



Understanding Communities of Interest

Frequently Asked Questions

People Powered Fair Maps™ is a national redistricting program of the League of Women Voters focused on creating fair political maps nationwide in all 50 states + D.C. One key component of assessing the 'fairness' of maps is by judging, to the extent possible, the preservation of communities of interest. Several states have constitutional provisions, laws, and/or redistricting guidelines that require keeping communities of interest intact as much as possible when drawing maps. Below we answer frequently asked questions about communities of interest.

1. What are communities of interest?

Communities of interest are groups of individuals with comparable legislative and community concerns based on similarities, and who therefore would benefit from cohesive representation in government. Another way of understanding a community of interest is that it is simply 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. Communities are defined by the local community members and are typically suburban, urban, or rural interests.

2. Can a community of interest be defined by race alone?

No. The Supreme Court decisions on racial gerrymandering make it clear that "race" by itself does not constitute a community of interest. Communities of interest can connote a racial, ethnic, or linguistic group but race and ethnicity cannot be used as the sole definition. The affinity group could be based on geographic, governmental, regional, social, cultural, historic, socio-economic, occupations, and/or lifestyles interests and may not reside in a county or municipal boundary. Shared interests could relate to transportation, school funding and administration, or public safety issues like fire and water or first responder resources. Preserving communities of interest would allow community members to band together to appeal to lawmakers regarding their shared interests.

Courts have created a "predominant factor" test to ensure race is not the "predominant" consideration in carving out communities of interest when drawing legislative districts. When racial homogeneity is present, it must be

combined with a “nonracial factor,” like socio-economic status, geographic similarities, or any other interest that binds the community or represents a unique and relevant shared resource.

The Court has repeatedly struck down maps (in Georgia, Texas, and North Carolina) because they failed the “predominate factor” test. In Georgia, new maps were approved by a federal court because legislators named Georgia’s “agrarian peanut district” and “poultry industry” as communities of interest instead of grouping districts based predominantly on race.

3. How do I identify communities of interest I am part of?

You are the expert of the communities you are part of. Based on the description of “communities of interest” provided above, you can think through the important parts of your community. One way to do this is to identify your social and economic spaces. Ask yourself a series of questions, such as:

- Where do I live?
- Where do I work?
- Where do I shop for groceries and other essentials?
- Where is the nearest hospital to me?
- Do I live near a body of water?
- What are the community spaces that I use with others? What are common spaces of community congregation?
- Where do I worship?
- Do I ride public transit? Where is the closest stop to me? Do people in my community rely on public transportation?
- What schools do or would my children attend? Does the school provide a valuable service or resource to the community?
- Does a specific industry drive resources near me (e.g. agricultural or automobile processing facility)?

4. Why should we organize communities of interest?

For redistricting to be as fair as possible, there needs to be input from many individuals and communities. We and our League members don't represent every community in our state, nor should we. We need to build meaningful relationships with people from other communities. We need to equip and



empower communities to advocate for their own interests during the redistricting process so that every person is adequately represented. You can use the same questions from above to help others self-identify the communities of interest they are a part of. Identifying communities of interest can also serve to unify their voices and give them more power and connection when advocating for issues they care about. Share opportunities for communities of interest to advocate for themselves in the redistricting process.

This could be through:

- Giving testimony at public hearings
- Sharing stories in a written or visual format
- Participating in the map-drawing process
- Volunteering for local PPFM/redistricting events
- Educating family, friends, and neighbors about redistricting

In the long run, helping organize communities of interest with your partners can build trust and mutual understanding of redistricting work. By demonstrating a commitment to reform and equity, you open the door to future collaboration and broader basebuilding.

5. What are some examples of communities of interest?

Over the past four redistricting cycles, courts have discussed the importance of recognizing communities of interest when drawing legislative maps, providing the following examples:

1. Hawaii's islands are each separate communities of interest;
2. North Carolina's rural regions;
3. Georgia's coastal counties;
4. Pennsylvania's coal industry;
5. Colorado's mountain regions;
6. Texas's economically impoverished and needy areas;
7. Places that share churches/religion;
8. Areas within a single school district;
9. Cities with shared public transportation; and
10. Counties with shared broadcast and print media.



In conclusion, communities of interest are defined by people at the local level themselves. For example, a plaintiff in a lawsuit regarding Colorado's maps identified seven separate communities of interest shared by the city of Pueblo and the San Luis Valley region where she lived. These communities of interest included employment (Valley residents work in Pueblo), religion (the Diocese of Pueblo includes the Valley, which is 40% Catholic), education (Valley residents attend university and college in Pueblo), and health (Pueblo and the Valley share several hospitals and medical facilities). These communities of interest were presented to the court as reasons Pueblo and the Valley should not be split up in Colorado's legislative maps.