

Mapping Our Future: Engaging in the 2021 Redistricting Cycle

San Diego



Partnership for the
Advancement of
New Americans

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SHOW UP
FOR
REFUGEES

ABOUT PANA

The Partnership for the Advancement of New Americans (PANA) fights to advance the full economic, social, and civic inclusion of refugees in the San Diego region, throughout California, and across the country. We envision a world where refugees are connected global leaders building trans-continental movement work to advance meaningful freedom for all.

Our values include:

- **Authentic Demand.**
Our communities own the decision making power to dictate the direction of our work and exercise their collective power.
- **Inclusion.**
We create and hold trusted space that honors the community's investment and supports community ownership. We are anti-racist.
- **Compassionate Leadership.**
We embrace differences & limitations and build meaningful opportunities for everyone to exercise leadership.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Tremendous thanks go to our refugee community across the San Diego region who have thoughtfully, effectively, and diligently engaged in the process to advocate for fair representation. We also thank the interpreters for the difficult task of translating and interpreting redistricting materials, testimony, and procedures throughout the process.

Thanks are also due to our community partners who worked alongside us to ensure our communities were visible, recognized, and heard throughout the redistricting process; the Black Census and Redistricting Hub (BCRH) and Common Cause for resources and technical support; and the LWV of San Diego for monitoring the county process. We thank our staff who led the redistricting effort, including Rahmo Abdi and Rami Ibrahim.

Finally, we thank our philanthropic supporters, Evelyn and Walter Haas Jr. Fund and the California Endowment. Without their investment and partnership our work would not be possible.



Dear Community Partner:

Over the past two years, we have worked together to learn about redistricting, a once-in-a-decade process that draws political maps that determine who will represent us and impact the policies that affect our everyday lives.

Recognizing the importance of building transformative political power, we started this process early by engaging in the census count, and we continued that engagement by deepening our investments in grassroots organizing. From the start, an important part of this work has been to ensure that the state and local redistricting processes would be fair, transparent, and linguistically accessible to our communities.

I'm so proud of this work and what we have been able to accomplish together. This historic effort ensured that refugee, black, indigenous, and immigrant communities were not only seen and heard throughout this process at the local and state level, but we played a key and leading role to ensure district boundaries were redrawn in ways that meaningfully accounted for the needs and priorities of our diverse and beautiful community.

More importantly, we leveled the playing field so that more of our grassroots community leaders were equipped with technical and legal expertise, knowledge, and resources to effectively represent their communities in negotiations.

As always, the work continues and we are more committed than ever to ensure our community's leadership is centered so that our people can be in their power, access and assert their rights, and successfully lead on their issues.

Ramla Sahid
Executive Director

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Introduction

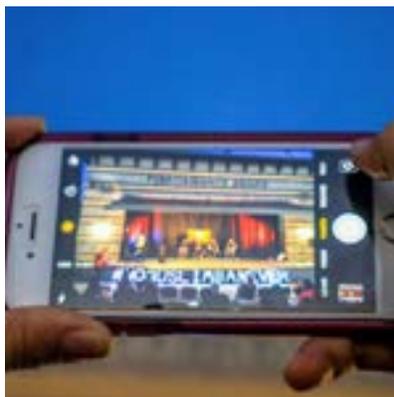
Building upon its work on the 2020 Census and its facilitation and support of a refugee and immigrant census hub in San Diego County, Partnership for the Advancement of New Americans (PANA) saw the 2021 redistricting cycle as an opportunity for further collaboration and power building among organizations that serve and advocate on behalf of Black, African, Middle Eastern, Muslim, and South Asian (BAMEMSA) refugee and immigrant communities. Redistricting was another critical step on a continuum of engagement and education of BAMEMSA community members, who had learned about the importance of Census participation, the pitfalls of undercounts and inadequate Census race and ethnicity categories, and the implications redistricting would have on political representation for the next decade.

The communities PANA and its partners serve are multiracial, multiethnic, and multilingual. The absence of a “Middle Eastern North African” category on the Census form means that people of Middle Eastern or North African descent are left with the white category as their best option, essentially whitewashing these communities from the Census data. Black African refugees and immigrants may or may not feel the “Black” race category fits their ethnic identity and even though encouraged to check “Black” as the closest option, it is impossible to extrapolate them from Census data on the Black population.

