

PART III: RECOMMENDATIONS TO ENHANCE PUBLIC TRUST

In this third and final part of our redistricting series, we share **four recommendations** that can be implemented this year to increase Tennesseans' opportunities to participate in the redistricting process.

Last time, there were limited opportunities for public comment.

During the last redistricting cycle, legislators created new opportunities for the public to engage -- they provided a website and comment line and invited the public to submit draft maps. But **few people exercised these options**: Only four draft maps were submitted.

Looking ahead, allowing the public to be more involved will deepen civic engagement and build trust.

The boundaries legislators draw this year will quite literally change the electoral map in our state. For some voters, decisions about where the lines go will mean a change in who represents them in federal and state government.

As they prepare for this redistricting cycle, Tennessee legislators should consider **four ideas that have worked in other states**:

Recommendation One: Actively share information with constituents about opportunities to participate in the process.

Tennesseans should know **which legislators** will be making the decisions, **what process** they will use and **how and when** they plan to engage the public.

- As they did ten years ago, the House and the Senate should maintain **websites** that serve as one-stop shops for redistricting information.
- Legislators should **actively share** this information -- the same way they would information about a voter-registration drive or a town hall meeting -- with their constituents, e.g., through social media, in their newsletters and on their websites.

Examples from Other States



The **Arkansas** General Assembly issued a press release announcing its 2021 redistricting process.

The release, which is available on the General Assembly's website, provides an overview of the process, a general timeline and a notice that all committee meetings will be livestreamed for real-time participation.(i)



A *Guide to 2021 Redistricting* that details requirements, a timeline and additional information to help inform residents about the process is posted on the **Texas** legislature's website.(ii)

The Texas state senator who chairs the redistricting committee uses social media to promote redistricting hearings and invite public participation.(iii)

Recommendation Two: Host meetings to solicit community input on the redistricting process.

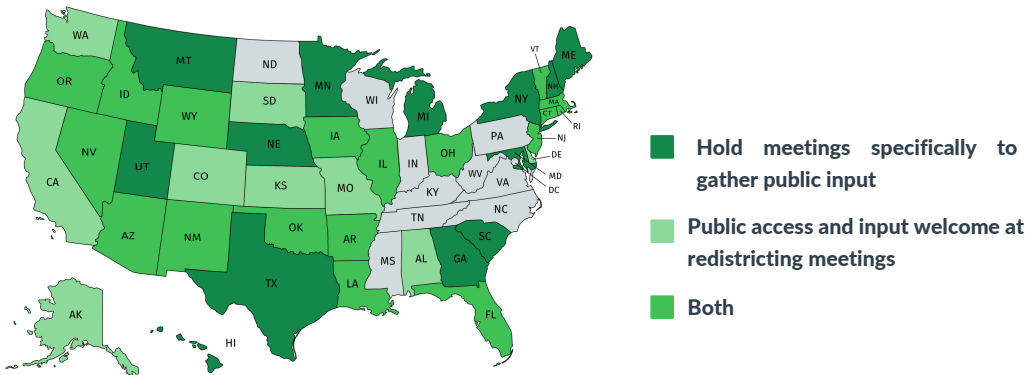
While Covid-19 may impact legislators' ability to hold in-person meetings, it also has provided them a window of opportunity to engage the public in redistricting discussions while awaiting the delayed census data.

- **Redistricting committees** should host **well-publicized community meetings** in **every Grand Division** through 2021. These meetings would allow the public to provide input on communities of interest, local preferences and other issues the legislature may take into consideration when drawing maps.
- **Every legislator** should hold in-person or virtual **meetings in their districts** to share information about the redistricting process and seek community input.

Examples from Other States

Most states host community meetings to gather input before maps are drawn.

- At least **32 states** hold **public meetings** to gather community input to inform map drawing.
- **26 states** allow public input at **redistricting hearings**.*



*In Tennessee, public input at redistricting hearings varied. Public comment was allowed during House hearings, while the Senate allowed only pre-arranged testimony.

Recommendation Three: Allow the public virtual access to all legislative redistricting meetings, with a week's notice provided for when those meetings will convene.

In addition to hosting community meetings before maps are drawn, legislators should **allow the public to attend** meetings where maps are discussed and drawn.

- **Redistricting meetings** should be **open to the public** to attend in person or virtually. Last cycle, the public could attend and stream legislative committee hearings where draft maps were **presented**, but the meetings where maps were **developed** were not publicly accessible.
- **Members of the public** viewing these meetings should have an opportunity during the meetings to **share their views**, and those views should be recorded and made part of the **public record**.

