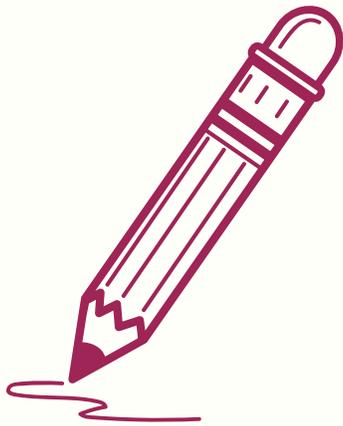


# ALL ABOUT REDISTRICTING: EMPOWERING OUR COMMUNITIES

## WHO SHOULD CARE ABOUT REDISTRICTING?

**You!** Redistricting has been used in the past to exclude our communities from political power. How district lines are drawn influences who runs for public office and who is elected. The lines also affect how responsive elected representatives are to your community when they make decisions important to your lives, from ensuring safe schools to adopting immigration policies. These lines should reflect the interests of everyone living in the district—including children, non-citizens and those who cannot vote. Because district boundaries are in place for the next ten years, the impact of their policies can last well beyond that.

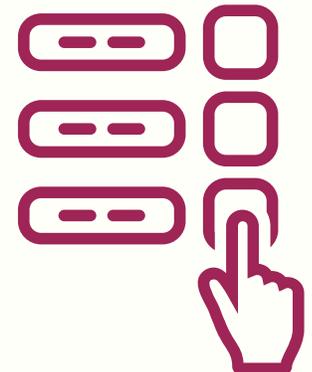


## WHAT IS REDISTRICTING?

**Redistricting is the process of redrawing 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, and more. Redistricting is based on the idea that each district should have about the same size population, which makes sure that each of our voices can be represented equally. Census data that are collected every ten years are used to draw new maps to account for the ways that populations have changed and moved across states and districts.

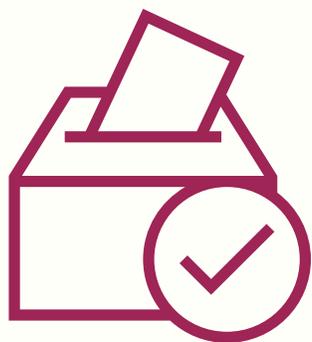
## WHEN DOES REDISTRICTING OCCUR?

**Redistricting typically takes place in the year after the census.** States and local areas have their own timelines for redrawing districts, based on when they get their census data and when their next elections will be. The most recent census was taken in 2020. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the US Census Bureau is releasing census data late. Most state and local redistricting will occur in fall of 2021 and spring of 2022.



# WHERE DOES REDISTRICTING HAPPEN AND WHO MAKES THE DECISION?

All states and local government bodies that use districts to elect representatives will redistrict. In most states, the state or local government is responsible for redistricting. Most state legislatures are responsible for drawing congressional and state legislative districts. Local governments are responsible for redistricting their own districts. Some states and local areas instead use a commission to carry out redistricting responsibilities. [Check with your state or local government](#) to learn about where, when, and how redistricting is happening in your area, so you can have a voice in the process.



## WHY IS GETTING INVOLVED IN REDISTRICTING IMPORTANT?

By fully participating in and monitoring the upcoming redistricting process, underrepresented communities, such as Asian 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.

## HOW CAN I GET INVOLVED?

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 collectively. Many of the steps to participate in redistricting are the same activities involved in having your voices heard in government.



### 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.

# HOW CAN I GET INVOLVED? (CONTINUED)

## CLARIFY YOUR GOALS

- What issues do you and your neighbors care about?
- What level(s) of government impact those issues?
- Do you want to advocate for a community of interest or a whole map plan?
  - A community of interest is a group with shared interests and traits. You can explain to the map-drawer where your community is and advocate to be kept together in one district or kept with neighboring communities that are similar to yours.
  - You can also work in coalitions to create a whole district map proposal and advocate for the map-drawer to draw a map like yours.
- How does influencing the maps help your cause?

## DEFINE YOUR COMMUNITY OR SOMEONE ELSE WILL

- Engage your neighbors or coalition on creating community profiles to share with the map-drawers.
- Collect community impact stories.

## TESTIFY AT HEARINGS

- Research the process for redistricting in your area: 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) to the redistricting map-drawers.
- Present maps, community profiles, and impact stories.

## ADVOCATE FOR YOUR COMMUNITY

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

# STORIES OF ASIAN AMERICANS AND REDISTRICTING

## CHICAGO CHINATOWN

After 2001 redistricting, Chicago Chinatown was split into four city wards, three state senate districts, four state house districts and three congressional districts. Since the Asian American community only made up a small part of each elected officials' constituencies, none of the elected officials knew the community (or its needs) well and thus, their concerns and issues went unaddressed.

