

# TRANSPARENT ELECTION INITIATIVE



## TEI Signature Gathering Protocol in Montana

### Executive Summary

This document outlines the fundamental rules, procedures, and legal requirements for gathering signatures for the TEI initiative in Montana. The process is governed by strict state laws and internal organizational protocols designed to ensure the validity of every signature collected. Key takeaways from the process include:

- **Broad Gatherer Eligibility:** Signature gatherers are not required to be Montana residents, U.S. citizens, or registered voters. Minors are also permitted to gather signatures.
- **Strict Signer Eligibility:** Only individuals who are registered Montana voters are eligible to sign the petition.
- **The Single-County Rule:** A critical and inflexible rule is that each individual petition sheet may only contain signatures from a single Montana county.
- **Legally Binding Documentation:** Each submission batch of up to 25 petition sheets must be accompanied by a completed and correctly dated unsworn statement, signed by the gatherer under penalty of perjury.
- **Rolling Submission Deadlines:** The campaign operates on a strict schedule of rolling deadlines, requiring signatures to be submitted to county election officials shortly after they are collected, culminating in a final deadline of 5:00 p.m. on June 19, 2026.
- **Mandatory Post-Submission Reporting:** The process is not complete until the gatherer obtains an official receipt from the county and forwards a copy to their TEI coordinator, ensuring accurate campaign-wide tracking.

### Eligibility Requirements

#### Signature Gatherer Eligibility

The criteria for individuals permitted to gather signatures are notably broad and inclusive.

### **Who is ALLOWED to gather signatures:**

- Montana residents
- Non-Montana residents and out-of-state residents
- International visitors (must have work authorization if they are being paid)
- Minors (no minimum age restriction is specified)

### **What is NOT REQUIRED to gather signatures:**

- Montana residency
- U.S. citizenship
- Voter registration status

*Note: While the TEI initiative is organized as an all-volunteer effort, the source context indicates that numerous restrictions apply to paid signature gatherers, which are covered in a separate, comprehensive training module.*

### **Signer Eligibility**

The requirements for those signing the petition are explicit and non-negotiable:

- Only **registered Montana voters** are permitted to sign a TEI petition. No one else is eligible.

### **Core Principles of Signature Collection**

Adherence to a set of basic rules is essential for ensuring signatures are valid and will be counted.

- **Use of Approved Forms:** Gatherers must exclusively use official documents provided by the TEI organization. This includes official signature gathering forms, forms containing the full text of the initiative, and unsworn statements.
- **Physical Presence:** The signature gatherer is required to be physically present and witness the elector signing the petition. Under no circumstances should petitions be left unattended for people to sign.
- **Ballot Issue Text Availability:** A complete copy of the ballot issue's text must be on hand and made available for any potential signer to review upon request.
- **One County Per Sheet Mandate:** Only signatures from a single county may be collected on any given petition sheet. If a gatherer encounters a signer from a different county, they must start a new, separate sheet for that county. Mixing counties on a single sheet is a common and critical error that leads to rejection.

### **The Unsworn Statement and Submission Process**

The unsworn statement is a critical legal document that certifies the validity of the collected signatures.

### **Affidavit Rules and Procedures**

- **Unsworn Statement:** The TEI organization utilizes an "unsworn statement" in place of a notarized affidavit. This document is signed under penalty of perjury but does not require notarization.
- **Batching:** Each submission consists of a single, completed unsworn statement attached to a batch of no more than 25 petition signature sheets.
- **Critical Dating Requirements:** The dates on the statement are of paramount importance and must be accurate.
  - The "**date of first signature gathered**" on the statement must correspond to the earliest signature date found on any of the attached petition sheets.
  - The **date the unsworn statement is signed** by the gatherer must be on or after the latest signature date found on any of the attached sheets.
- **Signatory Integrity:** The unsworn statement must be signed by the same signature gatherer who was physically present and witnessed the collection of all signatures in the attached batch.

**Submission Procedures and Deadlines**

The process for submitting collected signatures is time-sensitive and highly structured. Sponsors and gatherers are responsible for adhering to the schedule.

**Approved Submission Methods**

There are two approved methods for submitting a verified batch of signatures and its corresponding unsworn statement:

1. **Deliver to TEI Community Lead:** The primary method is to deliver the complete batch to the designated TEI Community Lead.
2. **Deliver to County Official:** Only when specifically instructed by a TEI lead, the gatherer may deliver the batch directly to their county's election administrator, whose office is typically located within the county clerk's office.

**Rolling Submission Deadlines**

Signatures must be submitted to county election offices according to a strict, rolling schedule.

Signatures Gathered On or Before	Submission Deadline to County
October 3, 2025	October 17, 2025
January 2, 2026	January 16, 2026
March 13, 2026	March 27, 2026
April 10, 2026	April 24, 2026

**Final Deadline:** Any signatures gathered after April 11, 2026, must be submitted to the county Election Administrator by **5:00 p.m. on June 19, 2026.**

**Submission Blackout Periods:** Gatherers are asked to avoid submitting signatures during the first week of May and the first week of June. Election administrators are exceptionally busy during these periods with school elections and the primary election, respectively.

### **Post-Submission Verification and Record-Keeping**

The workflow extends beyond the point of submission to ensure proper documentation and campaign tracking.

### **Receipt and Reporting**

This final stage is mandatory to verify the successful delivery of signatures.

1. **Wait for the Receipt:** When delivering a batch directly to a county official, the gatherer must wait for the election administrator to process the batch and issue an official receipt.
2. **Save the Receipt:** This receipt is the official proof of submission and must be carefully saved.
3. **Report to Coordinator:** The gatherer must send a copy of the receipt (a clear photo is acceptable) to their TEI county coordinator. This action confirms successful delivery and concludes the submission process for that batch.

### **Record Access and Management**

- **No Photocopies Required:** Gatherers do not need to photocopy signature pages before submission.
- **Official Scans:** County Election Administrators (EAs) will scan the submitted documents before forwarding them to the Secretary of State. These scans are considered public record, and the TEI organization will acquire copies.
- **Submittal Reports:** TEI will establish a process to retrieve each county's submittal reports from the Secretary of State's office. These reports will contain the scanned signature pages and a count of verified signatures for each legislative district.

### **Compliance, Common Errors, and Consequences**

Strict adherence to Montana's signature gathering laws is essential to avoid invalidation of signatures and potential legal action.

### **Common Mistakes Resulting in Rejection**

- Mixing signatures from multiple counties on a single petition sheet.
- The signer is not a qualified, registered Montana voter.
- The signer has already signed the petition.
- The signer provides illegible or incorrect information (e.g., date, printed name, address).

- The signature gatherer's affidavit (unsworn statement) is incomplete, improperly signed, or dated prior to the collection of the signatures it pertains to.

### **Penalties for Non-Compliance**

Failure to follow legal requirements can lead to severe consequences for both the individual gatherer and the campaign. Potential penalties include **misdemeanor and felony prosecutions** for offenses such as making false statements on an affidavit or the forgery of signatures.