Examples from Other States



In 2011, all meetings of the Alabama Reapportionment Committee and its subcommittees were made **open to the public**, with minutes and transcripts maintained as part of the **public record**.(iv)



South Dakota's 2021 redistricting timeline includes **multiple meetings** of the legislative redistricting committee meetings, where **public testimony** is generally accepted.(v)

Recommendation Four: Actively seek public input on draft maps.

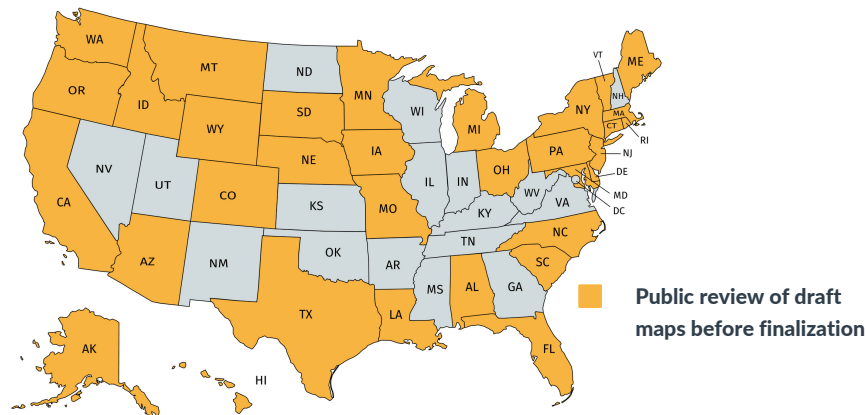
The legislature should continue to allow the public to **submit draft maps**, and it should provide information about how those maps **will be considered**. Legislative committees should **share draft maps** with the public -- potentially along with demographic information and voting patterns for each district -- **before they are finalized**.

- Redistricting committees should host additional well-publicized **community meetings when maps are drafted**. These meetings would allow the public to preview changes to their districts, provide comments and hear legislators' reasoning for proposed district changes.
- Redistricting committee meetings where draft **maps are presented** should be **open to the public**, with enough time between presentation and passage to allow members of the public to submit comments and feedback.

Examples from Other States

In most states, draft maps are presented for public review before they are finalized.

- **33 states allow members of the public to view draft maps**, with many actively encouraging public comment and feedback.



In **Louisiana** last cycle, the public could **attend committee hearings** where draft maps were presented and discussed. Maps were not finalized until **weeks later**, allowing time for the public to contact legislators with feedback.(vi)



In **Nebraska** last cycle, members of the **public testified** about concerns with proposed new district boundaries at a redistricting committee hearing.(vii)



In **Iowa**, state law requires at least **three public meetings** about draft maps before they are approved. (viii)

Notes and References

- (i) State of Arkansas House of Representatives. (December 11, 2020). Redistricting in Arkansas. See <https://www.arkansashouse.org/news/post/8060/redistricting-in-arkansas>.
- (ii) Texas Redistricting. (January 2021). Guide to 2021 Redistricting. See https://redistricting.capitol.texas.gov/docs/guide_to_2021_redistricting.pdf.
- (iii) Twitter. (March 13, 2021). Joan Huffman. See <https://twitter.com/joanhuffman/status/1370734974886932482?s=20>.
- (iv) The Alabama Legislature. (May 2011). State of Alabama Reapportionment Committee Guidelines for Congressional, Legislative, and State Board of Education Redistricting. See <http://www.legislature.state.al.us/aliswww/reapportionment/Reapportionment%20Guidelines%20for%20Redistricting.pdf>.
- (v) South Dakota Legislature Legislative Redistricting Council. (November 16, 2020). Redistricting 2020, a Primer. See <https://mylrc.sdlegislature.gov/api/Documents/207169.pdf>.
- (vi) Louisiana House of Representatives. (January 24, 2011). Redistricting Timeline. See https://house.louisiana.gov/H_Redistricting2011/RedistrictingTimeline_1_24_11.pdf.
- (vii) Nebraska Legislature. (May 13, 2011). Public Gives Input on Redistricting Proposals. Unicameral Update. See <http://update.legislature.ne.gov/?p=4773>.
- (viii) The Iowa Legislature. Iowa Code § 42.6. See <https://www.legis.iowa.gov/docs/code/42.6.pdf>.