After searching and failing to find ways to accurately quantify BAMEMSA communities, PANA knew that the most powerful tool for previously invisible BAMEMSA communities to be seen and centered in redistricting was to empower them to define, map, and present themselves. Redistricting is often about the data, but in California both the state commission and local redistricting entities are required to look beyond the data and, to the extent possible in light of other redistricting criteria, keep “communities of interest” (COIs) together. Under the 2011 congressional, state legislative, and San Diego County supervisorial district maps, the BAMEMSA communities that PANA and its partners serve and represent were splintered into multiple districts. And in El Cajon, which mapped its first districts in 2017, the growing refugee community was now split into three of the four council districts.

PANA’s goal was to ensure communities that wanted to be together would have a voice to advocate to be kept together in the maps that would result from the 2021 redistricting cycle. PANA developed a plan to educate itself and partners on the ins and outs of redistricting, to monitor and engage with the state redistricting commission and the first ever San Diego County independent redistricting commission, to monitor and engage in the city of El Cajon’s first redistricting process, and to engage and empower the community to show up and speak up for fair representation.

The following report documents the work of PANA and its partners during the 2021 redistricting cycle, the lessons and best practices learned, and the impact of the redistricting experience not just on the maps, but on the community and partners as a whole. The report concludes with key recommendations for improving the redistricting process and the ability of grassroots organizations to more effectively engage and secure redistricting wins for marginalized communities in the future.





PREPARING FOR REDISTRICTING

PANA's first experience with redistricting was in 2017 when the City of El Cajon drew council districts for the first time. The 2021 redistricting cycle was therefore PANA's first time participating in the large-scale, decennial process of redrawing congressional, state legislative, county, and local political boundaries. Moreover, PANA staff that would be leading the work had no prior redistricting experience. Thus, a deep and early investment in staff time and education on the complex world of redistricting was critical to ensuring that PANA could meaningfully engage the community in redistricting, effectively collaborate with and support organizational partners, navigate relationships with a variety of other stakeholders, and strategically map and center BAMEMSA communities that have been whitewashed from the Census and previously unseen in redistricting.

Committing Organizational Resources

The 2021 redistricting cycle was an important political education and power building opportunity that fit squarely within PANA's continuum of civic engagement for the refugee and immigrant communities it serves.

PANA incorporated redistricting into its long-term strategic planning with the intent of committing significant resources and organizational capacity to the work. Understanding that early engagement in redistricting would be important, PANA ensured that the full-time staff position dedicated to facilitation of its San Diego Refugee and Immigrant Census Hub would transition directly into the redistricting work.

Beginning in the summer of 2020, on the heels of its Census work, PANA's redistricting lead dedicated significant time to learning about redistricting and strategically planning for the various phases of the work that would continue through 2021 and, for local redistricting, into 2022: early monitoring of the various redistricting processes, materials development, partner outreach and education, community education and mapping, and community map presentations and advocacy for fair districts.

PANA invested additional staff time in the redistricting work as it ramped up in 2021. Starting in early 2021, the redistricting lead was supported by a full-time organizer who informed and supported language access advocacy, community organizing and leadership development, partner outreach, materials development, and workshop planning. An organizing fellow was added to the redistricting team in mid-2021 to assist with community workshops, supported partners in developing talking points, and with monitoring and turnout for redistricting hearings. Additionally, PANA's civic engagement organizer collaborated with the redistricting team to bring in the voices of young people into the process by facilitating engagement with PANA's youth leaders. And finally, PANA's Executive Director supervised the work and regularly participated in redistricting discussions with partners.



PANA and Majdal Youth Community of Interest Mapping Session.

Understanding Redistricting Concepts, Law, and Process



There is a steep learning curve to gaining an understanding of the once-in-a-decade redistricting process. Educating staff who will be leading the work involves more than a simple “redistricting 101.” This is true even for organizations with a long history in redistricting, but where staff turnover means people will be new to the redistricting world.

