

Redistricting Fundamentals

A General Redistricting Guide

Redistricting training materials were created by Common Cause, Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund, and State Voices in collaboration with Arizona Coalition for Change, Asian Americans Advancing Justice | AAJC, Asian Americans Advancing Justice | Los Angeles, Black Voters Matter Fund, Brennan Center for Justice, Campaign Legal Center, Center for Community Change, FIRM (Fair Immigration Reform Movement), Center for Popular Democracy, Demos, Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights Under Law, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People-Legal Defense Fund, NALEO Educational Fund, Pennsylvania Voice, and Southern Coalition for Social Justice.

Redistricting: Overview

What is redistricting and why is it done?

Redistricting is the process used by governments to redraw political district boundaries. Redistricting applies to all levels of government where district elections are held, including the U.S. House of Representatives, state legislatures, city councils, school boards, county boards, judicial, water districts, and more.

Redistricting is based on the idea of “one person, one vote”, which makes sure that each of our voices can be represented fairly, by creating districts that have the same number of people. Census data that is collected every ten years is used to draw new maps to account for the ways that populations have changed and moved across the states and districts.

Why is it important?

How district lines are drawn influences who runs for public office and who is elected. Elected representatives make decisions that are important to our lives, from ensuring safe schools to adopting immigration policies. Who lives in a district can influence whether elected officials feel obligated to respond to a community’s needs. The district boundaries are in place for the next ten years, and their policy impacts can last well beyond that.

Why should I be involved?

Redistricting has been used at times to exclude communities from political power. By fully participating in and monitoring the upcoming redistricting process, underrepresented communities, such as African Americans, Latinos, Asian Americans, and Native Americans will have the opportunity to elect candidates of their choice and voice their needs and interests. District boundaries are generally drawn once every 10 years, so this process has long-term effects on community representation.

Who is in charge of redistricting?

In most states, the state or local government is responsible for redistricting. Most state legislatures are responsible for drawing congressional districts and state legislative districts. Local governments are responsible for redistricting their own districts. Increasingly, states and local areas are using some form of commission to carry out redistricting responsibilities. Commissions are smaller groups of people that are often not elected officials. In some places, the process is not always transparent, so it is important to become familiar and pay attention to which process your area uses. Contact your elected officials to get the most updated information.

When does redistricting take place?

The census happens in the year 2020. Redistricting typically takes place one year later. States and local areas will have their own timelines for redrawing districts, based on when they get their census data and when the next set of elections are scheduled. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the US Census Bureau pushed back its data release deadline several months later to July 31, 2021. This change could have a significant effect on the timeline and process used to draw new maps. While most redistricting processes begin in 2021, communities can begin getting organized now. Getting ready includes building coalitions and collecting community data and stories to inform the official process.

How Gerrymandering Hurts Minority Communities: A Deluge of Problems for a Divided Watts

On November 12, 2003, a freak storm dumped over 5 inches of rain and hail on Watts, a neighborhood of Los Angeles, overwhelming storm drains and flooding the community. Over 150 buildings and homes were heavily damaged, over 50,000 people lost power, and about 6,000 people sought aid from the county's emergency center. Firefighters reported rescuing over 100 people from waist-deep waters. Many people had lost everything; mattresses, clothes, cars, even refrigerators. However, the government was slow to aid the people. FEMA refused to act when California's then-Governor Gray Davis declared a state of emergency (six days after the flood).

Watts is divided into **three** Congressional Districts (35, 37, and 39) and **three** State Senate districts (25, 27, and 30).

Romulo Rivera, former Congressional staffer: *“At the time of the 2003 flood, I remember our office trying to be very responsive, but there was a lot of ping-ponging of constituents between elected representatives. Residents weren't sure who actually was their member of Congress. Watts is cut into three different Congressional and state Senate districts. Residents who live on the same street may live in different districts. There was a lot of unnecessary frustration for constituents during a difficult time. **This would have never happened if all of Watts belonged to one district.**”*

Los Angeles Times, 11/17/2003, “Storm Victims Face Long Wait for Aid” (5 days after the storm): *“We need someone to help,” said Gloria Papillion, who like many of her neighbors expressed frustration that aid workers have not yet come to their cul-de-sac. Several said they had gone to the relief center and waited in line for hours, but said they had been unable to get the information they needed about what to do.*

Watts is a historically black community in Southern Los Angeles with a large Latino population. The community has long suffered from high rates of poverty and crime. Watts has the lowest household income of any Los Angeles community (\$17,987), and violent crime is nearly 300% the city average.

What would the response have been if this neighborhood were in a single district?

Adapted from Common Cause

Redistricting: Steps in Participating

Grouping people with similar traits and concerns together in one district gives them a stronger voice to have their issues addressed. Engaging in the redistricting process is more effective when done in a collective manner. Many of the steps to participate are the same activities involved in having your voices heard and making strides towards winning your issues even after the redistricting process is over.

