

Petitioning tips

- Do not use clipboards; use petition boards, which are “foam board” (aka “foam core”) cut to 9 x 12”. Foam board is available at art supply and office supply stores like Michael’s and Staples. Get the thinnest available. Tape a [statement of what we stand for](#) or candidate info on the backs of the petition boards. You will also need a box of #64 (¼” wide, 3½” circ.) rubber bands, a box of black ball point pens with removable caps, and a light bag to carry everything in, preferably a messenger-type bag or apron with pockets. Tape and scissors may also come in handy. (You may also want to be prepared to record any encounters with self-proclaimed “authority” people.)
- To prepare the petition boards, place ten blank petitions on the front and, about ¼ the distance from the top, wrap two rubber bands horizontally around the board and petitions and two more about ¼ the distance from the bottom. Take a pen with no cap and wedge it under the top rubber bands. (Nobody steals a pen, inadvertently or otherwise, that has no cap.) This petition board is light as a feather and can be tossed like a Frisbee, yet remains very secure.
- The petition should also have an overlay, which will make people much less likely to balk when asked to sign a blank petition sheet and will also prevent them from making as many mistakes. To prepare the overlay, fill in a perfect sample for signing block #1 on one petition sheet. In the first column, sign a legible signature on the first line and neatly print the name on the second. In the middle column, neatly print a normal residence address with a unit or apartment #. In the last column, write “<leave blank>”. Make a dozen or so photocopies of that page. Cut the copies (not the original, in case you need more copies) along the horizontal line just below signing block #1. Cut or fold the top of the sheet to remove an amount that is the same width as the signing block #1 you just filled in. Insert the sheet under the rubber bands, over the top sheet on the petition board. It now looks like there are two #1 signing blocks on the petition, with the first one already filled in. This makes the first signer more comfortable by subliminally making him think that he is not signing a blank page, and it gives him a sample to copy. (Normally, when the first signer makes a mistake, all the other signers copy it.)
- Carry at least three to five boards, more if you are having people sign two petitions or have to decide which of two or more petitions they need to sign. If you are having people sign two petitions, be sure to hand them the petition you want them to sign the most, first. If you have to decide which of two or more petitions they need to sign, come up with an easy question to ask them to make that determination, such as “North of highway 64 or south of highway 7?”, and mark the top left of the petitions with, say, “N” or “S” so you don’t have to think about which to hand them based on their answer. If they reside close to the border and so you’re not sure which petition is theirs, hand them the one with the candidate who has the best chance to succeed, i.e. will collect enough signatures to get on the ballot.
- Always have a very friendly smile and ask people an innocuous residence question, such as the question in the previous paragraph. What to ask depends on the petition. E.g., “Excuse me, sir, are you a New York resident?” for a statewide petition, or “. . . do you live in Woodstock?” for a local petition, or a larger area if people are liable to say “no” even though they do live in the covered jurisdiction.
- No matter what they say, unless they’re clearly not eligible, thrust the petition into their hands and say, like a statement, not a question, and with a look of concern but not unfriendly, and nodding your head “yes”, “Would you sign this petition please? It’s to get more candidates on the ballot in November.” (If you ARE the candidate, then you have to say something else. Try something like “Would you sign this petition to help me to appear on the ballot in November? I’m running for Town Council.” and see how that works. Modify the speech as you see how it works.) Remember: the attitude is that you’re friendly, but you’re telling them what to do, not asking, i.e. that you are doing them a favor, not that they are doing you one. Never beg or ask for help.
- If the signer objects for any reason, say “It’s just to get the candidate (or ‘me’) on the ballot; it does not

mean you are promising to support or vote for him (me); anybody should have a chance to run for office, don't you agree?" Most people will agree at that point. If not, just move on.

- If the signer says "I never heard of him (you)" or "What does he (do you) stand for?", just turn over the board and show them what we stand for, which you previously taped on the back.

- Once they take the petition, whether it is to read the back or to sign it, politely excuse yourself to approach someone else with another board.

- Don't talk to anybody for more than 20 seconds (unless there are NO other people around, in which case you should probably find some place better to petition anyway). Anybody who does not sign in the first 20 seconds is very unlikely to ever sign; they just want to talk to you to convince themselves that you are nuts or to convince YOU that you are nuts or just to waste your time. Even if you can convince them to sign after, say, a couple of minutes, you've just lost the opportunity to approach everyone else who passed by during that time. You could lose 10 sigs just for the chance to get one, which you probably won't get anyway.

- VERY IMPORTANT: when the first person comes back with the board, look at everything they filled in and make sure they filled in all the necessary information; for anything that's missing, ask them and YOU write it in (except for their signature, of course).

- ALSO VERY IMPORTANT: Once they agree to sign, SHUT UP, i.e. stop talking politics; I can't tell you how many people grabbed back the petition and crossed off their name because I said something I thought I was saying in solidarity that surprised them after they had signed.

- When a petition sheet is full, take it out and put it in the bag. Don't put the filled in sheets under the rest and hand that to a stranger. I've never had anyone steal or destroy my petition sheets but why take the risk? Just put the completed sheet in your bag/apron.

- Also carry in your bag a few copies of [Chris Garvey's laws regarding petitioning](#). If anyone tells you that you cannot petition on public property, start recording if you have a device to do that, be nice, ask if you can just tell them something, hand them a copy of Garvey's laws, and tell them that petitioning on publicly owned property is a federally protected right and that anyone who interferes with a petitioner can be fined up to \$1000 plus one year in jail plus attorney's fees. If they say they have to speak to someone about this then tell them that if they do, then interfering with you after that becomes a maximum \$10,000 fine plus 10 years in jail plus attorney's fees. It is probably a bluff if there are no Federal candidates on the petition, but it may work anyway.