



Citizen Initiative Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

1. What is Citizen Initiative?

Citizen initiative is a tool of direct democracy that enables voters to collect signatures and put a law and/or constitutional amendment directly on the ballot, without going through the legislature. At present, 24 states have Citizen Initiative (authorizing citizen-initiated laws, constitutional amendments, or both).

2. How does Citizen Initiative work?

Each CI state uses somewhat different procedures, but all CI systems specify how proposed measures qualify for the ballot (e.g., how many signatures are needed and who approves the ballot measure language), as well as what share of the voters must approve a measure for it to take effect (typically a simple majority of those voting for a law, often a higher threshold for a constitutional amendment).

3. Why doesn't NC have Citizen Initiative already?

CI was one of the core Progressive-Era reforms promoted at the end of the 19th Century. This period saw most of the Southern states embroiled in Jim Crow, a movement that favored limiting rather than expanding voters' powers, with the result that, among the Southern states, only Florida CI and it is limited in scope.

4. How does Citizen Initiative contribute to reform?

CI enables voters to put in place or modify a law or a provision of the state constitution directly, providing a route to reform when the legislature will not act. For example, all functional independent redistricting commissions were created via CI. The ability of voters to circumvent the legislature through CI can also encourage the legislature to act.

5. How are other states using CI?

In the 2024 presidential election, voters across the country voted on 46 state ballot initiatives, including measures that would protect reproductive rights, adopt or modify ranked choice voting, raise the minimum wage and expand paid leave, introduce top four primaries, modify criminal sentencing provisions, legalize marijuana, and protect same-sex marriage.

6. What will be required to get CI in North Carolina?

CI will require a constitutional amendment, which in turn requires approval by 60% in each chamber of the legislature. The support of voters across the political spectrum will be essential to motivate legislators to act and then to win voters' approval to a CI amendment in a general election referendum. None of these steps will be easy.

7. What is the next step for the League in CI advocacy?

The League of Women Voters takes action on an issue only when we have a position addressing that particular issue. Members must study and come to consensus on an issue to form a position. The CI study team reviewed 19 positions adopted by Leagues in other states and identified LWV-Alabama's position as the one most suited to North Carolina, based on its combination of clearly defined and reasonable requirements to approve a ballot measure with appropriate safeguards. We hope to gain members' approval to concur with their position at the State Convention, adding it to the League's current program.

8. What key steps would follow League adoption of a CI position?

Putting in place a League position on CI is just the first step toward adding CI to North Carolina's governance system. Additional steps include: 1) building a broad, bipartisan coalition to advocate for CI adoption; 2) developing a proposed constitutional amendment and implementing legislation language; 3) undertaking active educational outreach to voters across the state in partnership with coalition partners and others; 4) working with legislative partners to introduce and promote adoption of legislation to add CI to the NC constitution, and 5) winning voter approval for a CI amendment.