LEARN THE RULES

- Understand the basic rules and concepts affecting redistricting.
- The rules and criteria used will vary among different states and levels of government.

ORGANIZE YOUR COMMUNITY

- Find neighbors or organizations interested in redistricting, especially those sharing your views.
- Create a coalition with a set of principles. Redistricting can be a divisive issue, where groups can be manipulated and pitted against each other.

CLARIFY YOUR GOALS

- What issues do you and your neighbors care about?
- What level(s) of government impact those issues?
- Are you advocating for a community of interest or a whole map plan?
- How does influencing the maps help your cause?

DEFINE YOUR COMMUNITY OR SOMEONE ELSE WILL

- Engage your neighbors or coalition on creating community profiles.
- Collect community impact stories.

TESTIFY AT HEARINGS

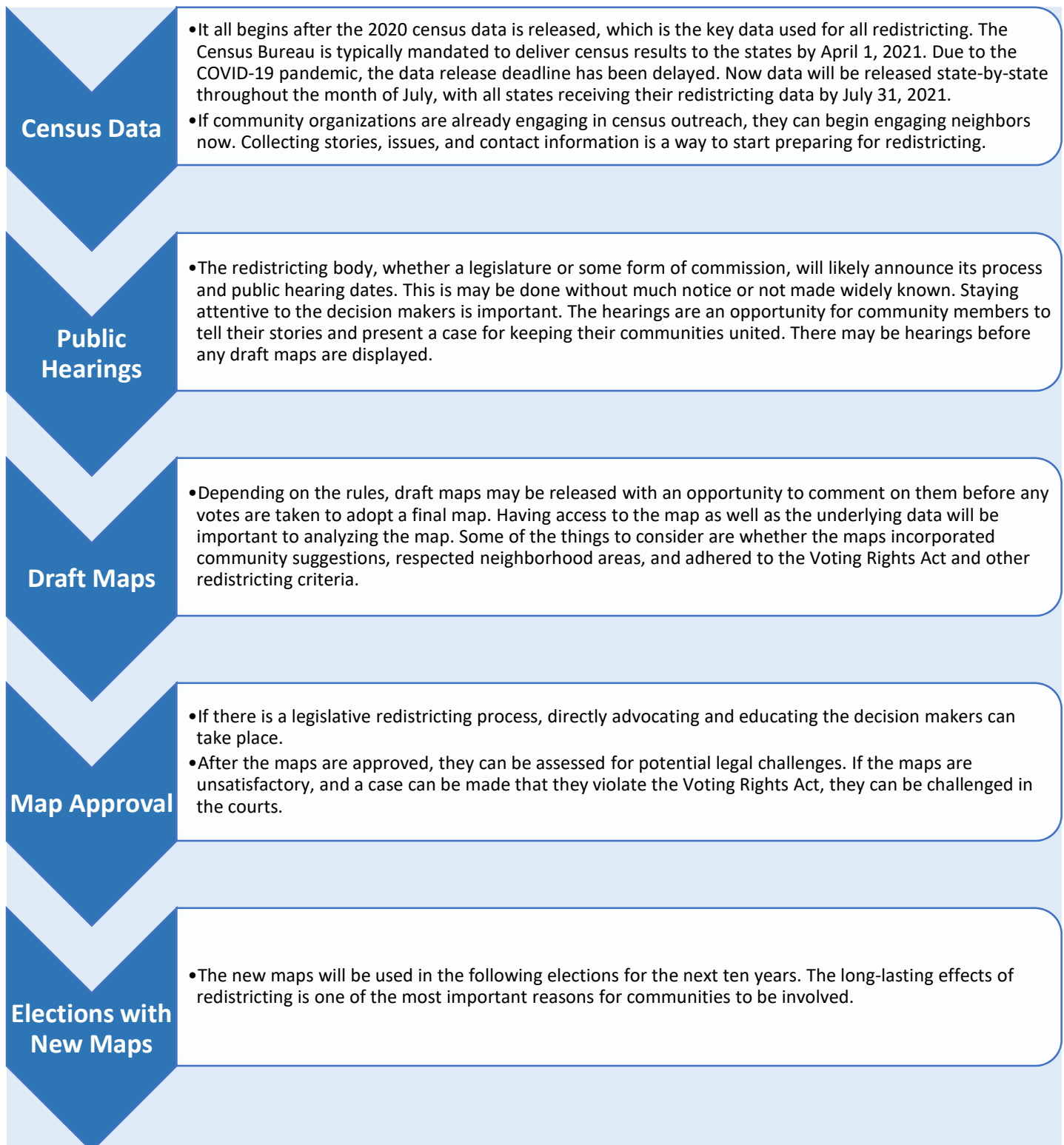
- Research the process to draw the maps: who makes decisions about the maps, when are the hearings and deadlines, what are the rules to testify
- Provide testimonies about your community (the more the better).
- Present maps, community profiles, and impact stories.

