

HOW TO INFLUENCE THE PROCESS

Citizens and community organizations can influence the redistricting process, even within the status quo, to ensure better representation. The following are some tips describing how.

Once the official census count is in, redistricting in each state will begin — but you don't have to wait until then to get a jumpstart on redistricting work.

Identify and map local communities. Several states explicitly require consideration of communities of interest; political pressure can effectively force other states to consider them as well. Communities of interest, however, are notoriously difficult to identify concretely. You can assist advocates, legislators, and others responsible for drawing district lines by mapping boundaries of local communities that should be kept together within a district — or if a sizable community prefers to be split in order to influence a larger number of representatives, drawing lines that show where the most appropriate splitting point is. Convene community forums and town meetings, get out the road maps, and put pen to paper to define where recognizable communities start and stop.

Demand and attend hearings. In several states, redistricting bodies are required to hold public hearings; in others, those in charge of redistricting may be prodded privately or publicly into allowing some forum for public input. If there are hearings, get the hearing schedule as early as possible, and mobilize community attendance: the more people who make their voices heard about the lines that would serve their needs, the more likely it is that districts eventually follow those lines. Also, it will be important to demand hearings or a public comment period not only before draft maps are produced, but afterward, to ensure that those who draw the lines hear about the impact their proposed decisions will have.

Present community maps to those who draw the lines. If there are public hearings, present maps of your community's boundaries at the hearings. If not, send proposed maps to your legislators, along with petitions showing numerical support for the districts you prefer. As above, the more you can emphasize the maps that *should* be drawn, the more likely they are to be reflected in the final product.

Develop alternative maps. You may also want to step beyond maps of local communities, to redistrict the state (or city, or county) as a whole. Those who are drawing the lines have to develop multiple maps in a relatively short period of time. If you are able to give them a model, they will be able to use that model as a reference point. And in the event that the maps they draw end up in court, courts will often look to alternative maps for guidance.

Educate the media. Media outlets — particularly print and web media — are usually wary of self-interested government actors, and will be very interested in the redistricting process as it unfolds, and in the political impact of the final maps. Few, however, understand the redistricting process in detail. You have an opportunity to educate the media in 2009 and 2010, to let them know about how the redistricting process works, and how you think it should work, to drive media coverage of the process to focus on the goals you think most important.