Setting Up a Redistricting Office

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Questions to Ask in Advance

• Why?
• When?
• Who?
• Where?
• What?
• How?

These questions may seem obvious, but they will force you to think about all the parameters for the office.
Why?

Why are you establishing this office and what are the tasks for the office?

• Purpose
  • Redistricting (statutory, constitutional)
  • Other (between redistricting cycles)
• Items to be accomplished
  • Redistricting plans
  • Keep track of precinct boundaries?
  • Collect election data?
  • Other?
When?

What deadlines will the office have or need to meet?
- Constitutional
- Statutory
- Practical
Who?

Staffing

• Drawing districts
  • Legislators?
  • Staff?
  • Commission/board?
  • Vendor?
• Technical support
  • Full time staff?
  • Vendor?
• General staff
  • Legal counsel
Where?

Where will the office be located? The obvious answer may not be the correct one!

- Capitol building/campus/statehouse?
- Private building off-campus?
- Some other location?

Items to consider no matter where the office is located:

- Security (physical security of staff and equipment)
- Security (data)
- Janitorial staff
- Other access issues?
What?

What items will the office need to function and meet its responsibilities?

- Hardware and software
- Data (PL 94-171, election data, various geographic layers, other data?)
- Peripherals (printers, plotters, projectors)
- Data storage and sharing devices
- Office furniture
- Support items
How?

This question encompasses all of the decisions in terms of the methods, technology, processes, public participation/input, etc. that will govern or impact the redistricting process.

- Methods
  - Federal requirements
  - Redistricting criteria (constitutional and/or statutory)
    - Population deviations, nested districts or not, racial bloc voting analysis, compactness (and, if so, which measure(s))
  - State requirements for acquisition of hardware and software (RFPs/RFIs)
How? TECHNOLOGY

Software
- Standalone desktop licenses or internet based?
- What requirements will your state have and can the vendors meet these requirements?
- What type of output does your software need to provide? Metes and bounds? Bill language? Maps/images? Formats for things like Google Earth, etc?
- Technical support: length of contract? Cost? Availability? On-site or off-site?

Data
- Which years of election data? Which offices?
- Precinct boundary data (need the years to match the elections years you are using)
- Other boundary data / layers (source – Census or local/state provided?)
- Vendor designed database or in-house designed database?
- If you haven’t started, you’re already behind, so start now!
How? PROCESSES

What processes are required or will your state use in drawing maps?

- Draw maps first, present them to legislators and public and then make changes?
- Solicit input from all stakeholders first and then draw maps and present them?
- How and by whom will communities of interest be defined?
- What is the process to accept recommendations from other legislators or members of the public?
How? Public participation/input

• How will the public participate?
  • Map drawing? If so, via internet? Standalone computers?
    • Requirements for maps drawn by the public
    • How do those maps get submitted for review/consideration? Will the be reviewed and evaluated?
  • Testimony / comments on plans drawn by legislature/board/commission?
Final Thoughts (Learned the Hard Way!)

1. No matter when your P.L. 94-171 data arrive, you won’t be ready to start drawing districts! Plan some time to get the full redistricting database set up and put the software through its paces using real data.

2. Test all the features of the software you know you will need (reports, exporting data, etc.) before redistricting actually starts!

3. There WILL be problems/challenges/hiccups along the way – roll with them, be adaptable, and always keep the end goal in sight!