ADVOCATE FOR YOUR COMMUNITY

- Your strategy will vary depend on who is responsible for drawing the maps (legislators, independent commissioners, etc.).
- Understand what motivates the decision makers.

Getting Involved: Understanding the Process

When considering involvement in redistricting, it is important to understand how the process unfolds. While the rules and timelines vary for each state and local area, there are some common stages where the public can participate in the.



Rules of Redistricting: Overview

Every ten years, designated decision makers redraw legislative maps to even out the population in each district. This process is known as redistricting. It is meant to ensure that every person has fair representation. How the new maps are drawn can be done in several ways depending on the rules used. The rules, or criteria, guiding a redistricting process are shaped by traditional practices, court decisions, and the priorities set by state and local governments. Some rules of redistricting like “one person, one vote” and the Voting Rights Act must be followed. Other rules, unless specifically ranked by local laws, are open to interpretation about their importance. Understanding the rules used by your local government will be important to influencing the maps.

Required Redistricting Criteria

1. **Equal Population** – Each district should have the same total population. The principle of “one person, one vote” is fundamental to our democracy, and is embedded in the U.S. Constitution. It means that every resident should have equal importance.
2. **The Voting Rights Act** – This law addresses the history of discrimination faced by communities of color by protecting them during all stages of the electoral process, including drawing maps. In redistricting, the Voting Rights Act provides protections to these communities to be able to elect candidates of their choice. **(See Rules of Redistricting: The Voting Rights Act)**

Common Redistricting Criteria

There are also several other commonly used redistricting criteria. Many areas use a combination of the following redistricting principles when drawing their maps. The criteria below may have competing mandates, however, none of these criteria are more important than the ranked, required criteria above.

- **Preserve Communities of Interest** – A community of interest is a community, neighborhood, or group of people who have common concerns and traits and would benefit from staying together in a single district. This rule is one of the most important tools a community can use to preserve their community’s ability to stay in a single district. Providing community stories and examples of historical discrimination can also provide important evidence to support Voting Rights Act claims in the future. **(See Rules of Redistricting: Communities of Interest)**
- **Be Compact** – Compactness refers to the shape of the district. It describes boundaries that are drawn closely and neatly packed together unless there are good reasons such as VRA compliance or following oddly shaped boundaries, like city boundaries or rivers.
- **Be Contiguous** – Contiguity means that the boundaries of a district are a single, uninterrupted shape.
- **Follow Existing Political Subdivisions and/or Natural Boundaries** – This means maps minimize splitting cities and counties, or crossing natural or urban boundaries (rivers, mountains, highways, etc.).

Common Redistricting Criteria (continued)

- **Respect Existing Legislative Boundaries** – This means drawing new districts as closely to the existing lines as possible or preserving the cores of prior districts.
- **Respect Incumbency** – New districts include the current elected official’s house.
- **Achieve Political Goals** – State and local districts may be drawn for political reasons, such as to ensure the success of one political party over another. This may not be explicitly stated but is commonly considered a traditional redistricting criterion.

Emerging Redistricting Criteria

Other criteria exist that are less common, including nesting state House Districts within state Senate Districts, prohibiting districts that are drawn to favor an incumbent, candidate or party, and creating politically competitive districts.

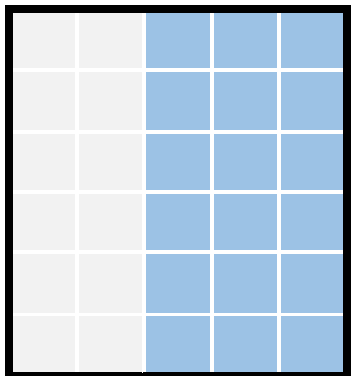
Rules of Redistricting: The Voting Rights Act

Passed at the height of the Civil Rights Movement in 1965, the **Voting Rights Act** (VRA) prevents the systemic and widespread voter discrimination experienced by people of color. In recent years, the Voting Rights Act has been used to block voter suppression laws, such as demands for voter identification, voter registration purges, and making voter registration harder. The process of voting is not only casting a vote on election day. It also includes rules and processes that determine who is eligible, how to register, how to vote, when polls are open, and whether people are put in districts that give them a fair chance of electing their candidate of choice. **Section 2** of the VRA protects voters from discrimination based on race, color, or membership in a language minority group in all these election procedures. The term “minority” is used in the Voting Rights Act and has a specific legal definition.

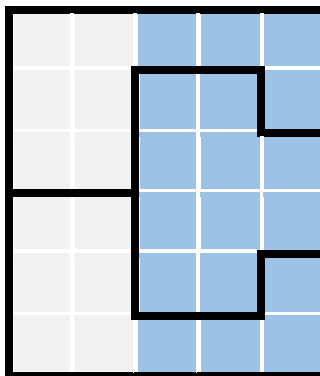
Redistricting has been used at times to prevent minority voters from gaining political power by drawing districts in a way that resulted in those voters having less of a chance of electing their candidate(s) of choice. This is known as **minority vote dilution**, and it commonly occurs in two ways, packing and cracking.