Understanding the nuances of redistricting was especially important for PANA as it contemplated how it could educate and support the San Diego BAMEMSA community and ensure they had an equal seat at the table in both state and local redistricting processes and conversations. Listed below are the key concepts, laws, and process that PANA staff learned, and that informed their planning and engagement with the community, with partners, and with the commissions and elected officials that would be drawing the lines:

- **The Importance of Redistricting:** what is redistricting, how it impacts people’s lives for the next decade, what it means when a community is split, why it is important for a community to be kept together.
- **General principles and terminology:** understanding the meaning of apportionment, equal population, total population, citizen voting age population, majority-minority district, influence district, coalition district, gerrymandering, community of interest, and other redistricting criteria and concepts like cracking, packing, contiguity, and compactness.
- **Federal, state, and local redistricting laws:** the United States Constitution; the federal Voting Rights Act of 1965, including the language access requirements; for California, a new state law that governed local redistricting called the Fair Maps Act; and other state laws and local charters that apply to county and city redistricting.
- **How Census data is operationalized:** impact and timeline of new Census data, how American Community Survey Census data is used in redistricting, the impact of undercounts of marginalized communities, and the ways in which BAMEMSA communities are invisible in the Census data.
- **Who draws the lines:** the difference between an independent commission, advisory commission, and when elected officials draw their own districts.
- **The phases and timing of redistricting:** the important phases of the redistricting process and how timelines vary between state, county, and city processes.
- **How to engage in non-partisan redistricting:** the importance of community-centered, non-partisan redistricting and the ways that 501(c)(3) nonprofits can engage in redistricting and protect against improper partisan influence.
- **Political stakes and competing interests:** grasping how high the stakes are for elected officials and other key stakeholders, how different forces have historically come to bear upon various state and local redistricting processes, and how tensions between stakeholders have arisen and been resolved – or not resolved – in previous redistricting cycles.

Here are the resources PANA staff found most helpful:

- **Hired a redistricting consultant.** A hired a redistricting consultant with expertise in redistricting generally and who had experience with redistricting in the San Diego region. The consultant educated and advised staff on strategy, legal requirements, timelines, important phases of redistricting, materials development, and the political nuances of redistricting.
- **Participated in a statewide redistricting coalition.** On behalf of the Black refugee and immigrant communities it serves, PANA participated in the Black Census and Redistricting Hub (BCRH), a coalition convened by California Calls that included over 30 Black-led and Black-serving grassroots organizations throughout California. BCRH provided education on redistricting concepts, the history and status of Black representation across California, data and mapping, and grassroots strategies to motivate and engage Black Californians in the redistricting process. Unfortunately, there was no state or national coalition or network to provide education and support specific to Arab, Middle Eastern, Muslim, and South Asian refugees and immigrants, or strategies for countering their underrepresentation in Census data and redistricting.
- **Surveyed existing resources.** PANA staff attended multiple Common Cause webinars that covered federal, state, and local redistricting law; introduced mapping tools; and provided helpful tutorials on how to map a community of interest. In addition, there was a wealth of online redistricting resources, toolkits, and webinars that served as a starting point to learn about the importance of redistricting, relevant laws, and how marginalized communities have historically engaged and been marginalized in the redistricting process.
- **Conducted a political landscape analysis:** PANA staff spoke with a variety of local grassroots leaders involved in previous redistricting cycles to gain a better understanding of the ways in which marginalized communities in the San Diego region had been split apart or kept together in political districts. In addition, staff sought to understand the motivations, goals, and political implications of the 2021 redistricting cycle for non-BAMEMSA stakeholders. Finally, staff explored opportunities for collaboration with similarly situated grassroots partners to maximize limited resources, build cross-community solidarity, and ensure more communities were able to monitor and engage in multiple, simultaneous redistricting processes.



Finding Effective Mapping Tools

At first glance, one would think that mapping a community, a single district, or even a full redistricting map would be easy given the abundance of online mapping tools available during the 2021 redistricting cycle. However, unless you have GIS mapping experience, even the most user-friendly online mapping tools took time to learn and navigate. Moreover, it is hard to motivate people—and especially those who are not tech savvy—to jump into mapping their community in the abstract no matter how user-friendly a mapping tool may be.

PANA spent significant time researching and experimenting with a variety of mapping tools to determine what would be most useful for facilitating community workshops, capturing community discussion, and memorializing communities of interest.

COMMUNITY DISCUSSION

Defining a community has more undertones and nuance than just drawing the boundaries of a neighborhood on a map. Instead, drawing a community of interest (COI) requires a community discussion to explore shared interests and concerns. PANA found that community members of all ages, regardless of language spoken, wanted to map together through a facilitated discussion that would be memorialized in a map drawn by someone with experience using the available tools.

