Hands-On Redistricting Simulation

NCSL Redistricting Seminar
Providence, Rhode Island
September 27-28, 2010

John Guthrie, Staff Director, Committee on Reapportionment
Florida Senate

Peter Wattson, Secretary of the Senate (Legislative) and
Senate Counsel, Minnesota Senate
Morning electives (9-11:30 am)

- Hands-on Redistricting Exercise

- American Demographics and the States
  Linda Jacobsen, Vice President, Population Reference Bureau, Washington, D.C., will review demographic trends expected to drive district lines in 2011.

- Redistricting Veterans Roundtable
  Karl Kurtz will facilitate an open-ended discussion for veterans and experts.
Afternoon electives (1-3:30 pm)

- Hands-on Redistricting Exercise
- American Demographics and the States
- Roundtable for VRA Section 5 States with Bob Berman, Deputy Chief, Civil Rights Division, U.S. Department of Justice
- “Do it yourselfers” select best plan (after Section 5 roundtable)
Tomorrow morning at 8:00 am

• Convene in the Biltmore Hotel Grand Ballroom for presentation of plans and judging.

• For each region, presenters chosen by the morning and afternoon groups will get 3 minutes to persuade the audience that their alternative best achieves the competing goals described by Peter Wattson.
Introduction to Hands on Redistricting Exercise

1. Introduction
The simulation gives participants first-hand experience with the technical ease and political difficulty of agreeing on a redistricting plan that can withstand legal challenge. For veterans, a roundtable session for peer-to-peer learning is scheduled as an alternative.

2. Concurrent Sessions
If you are going to participate in the redistricting simulation, you will be assigned to a specific committee to produce a plan either in the morning or afternoon. You will be given a ticket (blue or pink card) with your committee assignment. When not participating in the simulation, you can attend the session on demographics, the redistricting veterans roundtable or the Voting Rights Act Section 5 states roundtable.

3. Multiple Committees for Redistricting Simulation
Everyone participating in the simulation will be assigned to a particular room for either the morning or afternoon session. This helps balance the size of the small groups.

If you have a pink ticket, you will do the simulation at 9:00am. If you have a blue ticket, please go to the simulation at 1:00pm.

Room Assignments:
- Jaguar—Room 551
- Dolphin—Room 552
- Buccaneer—Room 553
- Mouse—Room 557
- Pink ticket—Morning—9:00am simulation
- Blue ticket—Afternoon—1:00pm simulation

*Bring your ticket to your assigned room to receive your role.

4. The Current Plan
Each region has 11 legislative districts that have been in place for a decade. Based on the new Census, each region now has exactly 1,000,000 residents, which is enough for only 10 districts. In your conference room you will get maps and statistics for the current plan, and you will learn details about the districts and incumbents.

5. Your Assignment
All 11 incumbents plus a mix of other interests are members of your committee. When you get to your conference room, you will learn what role you will play. Within the 2½ hours allowed, your committee must agree on a new 10-district plan for your region that satisfies population, voting rights, and contiguity requirements.

6. Organizing Your Committee
You will elect your own leadership and decide what directions to give the computer operator. The operator has technical skills to use the software, but must take direction from the committee through the chair about how to model districts. After agreeing on a complete plan, the committee will elect a spokesperson to present the plan Tuesday morning.

7. Presenting Your Plan
Participants in all three sessions (morning simulation, afternoon simulation, veterans’ roundtable) will meet Tuesday at 8am. Morning and afternoon plans for each region will compete for approval of the majority. Spokespersons get 3 minutes each to present their plans. They will address how their plan meets legal requirements and why it should be chosen over the alternative. After the two presentations, members of the audience may pose questions or make brief comments. The audience will then select the best plan. This process is repeated for each of the four regions.

8. Bottom Line
The point of the hands-on redistricting simulation is for all players to come away with a deeper understanding of what is required to work as a group to draw a map that can win majority support and withstand legal challenges. Each region has a unique flavor and each committee will find its own dynamic. Every time you participate, your experience will be different and your learning opportunities will expand.
Subdivide into 8 committees

- Tickets balance the size of the small groups.
- If you are not participating in the small group exercise, please do NOT take a ticket.
Tickets…

- 4 committees will meet this morning. If you have a pink ticket, go to your appointed room as soon as we break here.
- 4 committees will meet after lunch. If you have a blue ticket, go to your appointed room promptly at 1:00 this afternoon.
A special exception...

• If you want to take part in a small group AND you want to attend the Roundtable for Section 5 states this afternoon, request a pink ticket.

• Otherwise, please cooperate by accepting your appointment and showing up at your appointed place and time.
Tickets …

- Tickets also indicate where you will go. Each room has its own computer operator and its own region to redistrict.