PACKING

Packing is the term used when minority voters are compressed into a small number of districts when they could effectively control more. An example of packing is when mapmakers draw one district that is over 90% of a single minority group (BLUE), when they could draw at least two districts with 50% single minority group.

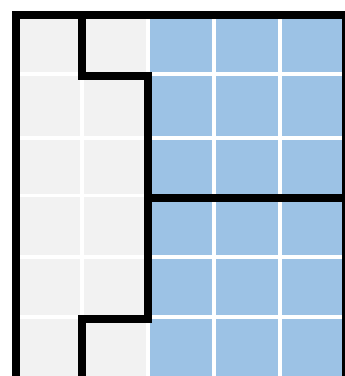


60% Blue wards
40% Gray wards



3 Districts
2 Gray Districts
1 Blue District

BLUE wards are
“packed” into one
district

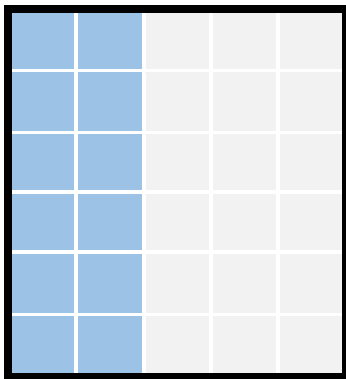


3 Districts
2 Blue Districts
1 Gray District

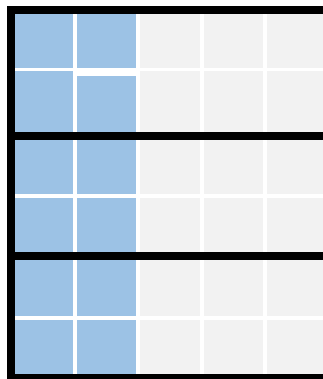
Proportional Outcome

CRACKING

Spreading minority voters thinly into many districts is known as **cracking**, splitting, or fracturing. An example of cracking can occur if three districts are created that have 40% of a single minority population in each. If the minority population (BLUE) were placed within one district where they are 70%, the minority community would have an opportunity to elect a candidate of their choice.

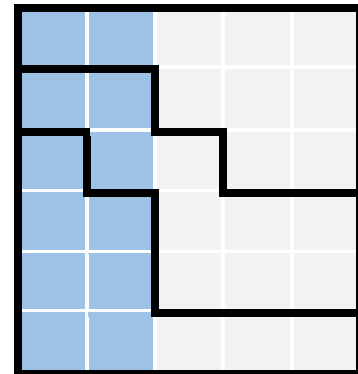


60% Gray wards
40% Blue wards



3 Districts
3 Gray Districts
0 Blue District

**BLUE wards are
“cracked” into 3
districts**



3 Districts
2 Grey Districts
1 Blue District

Proportional Outcome

Understanding the protections available under the Voting Rights Act can help keep your community together and gain greater political access. Providing community stories and examples of historical discrimination is an important way community members can provide evidence to support a Voting Rights Act district being drawn.

The Voting Rights Act, Section 2 protects the creation of **majority-minority districts**, which are districts that contain a majority of a racial or linguistic minority population. The courts have found that are four main criteria that need to be met in order to mandate the creation of majority-minority districts:

- 1) The minority group is sufficiently large and geographically concentrated to make up a majority in a district.
- 2) The minority group is politically cohesive. This means that the individuals that make up the group vote in similar patterns, e.g. they usually vote for the same candidates.
- 3) The white majority votes together to defeat the minority-preferred candidates.
- 4) Given the “totality of circumstances” listed above, the minority group has less opportunity than other members of the electorate to participate in the electoral process and to elect representatives of its choice.

Other types of districts that can be drawn as remedies to historic discrimination, including **minority-coalition districts**, **crossover districts**, and **influence districts**. (See **Redistricting: Key Terms**)

Rules of Redistricting: Communities of Interest

What is a Community of Interest?

A community of interest is a neighborhood, community, or group of people who have common policy concerns and would benefit from being maintained in a single district. Another way of understanding a community of interest is that it is simply a way for a community to tell its own story about what neighbors share in common, and what makes it unique when compared to surrounding communities. They are defined by the local community members.

Why is a community of interest important?

Keeping communities of interest together is an important principle in redistricting. It can be especially helpful to communities that have been traditionally left out of the political process. Community members can define their communities by telling their own stories and describe their concerns to policy makers. Without this, those who may not have their best interest in mind will define the communities for them.

What are examples of a community of interest?

A community of interest can be defined in many ways. Race and ethnicity can play a role in defining a community of interest but cannot be used as the sole definition. Residents may have a shared ancestry, history, or language.

