



# INDEPENDENT REDISTRICTING COMMISSIONS

## PRIMER AND BEST PRACTICES

### What is Redistricting?

Redistricting is the process of drawing and passing congressional, state legislative, and local district maps. At its root, redistricting is about achieving fair representation for all, but, if done wrong, redistricting can effectively silence voters, strip communities of much-needed resources, and lead to a loss of trust in our democracy.

### What are Independent Redistricting Commissions?

Independent Redistricting Commissions (IRCs) take the power of redistricting out of the hands of partisan legislators and put it in the hands of citizen commissioners who represent not only the two major parties but also independents and unaffiliated voters. They work to put citizens and communities at the center of redistricting decision-making and debate. IRCs provide a way to do redistricting *right* by ensuring a more equitable and transparent redistricting process, resulting in more representative maps and fostering trust in the electoral system.

During the 2021 redistricting cycle, nearly half of states had some kind of redistricting commission. But not all commissions are created equal. The structure and design of redistricting commissions, how commissioners are supported and empowered to serve, and the rules and procedures governing how commissions operate are all important pieces to consider in creating redistricting commissions. As explored in Campaign Legal Center's recent report, *Redistricting Commissions in the 2021 Cycle: Case Studies and Lessons Learned for 2031 and Beyond*, the 2021 redistricting cycle affirmed that true IRCs vested with the full authority of redistricting are the gold standard.

A TRUE IRC	NOT A TRUE IRC
<b>Independent:</b> Instead of legislators, citizen commissioners—Republicans, Democrats, and Independent or non-affiliated citizens—work together to create and pass district maps.	<b>Political or Bipartisan Commissions:</b> By either keeping the power of redistricting in the hands of politicians (Political) or evenly splitting redistricting power between the two major parties (Bipartisan), these structures frequently devolve into the same politicized process as legislative redistricting.
<b>Full Authority:</b> The most effective IRCs have complete authority to produce and approve maps without the legislature.	<b>Advisory Authority:</b> Limiting a commission to only suggesting plans that the legislature is not required to pass can effectively nullify the benefits of an IRC.

## BEST PRACTICES

The processes and outcomes of redistricting commissions in the 2021 redistricting cycle provide valuable lessons regarding the aspects of commission design that worked well and design choices that ought to be avoided, because they make commissions less effective.

### DESIGN:

#### CREATING A COMMISSION TO FACILITATE FAIR REDISTRICTING

Commissions are best structured to achieve the fundamental goals of redistricting reform when they are:

- 1 Truly independent and insulated from legislative and other political influence;
- 2 Vested with the full authority of redistricting;
- 3 Made up entirely of citizen commissioners who are broadly representative of the diversity of their state;
- 4 Evenly split between the primary political party, secondary political party, and independents; and
- 5 Large enough to disperse responsibilities, encourage collaboration and compromise, and prevent one or two outlier commissioners from derailing the process.

### BASELINES:

#### PROVIDING COMMISSIONERS WITH THE PROPER KNOWLEDGE, RESOURCES, AND STANDARDS

Commissions are best enabled to achieve the fundamental goals of redistricting reform when commissioners are:

- 1 Empowered to understand and make decisions regarding the complexities of redistricting;
- 2 Assisted by trustworthy and knowledgeable staff and advisors, selected through a process designed to give commissions a broad base of options; and
- 3 Guided by clearly defined and ranked criteria protective of the rights of every voter.

### FUNCTIONALITY:

#### ENSURING REDISTRICTING COMMISSIONS LIVE UP TO THEIR POTENTIAL

Commissions function best to achieve the fundamental goals of redistricting reform when:

- 1 Their decision-making and map-drawing processes are aimed toward building consensus as opposed to rewarding contention;
- 2 The redistricting process is participatory, inclusive, and transparent;
- 3 Commissions are required to demonstrate how the final maps incorporate public input; and
- 4 There is a clear, specific fallback mechanism that ensures the enactment of fair maps.



For more information, read Campaign Legal Center's report:  
**Redistricting Commissions in the 2021 Cycle:  
Case Studies and Lessons Learned for 2031 and Beyond**