The most important tool, whether mapping virtually or in-person, was giving community members the opportunity to discuss their community as a group. People often do not reference their community by street names or readily identifiable intersections. Instead, people define their community by landmarks, shopping centers, schools, parks, religious institutions, etc. Group discussions allowed community members to work together to paint the full picture of their neighborhood, and to explore their shared interests, needs, and policy concerns.

PHYSICAL MAPS

PANA knew community members would more readily engage in mapping discussions if they could see their neighborhood on a physical map and place markers on important community landmarks like schools, parks, shopping centers, and libraries. Physical maps were also an important tool for outdoor workshops where technology was not readily available. PANA worked with GIS staff at San Diego's regional planning agency, the San Diego Association of Governments (SANDAG), to create neighborhood maps with identifiable landmarks.

Similarly, from its civic engagement work, PANA knew that community members are often unaware of which political districts they live in, let alone whether their community is split into multiple districts. PANA purchased copies of physical political boundary maps from the San Diego County Registrar of Voters that staff used as a civic education tool to educate the community about their current political representation and the impacts of redistricting.

ONLINE MAPPING TOOLS

PANA staff researched and ultimately relied most heavily on Draw My CA Community, a mapping tool provided by the California Citizens Redistricting Commission (CCRC). Draw My CA Community was designed for individuals to draw, describe, and submit their community of interest (COI) directly to the CCRC by answering a few short questions and following a few simple steps. But even PANA's tech-savvy youth had challenges using it despite receiving an in-depth tutorial. Instead, Draw My CA Community was most useful to PANA staff, who used it to facilitate virtual community mapping sessions, memorialize community discussions, and generate COI shape files that could be shared with partners, the Black Census and Redistricting Hub, and the demographer PANA ultimately hired.

PANA staff also explored using DistrictR, another publicly available mapping tool, during in-person sessions and tabling events. However, staff found the interface was too complicated and overwhelming to use in live mapping sessions. Notably, while PANA did not ultimately use DistrictR, the Common Cause training on DistrictR was an invaluable resource and introduced the PANA team to GIS mapping and the important elements of mapping a community of interest.

Securing Demographer Services

Ultimately, there is no tool that substitutes for the expertise of an experienced demographer. While PANA staff became adept at mapping communities of interest (COIs), mapping and assessing the viability of keeping communities together in effective districts required someone with experience layering and balancing legally mandated redistricting criteria and nuanced Census and American Community Survey data. In addition, a demographer's expertise was critical to evaluating and understanding the implications of multiple draft maps being released by the state and county commissions, and later the City of El Cajon.

Through its participation in the Black Census and Redistricting Hub (BCRH), PANA had access to a demographer who incorporated San Diego's Black refugee and immigrant COIs into proposed districts for congressional and state legislative maps. Those Black COIs often intersected with and complemented the non-Black Arab, Middle Eastern, Muslim, and South Asian (AMEMSA) COIs that PANA and its partners mapped together, and the BCRH did its best to represent those interests in state maps.

For local redistricting, PANA was fortunate to secure funding to hire a demographer to support its work with partners on local redistricting. Importantly, PANA ensured its partners had equal access to the demographer for one-on-one consultations where they could understand their COIs in the context of current district maps, explore the possibilities for being united in new districts with other communities with shared interests, map proposed districts, and get direct support analyzing draft maps as they were released. The demographer also participated

in partner meetings, animating the discussions through live mapping. Significantly, the demographer ultimately helped PANA and its partners draw a proposed district for San Diego County's board of supervisors that would bring historically marginalized BAMEMSA communities together for the first time in the county's history and draw a proposed map for El Cajon demonstrating how the city's growing refugee communities, split among three of the four council districts, could be better represented in two districts.



PANA community mapping session.

PANA partners highlighted the following benefits of access to an experienced demographer:

- Levelled the playing field and gave new organizations the confidence to participate in redistricting discussions.
- Ability to envision COIs together in ways that were not constrained by current political boundaries and were rooted in community input.
- Ability to map COIs together and propose new districts in compliance with complicated mapping criteria.
- Ability to analyze and understand the implications of state, county, and local draft maps, and effectively advocate for and respond to draft maps in real time.



