



December 17, 2020

San Diego County Redistricting Commission  
1600 Pacific Highway  
San Diego, CA 92101  
*Sent via electronic transmission*

***Re: Recommendations For Commission Next Steps***

Dear Commissioners:

Congratulations to all of you on your selection to the San Diego County Independent Redistricting Commission. You are now entrusted with important responsibilities that will shape San Diego's democracy for a decade. Our organizations include good government, civil rights, advocacy, and ethnic-based direct service organizations and labor unions working together to ensure a redistricting process that engages and reflects the changing face of San Diego County. We look forward to working with all of you over the coming year as you do the important work of drawing a new district map for the county. We write today with recommendations for how to approach your work over the next couple of months as you ramp up to making important decisions about how you will conduct a transparent and inclusive redistricting process.

Many of us were heavily engaged in the 2020 Census and in the 2010 state and local redistricting processes. For the past two years, we worked collaboratively with the California State Auditor's Office, the County Clerk, and the City of San Diego to encourage broad participation in their independent commission application and selection processes. The following recommendations are based on that work and expertise, as well as our ongoing work to engage historically underrepresented communities in our democracy.

**Arm Yourselves With the Information and Staff You Need to Effectively Plan the Process:**

To ensure you are effectively prepared and supported for the work ahead, we recommend that you learn from other commissions, research and get the training you need, and independently lead the hiring of any staff and consultants.

We cannot stress enough the importance of you doing your work in an independent manner. While county staff will support your work, it is you, the Commission, that should lead it and make critical decisions about how you will execute a fair and inclusive line drawing process. Fortunately, the state legislature extended the deadline for you to adopt a final map to December 15, 2021. Cal. Elec. Code Section 21622(a)(2). This gives you more than enough time to get the training you need and to engage experts to inform your thinking about how you want to conduct the county's first independent redistricting process. We recommend the following initial steps:

- 1) ***Learn from other commissions.*** The task before you can be daunting, but fortunately you do not have to reinvent the wheel. There are state and local commissions that have developed best practices for getting their work started and ensuring they have the training and staff they need to do their work effectively. The 2010 State Citizens Redistricting Commission (CRC) made recommendations in a written report based on their experience as the first state citizens redistricting commission. The 2020 state CRC is already making decisions about how they will conduct their work and there is a tremendous amount of material that might be helpful to you on their website. Similarly, the City of San Diego has had independent commissions for several redistricting cycles. We encourage you to reach out to current and former state and local commissioners and invite them to speak to you about what went well during their onboarding, training, and redistricting processes, and what they would have done differently.
- 2) ***Research and get the training you need.*** Ask other state and local commissions what training they found helpful and review the training the state CRC received this fall. Many of those same experts are available to you and we are happy to introduce you to them. At minimum, you should arrange to watch and discuss the videos of the trainings the state CRC received on Redistricting 101, the Voting Rights Act, California's diverse demographics, Communities of Interest, and the Statewide Database. The training you receive will help you decide the consultants you may need and will give you confidence as you interview and select the people who will work under your supervision and at your direction to carry out a fair, transparent, and lawful redistricting process.

In addition to training on redistricting law, demographics, and Census data, the state CRC brought in panels of experts on community outreach to underrepresented communities to inform its thinking about how to engage those communities in the redistricting process. Many of those organizations work in or are based in San Diego, and we would be happy to assist you with identifying state and local experts on engaging hard to reach communities, language accessibility, and disability access. We know the state CRC has found these panels extremely helpful to its outreach planning.

- 3) ***Be intentional and transparent when hiring consultants and staff.*** Again, you have several months before Census data is released and your intensive outreach begins. Take the time needed to learn about line drawing, demographics, the Voting Rights Act and applicable law, and community engagement strategies before soliciting proposals from line drawers and outreach consultants. You cannot determine what you will need from and be looking for in a consultant until you have researched and discussed the kind of process you want to lead. The state CRC has been seated for months and has not yet finalized its RFP for the line drawing consultant. It does not anticipate finalizing a selection and contract until late March or early April. In other words, there is an unnecessary sense of urgency in the recommendation for an expedited hiring process that is being presented to you by county staff.

