



How an Idea Becomes a Ballot Measure

Through California's initiative process, voters can propose state laws ("statutory initiatives") and amend the state constitution ("constitutional amendments"). Also, some kinds of legislation have to go on the ballot for a vote by the people. How do policy ideas get onto the ballot?

Qualifying an Initiative for the California Ballot



A voter or "proponent" submits a proposed measure to the state's Attorney General.



The Attorney General gives the proposed initiative a title and summary. If the proposal will affect the state budget, the state Department of Finance and the Joint Legislative Budget Committee write an analysis of its likely fiscal effects.



Proponents then have up to 150 days to circulate their initiative petition to gather signatures. They need 433,971 signatures to qualify statutory initiatives and 694,354 signatures to qualify constitutional amendments. The time it takes to gather enough signatures varies widely—from 27 to 150 days—but it averages roughly three and a half months.



The counties and the Secretary of State work together to verify whether proponents have collected enough signatures.



If proponents have collected enough signatures, their measure goes onto the first statewide ballot after 131 days.

To get on the November 4, 2008 ballot, an initiative has to qualify by June 26, 2008.



Qualifying a Legislative Measure for the Ballot

Legislation has to go on the ballot whenever the legislature passes a bond act, a constitutional amendment, or a statutory amendment (an amendment to an initiative approved by voters in a previous election). The legislature may also place a referendum on the ballot to overturn an existing law.



A legislator proposes a bill.



The legislature considers the proposal and negotiates changes.



Except for statutory amendments, all legislative measures need a 2/3 vote to qualify for the ballot.

Most statutory amendments can qualify with a simple majority vote by the legislature and the Governor's signature.

The legislature usually places measures on the ballot at least two months before the election.