EARLY MONITORING AND ADVOCACY FOR INCLUSIVE REDISTRICTING

Well before the community mapping process even started, PANA invested time in monitoring and engaging the state and county commissions and the city of El Cajon. The goals of early engagement were to advocate for diverse representation on San Diego County's first ever independent commission, to educate both the state and county commissions on outreach and language access strategies to reach the diverse BAMEMSA communities throughout the San Diego region, and in the case of El Cajon, to ensure the city council would comply with a new state law designed to ensure a more transparent and inclusive local redistricting process. Through its early engagement, PANA created visibility for and dispelled misconceptions about BAMEMSA communities and became a trusted source of information about historically marginalized refugee populations across the state.



San Diego County Commission Selection & Onboarding: Advocating for Diversity & Inclusion

Early monitoring of San Diego County’s selection and onboarding of its first ever independent redistricting commission was a critical way to ensure accountability in the selection and onboarding of the new commission.

In addition, PANA’s early advocacy was a catalyst for educating partners about the upcoming county redistricting process and provided an opportunity to introduce a diverse set of partner organizations to the county commission.

Unlike the state commission, which compensates commissioners for their service, the county commission was unpaid. This made recruitment of diverse applicants a challenge.

Of the 60 finalists selected from a pool of 300 applicants, only 18 identified as a race or ethnicity other than white, which was alarming for a county where whites are the minority.

The random drawing to select the first eight commissioners resulted in the selection of only two people of color - one Latinx and one Asian American – while five were white and one declined to provide race or ethnicity information.

The eight randomly selected commissioner-ers were tasked with selecting the final six commissioners from the remaining, limited applicant pool. Concerned about the absence of representatives from San Diego’s diverse BAMEMSA and BIPOC communities, PANA organized a sign-on letter, one of the only and earliest to the eight new commissioners, urging them to carefully consider and apply the statutorily mandated criteria that the commission represent the region’s racial, ethnic, geographic, and political diversity. ***See Appendix A.***

The eight commissioners took this seriously, and of the six remaining commissioners, one was African American, one was Asian American, three were Latinx, and one was white.

Because it was the first time that county staff would be onboarding and supporting an independent redistricting commission, PANA organized a letter to the commission, signed by 16 organizations and modeled after a letter that California Common Cause and the League of Women Voters of California, that offered ideas for best practices that would set the commission up for success. ***See Appendix B.*** The commission referenced and adopted several of the letter’s suggestions, including forming committees to carry out its outreach planning and tasks, and securing training from a diverse set of experts. PANA partnered with the League of Women Voters of San Diego to monitor the county commission’s planning process, and their support enabled PANA’s redistricting team to turn its attention to community and partner engagement while the League monitored and reported on the commission’s meetings and progress.

“I didn’t realize the importance of local elections before participating in redistricting.”

**– Shukriya Osman
PANA Youth Leader**



Language Access: Ensuring BAMEMSA Communities are Seen and Heard

PANA's entry point for deeper engagement with both the state and county commissions was language accessibility. Gaps in Census data collection – and the absence of African language categories on Census forms – make it challenging for BAMEMSA communities, and the languages they speak, to be seen: they do not show up in Census data and are thus historically invisible in, and excluded from, redistricting. Because of the diversity of languages within BAMEMSA communities, PANA had to go the extra mile to push for translation and interpretation in languages not required under federal and state law. PANA played a pivotal role in educating both the state and county commissions about the fact that Somali and Oromo – and not just Arabic – are widely spoken by African refugee communities across California.

PANA did not have staff capacity to monitor the state commission's meetings, but its participation in the Black Census and Redistricting Hub enabled them to keep up with the process and ultimately engage with the state commission. PANA informed and signed onto three letters to the state commission advocating for expanded language access and recommending best practices for meeting interpretation services. [See Appendices C, D, and E](#). In addition, PANA's redistricting team met with the state commission's language access subcommittee and did a presentation to the full commission on the language needs and effective outreach strategies to reach BAMEMSA communities. [See Appendix F](#).

