

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.

The census

Redistricting starts with the federal census. The census count is the starting point for redistricting 435 congressional districts, 7382 state legislative districts, and countless local government districts. It impacts local decisions on where to place schools, transit hubs, hospitals, retail centers, and more. And about \$ 400 **billion** in federal funding, **every year**, is based in whole or in part on the census. For every 1000 people who are not counted, a community loses \$ 1.2 **million** annually in federal funds. It's important to get this right.

- **Educate your community.** The main census form this year will be one page, front and back, with 7 easy questions about each person in the household; citizenship status is not one of the 7 questions. Show people the form, to help them get familiar with it. Help them understand that, by law, any official census taker has to pass a background check, and that census answers are **100% confidential**. And in emails and community forums and signature drives and the like, encourage **everyone** in the community to fill one out.
- **Recruit census takers.** The census offers part-time work for people who are willing to go house-to-house as census takers. Community response to the census is better when a member of the community is asking. Encourage members of your community to apply.
- **Become a census partner.** Census partners do not get direct monetary grants, but they will have preferred access to communications materials and promotional items. Apply to be a partner, to best spread the Census Bureau's resources.
- **Staff a help center.** Most forms are sent in the mail. To supplement this, 40,000 "Be Counted" sites across the country will help distribute forms, and 30,000 Questionnaire Assistance Centers will help people fill the forms out, including translation help for those who don't speak the six languages for which there are preprinted Census Bureau forms: English, Spanish, Chinese, Korean, Vietnamese, and Russian.
- **Focus on "hard-to-count" areas.** The Census Bureau has designated certain areas as "hard to count," reflecting past undercounts; maps of these areas are available. It is especially important to focus resources on these areas, to ensure that the count is complete.
- **Fight the "boycott".** Some groups have recently suggested that they will urge a boycott of the census, to protest government policy concerning immigration and undocumented persons. Most advocates for minority and immigrant communities believe this to be counterproductive: a boycott will only deprive undercounted populations of representation and resources, without achieving policy change. Moreover, a boycott has harmful effects well beyond those who take part; without data to guide their choices, officials are forced to make policy blindfolded.

Redistricting

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.