For example, by the 2000s, Chinatown's library was too dated and small to service the community. Starting in 1972 in a small storefront on Wentworth Avenue and moving to an 11,000-square-foot rental facility in 1990, the Chinatown library branch became one of the busiest in the Chicago Public Library system and became too small for the number of children, youth adults and seniors that used the facility. In the afternoon and weekends, children were sitting on the floor as there was no other space for them to read and study. **Unfortunately, despite advocacy by the community for a new, larger library, they were not successful while Chinatown was split across all those districts.** After the last redistricting cycle, 95% of the Chinese Americans living in the greater Chinatown area were included in Illinois State Senate District #1 and Illinois House of Representative District #2. Chinatown finally got a new two-story library in 2015 – one that was 45% larger than the previous structure.

## SAN JOSE, CALIFORNIA

Berryessa is a neighborhood in San Jose, California and has been home to a majority Asian American population for decades. During the 2001 redistricting process, the legislature cut up the neighborhood into four assembly districts and two state senate districts. Instead of being nearly 10 percent of an assembly district, the community became a small percentage in the different districts. Dividing the neighborhood made it difficult for the residents to combine their forces and appeal to their state representatives when it came to public health policies and budgetary issues. Fortunately, in 2011, the residents advocated to the newly created redistricting commission to be kept whole, and the commission complied.

## NEW YORK

In New York, redistricting advocacy by civil rights organizations successfully sought to keep the Asian American community in Queens (in Flushing/Bayside, Elmhurst and Briarwood/Jamaica Hills) intact within Congressional District 6. Asian Americans of voting age made up 37.9% of the district's population when the map was drawn. In November 2012, Grace Meng won that seat, becoming the first and only Asian American member of Congress from New York State and the first female Congressmember from Queens since former Vice-Presidential nominee Geraldine Ferraro. Serving her fourth term in the United States House of Representatives, Meng is a member of the House Appropriations Committee and its Subcommittees on State and Foreign Operations, Homeland Security, and Commerce, Justice, Science and Related Agencies. In this position, **Meng has been a strong and important champion for Census funding issues**, and has passed several pieces of legislation, including laws about religious freedom, making Queens historic sites part of the National Park Service, striking "Oriental" from federal law, and protecting public housing residents from insufficient heat.

# THE BASIC RULES OF

# REDISTRICTING

**POWER**  
on the **LINE(S)**  
Making Redistricting  
Work for Us

[READ OUR NEW GUIDE](#)

The maps drawn beginning in 2021 will determine the allocation of **political power** and **representation** at every level of government across the nation for at least the **next ten years.**

**LDF**  
DEFEND. EDUCATE. EMPOWER.

**MALDEF**

ASIAN AMERICANS  
ADVANCING  
JUSTICE  
AAIJC

## OVERVIEW

There are a lot of ways a district map can be drawn, but map-drawers must follow some basic rules. 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 are more flexible, unless specifically identified as a priority by local laws. Understanding the rules used by your local government will help you advocate more effectively.

## 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 guaranteed by 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 so that these communities have the opportunity to elect candidates of their choice.

# THE BASIC RULES OF

# REDISTRICTING (CONT.)

## COMMON REDISTRICTING CRITERIA [1]

There are several other redistricting criteria that are commonly used in states and local governments. None of these criteria are more important than the ranked, required criteria above.

### PROTECT 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 below for more details about 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, preserving communities of interest, 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.).

### 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.

[1] 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.

# THE BASIC RULES OF

## REDISTRICTING (CONT.)

### COMMUNITIES OF INTEREST

Identifying **Communities of Interest** and advocating for them to be considered in the maps can be an important tool for Asian American communities across the country in the redistricting process. It allows for communities to identify and illustrate the contours of their community to those drawing the lines, as well as other community members.

#### 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**. It is 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. **When a community is kept whole in a district, it can more effectively elect candidates who will pay attention to their issues.** Stepping up to define your community and sharing with the map-drawers is important. Community members can define their communities by telling their own stories and describe their concerns to map-drawers. Without this, those who may not have their best interest in mind will define the communities for them.

#### HOW CAN I DEFINE 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. **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. (See next page)

# THE BASIC RULES OF

## REDISTRICTING (CONT.)

### PERSONAL TESTIMONIES

**Personal stories are powerful.** Find community members willing to share examples of what residents share in common and what makes your community unique. Imagine describing your community to an out-of-town visitor. *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 is 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, and other sources.

### 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 helps 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 the area where your community of interest lives.** 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.

# ALL ABOUT REDISTRICTING: EMPOWERING OUR COMMUNITIES

## WHY COLLECT THESE COMMUNITY OF INTEREST MATERIALS?

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.

*For more detailed information about the redistricting process, please check out the following materials (which served as source materials for this factsheet):*

### **POWER ON THE LINE(S): MAKING REDISTRICTING WORK FOR US**

*(Asian Americans Advancing Justice | AAJC, MALDEF (Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund), and NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund) — a comprehensive guide to redistricting, aimed at empowering Black, Latino, and Asian American communities, as well as other marginalized communities, to be actively engaged participants.*

### **A GENERAL REDISTRICTING GUIDE**

*(MALDEF, Common Cause, and State Voices) — a series of factsheets providing a general guide to redistricting. Korean, Simplified/Traditional Chinese, Spanish, and Vietnamese translations available.*