Perhaps most importantly, in January 2021, PANA was the first organization to request interpretation for a state commission meeting and worked closely with state commission staff to arrange Somali and Oromo interpretation services for ten community members who wanted to call into the meeting in support of the language access recommendations. That first attempt at interpretation, via phone, did not go well. Connecting community members and interpreters by phone was awkward, the interpreters seemed inexperienced and unfamiliar with redistricting terms, and it appeared the commission had a hard time understanding what was being communicated. But valuable lessons were learned. Commission staff learned that the logistics of arranging quality interpretation would take time and planning; the commission recognized that engaging with limited English proficient (LEP) speakers would be a challenge; and the PANA redistricting team quickly understood what a big lift it would be to support LEP speakers dialing into meetings and eventually community input hearings. Importantly, PANA also learned that community members were excited and motivated to call in when they were offered the opportunity to do so in their preferred language.

“Language access is always a barrier but if you don't have staff or someone from the community involved in these processes, a large number of the population will be excluded. Which is why it was so important for us to advocate for Somali and Oromo Interpretation at redistricting hearings.”

– Rahmo Abdi

Community Organizer at PANA



PANA called into early meetings of the county redistricting commission to introduce and uplift the language access needs of San Diego's BAMEMSA refugee and immigrant communities. The commission invited PANA to formally present to the commission on best practices for community engagement, and PANA used the opportunity to further educate the county commission on the diversity of the refugee community and the ways in which they are invisible in Census data. [See Appendix G](#).

In addition, PANA staff utilized media advocacy as another tool to educate the public, the commission, and non-commission bodies about its communities during critical junctures throughout the redistricting process. For example, when advocating for language access services, PANA reached out to the Voice of San Diego to pitch a story.

Overall, there were five media stories uplifting BAMEMSA community engagement in redistricting. [See Appendix H](#).

Non-Commission Redistricting: Holding Elected Officials Accountable

Because of its engagement in El Cajon’s shift to district elections in 2017, and the continued growth of the refugee community in El Cajon, PANA planned to engage in the city’s redistricting. In early 2021, after repeated requests for information about the city’s plan for redistricting, PANA and its partners sent a letter to the city council urging it to start planning, with full transparency, for an inclusive redistricting process, as mandated by the state’s new Fair Maps Act. [See Appendix I](#). PANA and its partners spoke at city council meetings and ultimately met with city staff and council members, who ultimately shared a timeline for the required hearings.



City of El Cajon Redistricting Hearing with PANA, Majdal Center, and the Afghan Cultural Center.

“The community’s engagement in redistricting shifted how the community thinks about elections, local governments, and politics. They now understand the importance of having representation. The community saw firsthand the result of not having elected officials that care. Community will now vote and pay more critical attention to what the council is doing.”

– Yasmeen Obeid
Advocacy Coordinator, Majdal Center





DEVELOPING MULTILINGUAL, MULTIETHNIC MATERIALS

Multilingual, multiethnic materials and workshops were a key priority for PANA's multi-generational and linguistically, ethnically, and technologically diverse communities. PANA knew redistricting information would be needed in both English and PANA's priority languages of Arabic, Somali, Oromo, Swahili, Dari and Pashto. In addition, materials and workshops would need to ground redistricting in daily life, demonstrating how redistricting is not only a political concept, but affects community access to critical resources and representation for the next ten years.



Researching Materials for Diverse Communities

BUILD UPON EXISTING MATERIALS

There is a wealth of publicly available online resources, tutorials, and webinars on redistricting that can be adapted to suit an organization’s particular redistricting needs. PANA relied upon materials from the Black Census and Redistricting Hub (BCRH), including but not limited to redistricting 101 presentations, messaging points, a worksheet to help prepare community testimony, and FAQs on the redistricting process. Common Cause likewise had a webpage that provided similar materials. Materials from both formed the foundation for the materials PANA organizers developed to suit the diversity of San Diego’s BAMEMSA refugee and immigrant communities.

ENSURE MATERIALS ARE ACCESSIBLE

Even the best materials still needed to be translated into a community’s preferred language, adapted to the community’s specific mode of learning, and presented in the right setting. PANA was conveying information in seven languages. For many of PANA’s communities, the formality of a PowerPoint presentation is a barrier. Therefore, PANA incorporated key information from PowerPoints into a facilitator guide so that information could be conveyed verbally and in language. Arming facilitators with talking points for discussion meant organizers could strike up discussions about redistricting anywhere –parks, mosques, tabling– without the need for internet access and a computer or iPad.