Moreover, make sure that the selection of important staff is transparent and is done by the full Commission. While you may need a subcommittee to do an initial review and summary of proposals, independent commissions historically make the hiring of the line drawer - one of the most critical consultants you will hire - a transparent and public process. Many do the same for their outreach consultants. For example, the RFP should be posted and the public should be offered the opportunity to make comment before it is finalized. In addition, proposals received in response to RFPs should be made available to the public, and interviews for line drawers and voting rights counsel should be conducted during public meetings. Finally, the discussion and decision about the awarding of the contract should be done in a public meeting with the opportunity for public participation and comment.

## **Develop a Strong Infrastructure to Carry Out Your Work:**

With so many important decisions ahead of you, a strong infrastructure is crucial to supporting your work. For a harmonious and efficient redistricting process that builds trust and credibility with the communities on whose behalf you serve, we recommend that you share leadership, form subcommittees, and initiate team building opportunities amongst yourselves.

- 1) ***Share leadership.*** The 2010 state CRC chose a shared leadership model where it rotated chairs and vice chairs throughout the process. This is being modeled again in the 2020 state CRC. From our point of view as public observers, this rotation has many benefits. First, no one person or political party is seen as “in charge” or controlling the Commission, and it demonstrates equity among the Commissioners to the public. Second, it allows everyone to cycle in and out of the roles of facilitating meetings. This allows all Commissioners to spend most of their time being actively involved in the discussion during meetings without one or two of the Commissioners having to consistently focus on leadership tasks.
- 2) ***Use subcommittees to get your work done.*** You have many important decisions to make and business to attend to in the upcoming year. We recommend you create subcommittees to carry out some of this work. As a reference, both the state CRC and the City of San Diego have used subcommittees to get important work done. For example, the City of San Diego Redistricting Commission currently has three subcommittees: budget, bylaws, and hiring. With a wider jurisdiction, the state CRC has a variety of subcommittees, some of which may be useful to consider. A list of their current subcommittees can be found on their most [recent meeting agenda](#), including a subcommittee dedicated to Voting Rights Act compliance. Given the preeminence of Voting Rights Act compliance in the redistricting process, we urge you to establish a subcommittee that is tasked with ensuring you get the ongoing training and consultants needed to ensure your understanding and compliance.
- 3) ***Engage in team building.*** You will need to work very closely together over the coming year and potentially thereafter if your maps are challenged. At times, you will have robust discussions and be faced with difficult decisions about where district boundaries will fall. We believe that you will all be better Commissioners individually, and a better Commission as a whole, if you spend some time now getting to know each other and your individual work and communication styles. We suggest taking time to do some deliberate team-building now, especially with the current reality of Covid-19 and remote meetings. This could take the form of a series of virtual lunches, dinners, or coffees. You could also explore a virtual team-building exercise. We hope that you plan this as part of your ongoing activities during your time as a Commission.

Our thanks to all of you for being willing to do this important work for the people of San Diego County and ensuring a fair, transparent, and independent process. Your public service is sincerely appreciated. Again, we are available to speak to any of the above issues or to recommend experts who can inform your important thinking over the next few months. We look forward to working with you over the upcoming year. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact Jeanine Erikat, Community Organizer, Partnership for the Advancement of New Americans at [jeanine@panasd.org](mailto:jeanine@panasd.org) or (619) 363-4750.

Sincerely,

Ramla Sahid  
Executive Director  
Partnership for the Advancement of New Americans

Lori Thiel  
President  
League of Women Voters of San Diego

Samuel P. Sukaton  
Redistricting Coordinator  
California League of Conservation Voters

Nao Kabashima  
Executive Director  
Karen Organization of San Diego

Dilkhwaz Ahmed  
Executive Director  
License to Freedom

David Lagstein  
Political Director  
SEIU Local 221

Brigette Browning  
President  
UNITE HERE Local 30

James Woodson  
Policy Director  
California Black Census and Redistricting Hub

Imam Taha Hassane  
Director of Interfaith/Public Relations & Youth  
Program  
Islamic Center of San Diego, CA

Sahra Abdi  
Executive Director  
United Women of East Africa

Griselda Ramirez  
Director of Civic Engagement  
Mid-City CAN

Maleeka Marsden  
Co-Director of Policy  
Climate Action Campaign

Ramah Awah  
Community Organizer  
Majdal Center

Johnathan Mehta Stein  
Executive Director  
California Common Cause

Laila Aziz  
Director of Operations  
Pillars of the Community

Ismahan Abdullahi  
Executive Director  
Muslim American Society-Public Affairs and Civic  
Engagement