Once a request is received for approval of a petition to initiate or refer a law the Secretary of State must do the following:

We accept the petition as is and give the group a receipt letter as well as a timeline that will let them know when our office has to get back to them with the petition title as well as with any corrections that need to be made to the 'form' of the petition. This is within 5 to 7 business days excluding Sundays and holidays.

We then send out a press release to let the media know that a petition has come in and our timeline to get back to the committee with the petition title and any corrections needed. Al has a media list as to who he wants this release to go to. We also give a copy of the letter and the petition to the Attorney General's office so that they can take a look at the paperwork and get a head start on the petition title being our office and their office work together on a title.

Al (current Secretary of State) will then start to work on the petition title and once that is done will send over an official letter with his version of what the petition title should be and then the AG's office comes back to the Sec. of State's office with an official letter that gives us the ok'd title. During this time the election specialist will go over the petition and compare it to the form in the NDCC and type up a corrections memo as to anything that needs to be changed. I first make sure the group has submitted affidavits for at least 25 sponsoring committee members. Each form has to be notarized, be original, the notaries need to be up to date and NOT part of the sponsoring committee. I then compare the signatures on the affidavits to the name and address on the petition to make sure they match (pretty much exact). I then make sure the format of the petition matches the law and if any changes are needed I make up a corrections memo to go along with the letter that will be given to the committee with the petition title to be added. (no press releases are done at this step)

It is then up to the committee as to how long they will take to get that petition back to us (with the new petition title and any needed corrections). Once they get the petition back to us we look at it again to make sure the petition title was added EXACT and that any other changes were completed. If all looks good, we do not have to wait again for the 5 to 7 business days in order to get back to them the 2nd time around. The next letter will let them know that they can begin circulating and that they will have one year from the day we approve the petition to obtain the signatures. We also give them an updated timeline. The letter and timeline specifically says when the year is up. At this point the office goes out with another press release letting the public know that the petition has been approved and we also add the petition to our website under pending measures.

Our office is then out of the process until the committee brings in the needed amount of signatures. When the petitions are brought in the chairman or other responsible party member needs to sign an affidavit swearing that they truly believe they have the needed amount of signatures. Also, if they committee paid circulators then the committee would also need to file a campaign statement and should have had the state form 'intent to remunerate' turned in. If they didn't we need to get it from them at this time. We as the Secretary of State's office then count each of the petitions and place them in stacks of 50. This is not required by law however, it is done so that our office goes on record as to how many petitions were brought in so that the committee can't come back later to say they turned in more and that our office must have got rid of them. It is just a way to cover ourselves. The committee then gets a letter letting them know the number of petitions that were turned in and what the timeline is for the Sec of State's office to get back to them once we look through all the petitions to determine their validity. Another press release goes out after this happens that gives the press a copy of the receipt letter and an updated timeline. We also update the time line on our website.

Each petition is then given a date stamp with a number (we have a machine for this which could be updated). This gives us a chance to see if we counted the petitions correctly when first brought in as well as a way to identify each individual petition.

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Once the numbers are placed on each petition we go through and count every signature on a given petition and place that number on the corner of the 1st page of the petition and we do that in Blue. This is considered the initial number. This number includes every signature no matter if it is complete or not. We then count up that initial number on all the petitions to determine that they committee did truly turn in at least the needed amount of signatures. Once we are certain they did we go back to each petition and scrutinize each petition and its signatures. We have come up with a worksheet that goes along with each individual petition in order for our office to be able to identify each signature that was not accepted and the reason why it was not accepted. On this 'worksheet' we have columns and these columns allow us to write down the following:

a-the petition validation number that we stamped on the front page of each petition

b-the initial signature count again found on the front page of each petition

c-if the petition was circulated in its entirety and if that answer is NO, we move on to the next petition being that means that individual petition in invalid

d-You then look to see if the notary is a sponsor and if yes that also invalidates that individual petition

e-you then look to see if the notary name is different than the circulators name. If they are the same this would raise the question of whether the 2 people are spouses and if so would invalidate that individual petition. I try and find this out by going to the notary section in our AS400 to see if that notary has the same address as the circulator of if the system gives us a spouses name.

f-You then look to see if the notary signed, sealed and put their expiration date. The expiration date should not be on the stamp itself but some still print out their expiration date. You need to check that the 2 dates match. If any of this is wrong or missing it invalidates the individual petition and you need to make copies of that petition and give it to the Notary division for further action.

The above columns are answered with a Yes or a No and the following columns are answered by actually putting down the number of the signature line you are talking about.

g- Next column is where you look to see if any of the signatures were acquired before the approval date, that date is the day we told the committee it is ok to go out and circulate the petition.

h-Next column you need to look if any of the signatures were obtained after the notarization date. These signatures are invalid because the notary is notarizing the circulators signature who is swearing that each person on the petition signed in front of them and were qualified to do so. If a signature was obtained after the notarization date it nullifies the circulators statement.

i-You then look for any blank dates on the signature lines. There has been AG opinions that state if a signature line does not have a date but there is a date on the lines before it and after it then you can count the signature. If there are blank dates in the very beginning or very end of the petition you cannot count those individual lines being you don't know if they were obtained before the approval date or after the notarization date.

j-The next column is where you look for inadequate signatures You look for things like

-Mickey Mouse signatures

-No signature or only a first or last name

-petition circulator cannot sign the petition they are circulating

-notary cannot sign the petition they notorize

-a spouse cannot sign their spouses name-they all have to be original

k- Next column is where you look at the address portion of the signature line. Things like abbreviations and ditto marks are acceptable. If the address is entirely blank it cannot be counted.

l-Next column you need to look to see if there is either a city or zip code and that the person is from ND. Ditto marks and abbreviations are acceptable in this column.

m-in the last column we need to take the initial number (in blue) and subtract all the signatures that were invalidated on that particular petition and that is the number you put in the last column and also put that number on the front of the petition too. This number should replace the blue number and be put in red.

