

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.