Here are a few examples:

- **Residents** who have been working together to advocate for keeping a local health clinic open
- **Community members in an area** who formed around getting assistance to repair their neighborhood after a natural disaster
- **A neighborhood** organizing to have a high school built closer to their area
- **A community** that advocates for having a special recognition for cultural holidays, like Lunar New Year
- **Neighbors** who are advocating for the closure of a nearby coal plant

How can I define a community of interest?

Communities of interest are self-defined and create a common story. They can be described by creating maps and narrative profiles and providing community stories. The strongest arguments contain both qualitative (stories) and quantitative (data or statistics) information. While there are no clear rules on how to define a community of interest, the following are the basic elements.

- **Personal Testimonies** – Personal stories are powerful. Find community members willing to share examples of things residents share in common and what makes your community unique. Imagine describing your community to a visitor from out of town. Does your neighborhood share certain celebrations or traditions, like street festivals or parades? Are there important places where your community gathers, like parks or community centers? What is the history of how your community came together?
- **Written description** – A written description can be used to tell a community's story. Describe what connects the people and why it's important that they be kept together. Whenever possible include statistics to support your testimonies, including data on education levels, graduation rates, median household income, poverty levels, access to technology, homeownership rates, language isolation, voter registration rates, etc. This information can be gathered from the U.S. Census Bureau, universities, local government reports, etc. Consider using reliable sources such as the Census Bureau to find data on income, education, language, race, ethnicity, and ancestry.

- **Community Issues** – Often communities get involved in redistricting because they feel their issues have not been adequately addressed by their elected representative. Highlighting community issues in personal stories and written narratives help demonstrate the importance of having elected officials who understand and respond to community needs. Has your community come together to advocate for important services, better schools, roads, or health centers in your neighborhood? Have you worked for more recognition or support of your community, like having holidays recognized or historical events commemorated?
- **Boundary maps** – Create a map of your neighborhood or area. Mark the street names and significant locations. They can include significant landmarks and gathering places, including social service agencies, community centers, shopping districts, schools, and religious places. It may be helpful to have or create a name for your community area to be a reminder about what makes your community unique. Use Google Maps or other mapping sites to create maps. Paper maps such as AAA road maps can also be helpful in drawing maps.

The information can be presented at public hearings or in meetings with legislators to advocate that a community be kept together. Building community profiles and testimonies can have benefits beyond the redistricting process. They can also be used for future policy advocacy and coalition building. Furthermore, having the information on public record can be a basis for lawsuits to challenge redistricting maps. (See **Getting Involved: Preparing Your Testimony**)

Getting Involved: Core Strategies for Impacting Maps

As you begin to create a redistricting plan, consider the following strategic elements that will help you influence the maps in your favor. It should be noted that the redistricting process can move very quickly. Many of these steps can be done before the census data is released and can begin immediately.

ORGANIZE YOUR COMMUNITY

There are many stakeholders in the redistricting process. For your voices to be heard, it is important that you organize your community members, your message, and your partners. This work can begin immediately.

- Start by recruiting and organizing people in your area with shared experiences, concerns, or vision. Learn about how redistricting can make your communities better and strategize together.
- Organize large numbers of community members attending hearings and present a united front. This will signal that many people are paying attention to the outcomes—too many to ignore.
- Coordinate a unified message to make your advocacy more effective. Your message should describe your community and its issues and make your goals clear. Decision makers will pay attention to messages that are echoed by many people.
- Consider creating a coalition with a set of principles you will follow throughout the process. Redistricting can be a divisive issue, where groups can be manipulated and pitted against each other for someone else's gain.
- Identify potential partners from the communities around you. They may have similar interests and working together may help achieve your goals. Find out who else is working on redistricting in your area, especially those who are drawing full maps. Ask groups to keep your community together in their maps. Redistricting does not happen in a vacuum.

CLARIFY YOUR GOALS

There can be benefits to working on redistricting beyond creating a map that will help hold elected officials accountable, such as giving your issues a wider audience through the media, helping to organize more people to work together, or gaining the attention of more legislators. However, redistricting can be a lengthy process. Working on it can take a lot of time and resources. It is important to be clear about why you want to work on redistricting and how it will help your cause.

These larger goals will help determine which level(s) of redistricting (state, city, or school board, etc.) in which you will participate. Another decision you will need to make is the kind of map you want to present. The things that will impact your choice are your resources, partnerships, and the larger interests of elected officials. There are two main options: community of interest map or a regional or full plan map.

- A community of interest map outlines the borders of your community that you want incorporated into a single district. This map will involve less work to research, create, and organize around.
- Regional or full maps will have the district lines for a significant area or the entire state or local area and follows its redistricting rules. This kind of map is harder to develop but will best show how your community can be respected at the same time as other communities.