Now we need to go into the AS400. On the command line we type in 'go pets' and hit enter. Then we do the following steps:

a. Type in (1) enter/update petition/validations on the first screen that appears
b. Enter the number of the petition on the second screen that appears, this will vary with each petition
c. Enter the last 4 digits of the validation code (number we stamped on the petition the first day it came in), then enter the initial signature count (blue number) then enter final signature count (red number on front of petition) then hit 'post' You do this for every individual petition (100's)

Now you check to see the total number of valid signatures (the number in red) You do this by:

a. Go to the main menu in the AS400 and type in 'wrkqry' on the command line and press enter
b. Type in a 2(field exit), type in LGPETT(field exit), type in scsource then hit enter
c. Select records option 1 then enter
d. Then type in petition number, this will vary from petition to petition
e. Press F5 "report"
f. Type in 'B' (enter), at bottom of screen it will give you the total number of signatures submitted and then the total number of signatures accepted or valid

If that number is more than the number of signatures they need then you will need to do the following:;

a. Contact a printer to order 2,000 postcards. Do this as soon as you can so that the postcards are delivered asap. The wording will be somewhat different because the subject matter and dates will change but there is a lot that stays the same. Something to keep in mind is to try and correlate the color of the postcard with the color of the petition. If we have 2 at the same time it is much harder to have all postcards coming back in white.
b. You need to go back to the main page in the AS400 and type in 'go pets' on the command line and hit enter. On the second screen type a number 2(generate random numbers). On the 3rd screen type a number 1 for petition number, this will vary for each petition, then hit enter.

Now we are ready to start entering signatures. We do this by:

a. Go to the main menu and type in 'go pets' on the command line (enter)
b. On 2nd screen type in a number 3(enter/update names) then enter

c. Type in what petition number it is (1, 2, 3 depends) then hit field exit.
d. Type in last 4 digits of validation number the validation code (enter)
e. Put an X on the select line (enter)
f. Then you can type in the asked for information except the phone number then post

After all the signatures are entered we need to check the list for double names, this is done by:

a. Go to the main menu and type in 'wrkqry' on the command line (enter)
b. Option 2 (field exit), LGPETT (field exit),scsource (enter)
c. Move cursor to 'select records' and enter
d. On this screen skip to where it asks you for petition number and type in 1 (remember this number will vary from petition to petition)
e. Press F5 and you will get the list of signatures entered. You can do this step more than once. I do so that I know how many signatures out of the 2,000 needed are left to be entered.

You then scroll through the list of names and look for doubles. If you find them you need to go to one of the petitions they signed, void that and pick another name. Remember to go to the worksheet and mark down that signature line as being a double and take away one more signature.

Linda, currently in our office, now runs the labels for me, would be nice to do this step myself in the future). You will get 2 labels for each signature entered. One will have the entire address on it and that one goes on the front of the postcard under the Sec of State's return address. The second label will have the individual's name and a code number. This one will be placed under the wording "…your cooperation is greatly appreciated. Thank You" on the other half of the postcard. You then fold the postcard in ½ with the address label facing the outside and tape the open end together. The post office will not take stapled postcard. Mail them and make sure that the post office has enough balance in its business reply account so that we can keep receiving the postcards as they come in. If no money is in the account the post office holds on to the postcards until money is deposited. The Sec of State has a separate account for petition review.

I also have a postcard response log that I made up. It is very simple and basically keeps track of the postcards that are returned. I have a column for all yes responses, questionable responses (anything that has a no on it) and then a column for un-deliverables. In the AS 400 there is a spot that I can go into to actually type in how each person answered but I do not do that at this point.

If any postcards do come back with a 'no' answer I go back to the petition that they signed and check if the names are similar and they simple forgot they signed it or if they gave me their phone number I try and call them and see if I can get them a copy of that petition where their name shows up on to see if they think it is their signature or not.

After the 35 day review time limit, our office must send out a letter to the sponsoring committee chairman letting them know if it will or will not be on the next election. This letter must also let the committee know what number the measure will be on the ballot. Along with this letter to the committee we also go out with another press release and change our website to read that that petition is no longer pending.

Note: had the valid signature count fallen below the amount needed to qualify the measure for the ballot the committee would be given 20 days to correct or amend the rejected signatures. However, not every signature is in the correctable category.

Note 2: If our office is in the process of looking over the petition and the deadline passes to get on the ballot the measure automatically gets on the ballot even if we are not finished with looking through the corrections.