it out with the truth
- Know the common questions and provide timely info
- Lean into plain language

After your initiative is on the ballot, the next step is to pass it! It's so important to listen to what's happening on the ground. Knowing the common questions popping up among voters, and the disinformation they are likely to have heard, will help prepare your volunteers to talk to family, friends, and neighbors.

- Rapid response is crucial, especially to combat disinformation.
 - Responding quickly to confusion or attacks will encourage people to turn to you for timely and accurate information. Make sure you're communicating directly to your volunteers the accurate information they need to combat the disinformation (and be sure not to spread it).
 - Seizing those moments is also important for community building. Communicate with your volunteers whenever your ballot initiative is in the news or the local conversation.
 - This can be done by posting on social media and communicating directly with volunteers to make sure they're prepared when speaking to people.
 - Having answers ready to go for any disinformation voters are facing really helped empower our volunteers to have conversations.
- Create content (social graphics, handouts) with plain language to proactively answer questions and drown out any disinformation. DO NOT repeat the lies, and make sure that your good accurate information is out there even louder than the bad stuff!
- Here's an example of how Red Wine & Blue addressed disinformation about the purpose of the ballot initiative that targeted parents in Ohio: "Issue 1 strengthens parental rights by placing reproductive decisions firmly in the hands of Ohio families – instead of politicians or government."
- People tend to prefer text banking and postcards over phone banking or door-knocking.
 - Member-to-member texting is a good way to get volunteers excited and inspired – and to actually reach people. In Ohio, our text response rate was 25.2%. For reference, knocking on strangers' doors is closer to a 15% response rate.

- Digital toolkits can provide useful graphics and handouts for volunteers.
- Reporters are often interested in on-the-ground information or stories, especially in the final weeks.
 - Ask volunteers if they would be willing to share why they got involved or if they've had any impactful conversations recently. There's power in personal stories!
- Yard signs don't vote, but they do build a sense of community. Make sure that they're visible from the road.
 - Lesson learned: In Ohio, the original yard signs weren't clear and didn't really speak to our members. So, at Red Wine & Blue, we created our own!
 - We also had yard sign brigades to set them up. The yard signs helped create positive momentum for our community in the final weeks before the election.
- Remember: This is a marathon, not a sprint. Leading with positivity and building community can help everyone stay energized!

2023 MI and OH Ballot Initiative Work