DEFINE YOUR COMMUNITY and TESTIFY AT HEARINGS

Being a community member means that you know your neighborhood the best. You can help shape its future by telling the story of your community the way you want it to be told. It also prevents others who may not have your best interest in mind from defining you or ignoring your community entirely. You can do this defining your community of interest, which describes a community through community stories, narrative descriptions, and boundary maps. There is a variety of new technology, like mapping tools, that are designed to be used by community members. While community expertise is most important, working with political scientists, GIS or mapping experts, and historians can be helpful if you have access to a local university. Present your stories and research during public hearings and meetings with decision makers. (See **Rules of Redistricting: Communities of Interest** and **Getting Involved: Preparing Your Testimony**)

ADVOCATE FOR YOUR COMMUNITY

Community members can attend and participate in redistricting hearings. Here are some ways to prepare:

- Research who the final decision-makers are. Several states and local areas have changed the way they carry out redistricting. Understanding your audience will help you craft strategies that will be most effective in swaying them. In most areas, legislators are still the primary decision-makers. The strategies to influence them are like those used to pass a law. Other kinds of redistricting processes include independent commissioners and advisory commissions. (See **Getting Involved: Strategies for Different Redistricting Processes.**)
- Research the timelines, rules, and process type of redistricting your state or local area is using. Federal and state redistricting often starts before local efforts.
- Find out the hearing schedule and the rules for testifying, such as registering, time limits, and submitting written testimony into the record.
- Be prepared to participate early and often. Being at hearings early in the process will let decision makers know you are serious.
- Connect with civil rights groups who are drafting maps for your area. Make your concerns known and work with them to keep your community together in their maps
- Staying engaged will let you respond quickly to proposed ideas and maps. Since this can be a long process, organizing more people to cover the different hearings will spread the workload to more than a small set of people or organizations.
- Monitor the process and give feedback on the maps as to whether they meet your (or your coalition's) goals.

Getting Involved: Prepare Your Testimony

An important way for your community to have your voices heard during redistricting is by providing testimonies. This information can be presented at public hearings or in meetings with legislators to advocate that your community be kept together. (See **Rules of Redistricting: Communities of Interest**) Use the questions below as prompts to prepare your testimonies.

INTRODUCTION

Introduce yourself, your organization, and/or coalition.

- Describe yourself, the organizations with which you are working, and with whom you work.
- What are your goals? Keeping your community together, uniting your communities, or recommending a larger map with coalition partners.

Example: “My name is _____. I’ve been a resident of [neighborhood, place] for ____ years. I’m here with a group of my neighbors. I would like the [Commission, Committee, etc.] to keep my community together.”

DESCRIBE A MAP OF YOUR COMMUNITY

Describe the boundaries, significant landmarks, and gathering places.

- What are the streets or boundaries that mark your community borders on each side?
- What are the significant landmarks: rivers, parks, shopping areas, or historic sites, etc.?
- What are the gathering places: shopping districts, schools, community centers, religious places, and social service agencies?
- Do the current political district boundaries divide your community? Or do they keep your community together?

Example: “As you can see on the map that we submitted for our community of interest Riverside South: The northern boundary is the river, the eastern boundary is Highway 10, the southern boundary extends to Main Street, and the western edge goes to the city boundary where we meet the next town. Almanson Park by the river is where the neighbors gather to celebrate... Our community is currently divided into 2 city council districts and represented by two city council members.”

DESCRIBE YOUR COMMUNITY

Describe your community by including social and economic demographics, and narrative information about its history and culture. Describe what connects the people and why it’s important that they be kept together.

- **Include stories.**
 - Imagine describing your community to a visitor from out of town.
 - Who lives in your community? What kinds of things do they do for a living?
 - Does your neighborhood have celebrations or traditions, like street festivals or parades?
 - Are there important places where people gather, like shopping areas, places of worship, parks or community centers? Is there a place that is the largest employer?
 - What is the history of how your community came together?

Example: “My Little Cambodia neighborhood is where many new immigrants move to first when they come to the city. In the 1980s, it was mostly Southeast Asian. There was a small shopping district where people come in from all over to get Asian groceries and other goods. Along the main road of that area, there is a parade each year celebrating Lunar New Year.”

DESCRIBE YOUR COMMUNITY (continued)

- **Include data from reliable sources such as the U.S. Census Bureau as another way to describe your community and what neighbors have in common.** This will make the case stronger.
 - What is the average level of education or graduation rates? What is the average income level? Are there common occupations or jobs people have?
 - What kind of housing is common? Single family homes, large apartment buildings? Do people rent or own their homes?
 - Are neighbors mostly immigrants? Is there a common language? How do neighbors rate their level of English?
 - What are the different ancestries, races, and ethnicities of the neighborhood? (Race and ethnicity may be one factor, but it cannot be the predominant reason that a community is unique and needs to be kept united during redistricting.)