- Let Tim Storey know if you must change your assigned time or group.
Redistricting Simulation

• The simulation is set in 5 separate regions. Each has exactly 1,000,000 people and exactly 11 districts.

• Morning and afternoon teams will compete in four regions: Buccaneer, Dolphin, Jaguar, and Mouse.

• Experts and veterans will compete to draw the best plan for the Butterfly region.
Focus on redistricting

• The point of this exercise is for you to experience first-hand the challenge of negotiating a politically acceptable solution among mutually exclusive goals.

• It is not a software demonstration.
Roll back the clock…


• Some data and map elements were created or updated specifically for the simulation.

• The incumbent districts and simulation scenarios are completely fictitious.
Malapportionment

• In each of the 5 regions, the 11 current districts were equally populated when enacted 10 years ago.

• The current districts now must be adjusted based on a new Census.

• Most significantly, each region now has enough population for only 10 districts.
Your assignment

• You must create a new 10-district plan that satisfies population, voting rights, and contiguity requirements.

• Your plan must appeal not only to the stakeholders in your room, but also to the entire assembly.
District information…

- When you get to your room, you will get district descriptions, maps, and statistics that describe the 11 current districts and their incumbents.
Your role

• At your appointed room, you also will learn your role in the simulation. Just as if you were acting in a play, your role is fictional.

• Everyone has a stake in the outcome: Eleven members of each committee are incumbents. Others are campaign managers.
Decorum

- You will elect your own leadership.
- The operator has technical skills to use the software, but must take direction from the committee *through the chair.*
Simulation software

- The software is FREDS 2010 District Builder, a program being developed by the Florida Senate for 2011-2012.
  - Emphasis on ease of use.
  - Emphasis on public access.
- Brief introduction to the tools you will use for the simulation…
Get organized quickly

• You have only 2½ hours to build all 10 districts.

• It is possible, but it will be difficult.
Study and strategize

- Before you start making assignments, study maps and statistics for the entire area and develop an overall strategy.

- For example, based on the thematic maps, you will see a positive correlation between African-American persons and Democratic voters. Think about what that means.
Work as a team

- Be considerate of others on your committee and mindful of their interests.
- Your job is to come up with a plan that achieves your goals, is acceptable to others in your group, and will be chosen over the alternative when plans are presented to the assembly tomorrow.
Call for help

• If you have technical difficulties or questions about the simulation, send for one of the facilitators:
  • Tim Storey,
  • Peter Wattson,
  • John Guthrie.

• We will be circulating among the rooms to help with technical issues.
Patience is a virtue

• As in any real redistricting scenario, there will be technical problems. Try not to get distracted by them.

• Your computer operators have had very little training. They are working with a statewide database containing more than 2 gigabytes of demographic and political information.
Preparing your presentation

- After completing your plan, choose a presenter.
- We will deliver to the presenter maps and statistics for your plan and the alternative (provide contact info to your operator).
- Presenters will study the plans and prepare a 3-minute argument describing what’s good about their plan and bad about the alternative.
Debriefing

- At 8:00 sharp tomorrow, we will reconvene in the Biltmore Grand Ballroom to judge plans.
- At the debriefing, we will consider one region at a time.
- Presenters for morning and afternoon plans will address the audience.
Vote and move on…

• The audience may pose questions, offer insights, or make brief arguments.

• The assembly then will pick one of the plans. If there is substantial disagreement, the matter will be left to the courts.

• This process is repeated for all 4 regions.
Governing Law

▪ Not a VRA § 5 jurisdiction
▪ VRA § 2
  ▶ Minorities politically cohesive
  ▶ Bloc voting by whites usually defeats preferred candidate
  ▶ History of discrimination
▪ Contiguity by water is sufficient
Get to Know the Lay of the Land

- Incumbents
- Minority populations
- Political party strength
- Political subdivisions
- Communities of interest
Don’t Sweat the Details Until Your Overall Plan is Set

- Starting off on the wrong track may be fatal
Draw Minority Districts First

- Violation of VRA § 2 is fatal error
- Determining whether a district can be drawn may take a long time
Work from Outside In

- Last district drawn will be ugly
- Districts on edges
  - Census units larger in area
  - Mistakes easier to see
  - Fewer districts with which to exchange territory
- Districts in center
  - Census units smaller in area
  - More districts with which to exchange territory
Work From the Top Down

- Counties
  - Cities & towns
    - Precincts
    - Census blocks
- Census tracts
  - Block groups
    - Census blocks
Pay Attention

- Don’t leave the room
- Don’t get distracted when they’re deciding whose district to eliminate
Consider Your Presentation

- Reasons why you did what you did
- What’s good about your plan?
- Why is it better than others?
- Three minute limit
Don’t Let the Perfect Be The Enemy of the Good

- Finish on time