

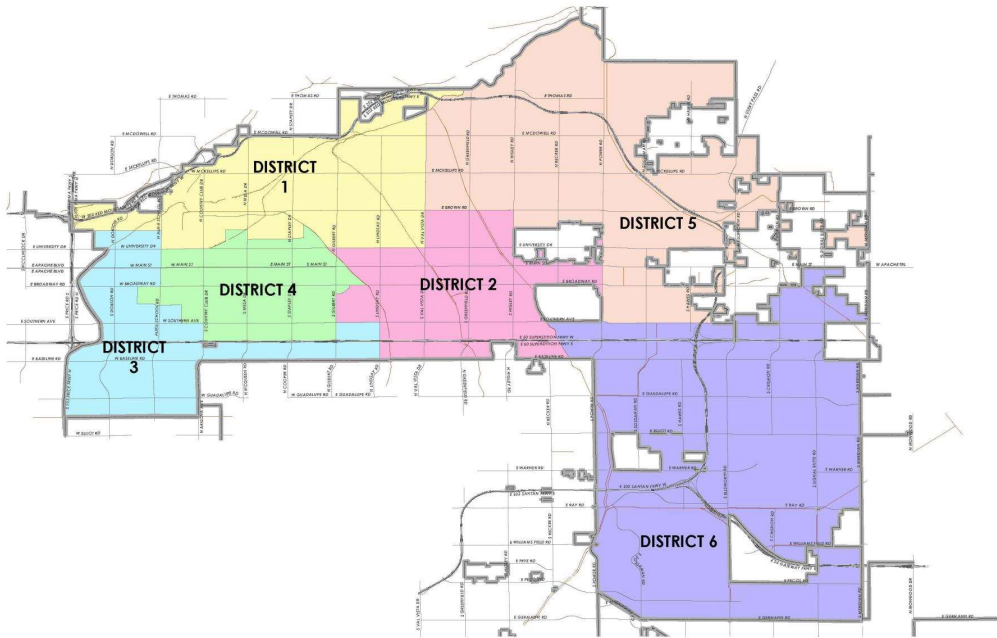


Communities of Interest and Public Input

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Overview



Why are Communities of Interest Important?

Defining “Communities of Interest”

Challenges in Implementation

Designing Public Input Strategies

Why are Communities of Interest Important?

- Closely Tied to Public Input
- Can Obtain Information Prior to Receipt of 2020 Census Data
- Can Serve as Building Blocks for Districts
- Can Provide a Basis for Distinctions and District Boundaries
- One of Multiple Redistricting Criteria
 - May Intersect with Other Criteria, such as Voting Rights Act Compliance
 - May Be in Tension with Other Criteria, such as Population Equality or Compactness

Defining “Communities of Interest”

- No Fixed Definition or Ranking in Mesa City Charter
- Arizona Congressional/State-Level Redistricting
 - Arizona Constitution: “District boundaries shall respect communities of interest to the extent practicable.”
 - Arizona Case Law: Deference to Commission and Allowed Flexibility
- Definitions Vary, But Typically Focus on Shared or Common Interests Among Groups or Neighborhoods Tied to Representation

Defining “Communities of Interest”

- Examples of Definitions or Guidelines:
 - California Fair Maps Act (Local Redistricting):
 - “A ‘community of interest’ is a population that shares common social or economic interests that should be included within a single district for purposes of its effective and fair representation.”
 - Montana Discretionary Guidelines:
 - “Communities of interest can be based on such things as trade areas, geographic locations, communication and transportation networks, media markets, Indian reservations, urban/rural splits, similarity in social cultural and economic interests, and prevalent occupations and lifestyles.”

Defining “Communities of Interest”

Colorado:

- (I) "Community of interest" means any group in Colorado that shares one or more substantial interests that may be the subject of federal [or state] legislative action, is composed of a reasonably proximate population, and thus should be considered for inclusion within a single district for purposes of ensuring its fair and effective representation.

- (II) Such interests include but are not limited to matters reflecting:
 - (A) Shared public policy concerns of urban, rural, agricultural, industrial, or trade areas; and
 - (B) Shared public policy concerns such as education, employment, environment, public health, transportation, water needs and supplies, and issues of demonstrable regional significance.

- (III) Groups that may comprise a community of interest include racial, ethnic, and language minority groups, subject to compliance with subsections [that] . . . protect against the denial or abridgement of the right to vote due to a person's race or language minority group.

Defining “Communities of Interest”

- Examples of Exclusions:
 - Austin, TX:
 - “Communities of interest shall not include relationships with political parties, incumbents, or political candidates.”
 - But see Mesa City Charter: “The redrawing of district boundaries shall not remove the residence of an incumbent Councilmember from the district he was elected to represent during his term in that office.”

Defining “Communities of Interest”

- Local Government Example – Neighborhoods Near an Airport
 - Geographic Proximity
 - Common Policy Issues:
 - Noise Abatement
 - Traffic
 - Zoning
 - Additional Commonalities:
 - Income Levels
 - Property Values; Renter vs. Homeowner

Defining “Communities of Interest”

- Special Consideration: Race or Ethnicity
 - Close Relationship to Federal Voting Rights Act
 - Federal Constitutional Issues When Using Race as a “Predominant Factor”
 - Should Look at Multiple Factors That Overlap With Race
 - E.g., Neighborhood Proximity, Socioeconomic Status
 - Be Attentive to Geography and Population Concentrations, As Well As Dispersion

Challenges in Implementation

- Definitions
 - Open-Ended vs. Enumerated
 - Importance of Fitting Within District Boundaries
- Relative Rankings of Redistricting Criteria
- Subjective vs. Objective Information
 - Public Comments, Testimony, Maps
 - Corroborating Information, Including Census Data
- Gaps in Information
- Inconsistent Information
- Manipulability

Designing Public Input Strategies

- Education and Outreach
- Accessibility Issues: Disability, Language
- Multiple Channels for Input
 - Public Hearings and Testimony
 - Attention to Expanding Participation, Community Locations, Hours
 - Submissions
 - Commission-Generated Forms (e.g.: <https://drawmycacommunity.org>)
 - Low-Tech Can Be Just as Effective
 - Mesa-Specific Online Tools: DistrictR
- Iterative Mapping
 - Drafts and Comments