Example: “My neighborhood is working class, low to median income families mostly renters. The median household income is \$32,000. Many of our residents moved from the South to this neighborhood to build a new life.”

- **Description of how your community is different or alike from the communities around you**—Highlighting community issues in personal stories and written narratives help demonstrate the importance of having elected officials who understand and respond to community needs. Share stories and data about community concerns and if you feel like your voices have been heard and your needs have been met.
 - Has your community come together to advocate for important services, like more translated information, or health centers in your neighborhood?
 - Have you worked for more recognition or support of your community, like having holidays recognized or historical events commemorated?
 - What harms have been caused because your voice has been ignored, like poor health caused by pollution from nearby coal plants or industrial farms? What are the barriers to solving these issues?
 - What kind of relationship do you have with elected officials in your area? Are you able to meet with them?
 - Use data on income, education, housing, etc. to compare your neighborhood to ones nearby.

Example: “A few years ago, my neighbors and I started complaining about the lack of affordable healthy food. We found that there were ten liquor stores, and the closest grocery store was almost two miles away. Like Green Heights, our neighborhood of Hamilton South is working hard to bring a food market in. The neighborhood to the north has two grocery stores...”

CLOSING

- Thank the members of the redistricting body (city council, school board, commission, committee, etc.)
- Provide them with written testimony and exhibits.
- Restate your goals, acknowledge your community members and partners in attendance, and thank the members.

Example: “I believe my neighborhood should be kept together for the many reasons our coalition members have outlined. I want to thank the commissioners for their consideration of keeping my neighborhood together.”

Getting Involved: Strategies for Different Redistricting Processes

The redistricting process varies in each state and local area. Knowing the process your area uses and who you need to sway is important to designing an effective advocacy strategy. Much of redistricting is still done using a legislative process, but more and more, commissions are being used. Commissions are smaller groups that have been given the power to draw, and often, approve maps.

KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE

Knowing your audience and how to reach them are key parts of your strategy. Research the decision makers to understand their influence and relationships. Also research the importance of public hearings and how to participate and monitor them

- Who are the decision makers?
- How are they selected or who selects them? What relationship does the commissioner have to the person or entity appointing them?
- What relationships do you or people you know have with them?
- How important are hearings or lobbying to making an impact?
- How will you be able to participate?

Use the descriptions and suggestions below to refine your strategies to best impact the decision-making group. A basic strategy starts with these activities (See **Getting Involved: Core Strategies for Impacting Maps**):

- Organize your community.
- Build your coalitions.
- Set your goals, including whether you are presenting a community map or whole map.
- Prepare your testimony (See **Getting Involved: Preparing Your Testimony**).

Legislative Process

Who Decides:

Lawmakers, such as city council members or county commissioners, draw and vote to pass new district lines. In some cases, the maps also require the Governor/Mayor's approval.

Key Features:

- ❖ Behind the scenes lobbying often takes place (not always transparent).
- ❖ Notice for public hearings may be difficult to find, or not posted timely or distributed widely.

Strategies:

- ❖ Organize people to testify at hearings with a common message.
- ❖ Advocate to keep your community together.
- ❖ Advocate for a transparent and open process.
- ❖ Use legislative advocacy tactics like ones used to pass a law:
 - Find decision makers who are allies.
 - Meet with key lawmakers and influencers (committee chairs, donors, community leaders).
 - Advocate with the Governor or Mayor if s/he approves the maps.
- ❖ Exert external pressure (traditional and social media, letters of support, phone banking, rallies).

Independent Commission

Who Decides:

An independent commission is composed of individuals selected by an appointment or screening process conducted by an independent entity, like a state supreme court. They can be elected officials, but not from the body for which the map is being drawn.

Key Features:

- ❖ Commissions usually have clearly stated redistricting criteria.
- ❖ Public hearings are the main way to have community voice heard.
- ❖ Many people are giving input, which may make it harder for your message to break through.
- ❖ Hearing notices and maps should be publicly posted and available.
- ❖ No lobbying behind the scenes takes place.

Strategies:

- ❖ Encourage your community members to apply to become commissioners.
- ❖ Organize as many people as possible to testify at hearings with a common message. Hearings are more important, because it is unlikely that you will be able to talk to a commissioner directly about your proposal.
- ❖ Exert external pressure: traditional and social media, op-eds, letters of support, rallies, etc.

Variations on Redistricting Processes

There are other types of redistricting process. If your area uses a variation like the ones listed below, use the previous questions to understand who holds the decision-making power. Effective strategies may be a combination of the above activities, because hearings may be an important feature, and the commissioners are often elected officials. A final strategy to keeping your community together may be to consider challenging the maps in court.

Advisory commission – A commission that draws a map for consideration by another body such as a legislature. Unlike other commissions, an advisory commission does not have the legal power to pass a binding map. Membership of an advisory commission may consist of legislators, non-legislators, or a mix.

Backup commission – A commission that draws plans only if the legislature cannot agree on a map or when the governor vetoes a proposal and no new map is passed.

Political appointee commission – A commission composed, in whole or in part, of individuals who are directly appointed by elected officials or party leadership. In some states, the membership of a political appointee commission is evenly divided between parties but, in other states, there could be more members of one party than the other.

Politician commission – A commission composed entirely of lawmakers or other elected officials. Politician commissions usually are appointed by the legislative or party leadership, the governor, or chief justice of the state supreme court.

Redistricting: Key Terms

Census – The counting and survey of every person in a population. In the U.S., a census is taken every ten years. The census is required by the Constitution for reapportionment and is used in the redistricting process.

Census Bureau – The federal government agency that administers the census.

Citizen Voting Age Population (CVAP) – Citizen Voting Age Population (CVAP) is the total population age 18 and over and a citizen. **(Related to VAP)**

Coalition District – A district where the combined racial minorities make up a majority of the population and where the voters from these different racial groups vote together to elect the minority-preferred candidate. Coalition districts are not legally required by the Voting Rights Act. **(Also called Minority Coalition District)**

Community of Interest – A neighborhood, community, or group of people who have common policy concerns and would benefit from being maintained in a single district.

Compactness – Compactness refers to the shape of the district. It describes boundaries that are drawn closely and neatly packed together unless there are good reasons such as VRA compliance or following oddly shaped boundaries, like city boundaries or rivers.

Contiguity – A characteristic describing a boundary's single and uninterrupted shape (i.e. all areas in the district are physically connected to each other).

Cracking – A splitting of a racial minority community into two or more districts so that the minority community is not a significant portion of any district. For example, cracking occurs when a minority population is big enough that it can make up 50% of one district but, instead, is divided into two or more districts so that the minority community makes up a small percentage in each district.

Crossover or Opportunity District – A district where some majority voters “cross over” to vote with racial minorities to elect the minority-preferred candidate. Crossover or opportunity districts are not legally required by the Voting Rights Act.

Deviation and Deviation Range – A district's **Deviation** is the difference of a district's population from the Ideal Population. The redistricting plan's **Deviation Range** is the plan's largest deviation to the plan's smallest deviation.

Ideal Population – The total population goal for districts in a redistricting plan. It is computed by taking the total population of the jurisdiction and dividing it by the total number of districts in the redistricting plan.

Incumbency (criteria) – Making sure the current elected official's house remains in a district.

Influence District – A district where a racial or ethnic minority group does not make up a majority of voters but does have enough members of the minority group to influence substantially an election or the decisions of an elected representative.

Gerrymandering – Drawing of district lines to give one group an unfair advantage over another group. Gerrymandering is *not* the same as redistricting, but gerrymandering can occur during redistricting. Drawing majority-minority districts to comply with the Voting Rights Act is *not* gerrymandering.

GIS (Geographic Information System) – Computer software used to create redistricting maps.

Majority-Minority District – A district where one racial minority equals 50% or more of the citizen voting-age population. In combination with a few other factors, a majority-minority district may be required by the VRA. **(See Rules of Redistricting: The Voting Rights Act)**

Minority vote dilution – Drawing districts which result in minority voters having less of a chance of electing their candidate(s) of choice. This is often done by “**packing**” or “**cracking**.”

Nesting – A redistricting rule where each upper house (such as the state senate) district is made up of two lower house districts (such as the state assembly).

One Person, One Vote – The Equal Population rule. A phrase that describes the constitutional requirement that each district be substantially equal in total population. Typically, this means that every district in a redistricting plan should contain the same number of people, regardless of age or citizenship.

Packing – An overconcentration of a minority population into a suboptimal number of districts. For example, packing occurs when a minority population makes up 90% of the district instead of two districts where the minority population makes up 50% of each district.

Reapportionment – The redistribution of seats in the U.S. House of Representatives based on changes in a state’s population. This occurs so that a state’s representation in Congress is proportional to its population. Reapportionment is not redistricting, although some states use the terms interchangeably.

Redistricting – The process used by governments to redraw political district boundaries and applies to all levels of government where district elections are held. Maps are redrawn every ten years after the Census to create districts with substantially equal populations to, at minimum, account for population shifts. There are many types of **Redistricting Processes (see Strategies for Different Redistricting Processes)**

Totality of circumstances – A consideration of all the circumstances to decide a case, rather than any one factor or rule.

Unity Map – A proposed map drawn by a coalition of multiple community groups that demonstrates their multiple communities of interest can be simultaneously respected.

Voting Age Population (VAP) – The total population ages 18 and over. **(Related to CVAP)**

Voting Rights Act (VRA) – The federal legislation passed in 1965 to ensure state and local governments do not pass laws or policies that deny American citizens the equal right to vote based on race. Section 2 of the VRA protects voters from discrimination based on race, color, or membership in a language minority group in all election procedures.