CATER MATERIALS TO COMMUNITY NEEDS AND INTERESTS

Within a diverse refugee community, no one size fits all. If PANA organizers wanted to spark interest and understanding of redistricting, education had to be tailored to the community’s interests, needs, and policy concerns. For example, the East African community is a long-standing community that is registered to vote and wants to participate in the democratic process. Frustrated by the language barriers they faced in the redistricting process, they began to connect participation in redistricting to broader language access needs for the community, recognizing that better representation could lead to the elimination of those barriers. In comparison, many of PANA’s Syrian families are newer arrivals who are ineligible to vote. Nonetheless, they have a strong interest in protecting their children from Islamophobia and discrimination, and understood the importance of uniting with other Muslim and refugee families to fight for representation that could lead to an end to discriminatory and exclusionary policies.

“There are big Oromo communities in the state,” one caller said in Oromo, a language spoken in Ethiopia. “We don’t have any translators. The big issue when we go to the DMV, any public places – school, welfare – is translation. We have been suffering a lot, so we need people to work with us, with our language translated for us.”

– Anonymous

Oromo community member testimony



Building a Shared Library of Materials

The PANA team developed and relied upon the following materials:

Partner education presentation:

An overview of redistricting and general concepts; what is at stake in redistricting; the timelines for state, county, and local redistricting; how organizations can get involved in redistricting, and examples of tiers of engagement and support. Partners were interested in discussing how the communities they represent were impacted by current boundaries, and in the future, PANA would include political boundary maps as part of the partner presentation.

See Appendix J.

Community education presentation:

An overview of redistricting and general concepts, the importance of redistricting and how it directly impacts people's lives, how to map a community of interest, and the ways in which people can engage through community mapping and participation in public hearings. As noted above, each presentation was slightly modified to speak to the unique interests of each community.

See Appendix K.

Virtual discussion tool:

A virtual discussion tool using Google Jamboard, a digital interactive whiteboard. Breakout rooms allowed for smaller group discussion where participants were asked a series of questions to prompt discussion about how they define their community. Virtual sticky notes allowed people to share and memorialize ideas that were then brought to the larger group discussion and informed the community mapping.

See Appendix L.

Workshop facilitation guide:

A facilitator guide for in-language workshops, with a sample agenda; tips on how to transition from community education into community of interest discussions and mapping; and practical instructions and tools for facilitating community mapping.

See Appendix M.

Community testimony toolkit:

A guide for community members on how to participate in redistricting hearings, virtually and/or in person; a public testimony template highlighting the key components of community of interest testimony such as community landmarks, demographics, and policy concerns; and examples of community of interest testimony based upon community input sessions.

See Appendix N.





BUILDING EFFECTIVE PARTNERSHIPS

Partnerships with and support of local organizations that advocate on behalf of and serve BAMEMSA refugee and immigrant communities, and marginalized Black communities, were critical to ensuring those communities were seen and heard in the redistricting process. Among the partners PANA worked with and supported during the 2020 Census, there was interest in learning about and engaging in redistricting. The challenge, however, is that redistricting engagement is more complex and time intensive than Census work. While education about and assistance with Census participation could be woven into the work of service providers, redistricting—which requires community of interest mapping and participation in redistricting hearings—fits more squarely into the work of organizations that have an organizing and/or civic engagement infrastructure.

PANA took a three-step approach to partner engagement. First, in light of the absence of a statewide or national network that could help Arab, Middle Eastern, Muslim, South Asian (AMEMSA) organizations navigate the redistricting process, PANA dedicated existing, and sought additional, resources to educate and support local partners. Second, PANA developed tiers of engagement that offered a menu of options that enabled all of PANA's Census partners the opportunity to engage in redistricting in some way. Third, PANA provided partners with direct access to a demographer and facilitated collaborative mapping among the partners it supported.

Educating Partners: Leveling the Playing Field

PANA's initial engagement with partners was intended to level the playing field, arming organizations with information that PANA staff had learned about redistricting, the historical and current political context for the 2021 redistricting cycle, the civic education opportunities for community, the impact redistricting would have on political power for refugee and immigrant communities in the decade to come, and the overall timeline and opportunities for engagement in the redistricting process. PANA incorporated this information into a PowerPoint presentation geared specifically to grasstops leaders, and presented the information at various coalition meetings, in deeper, one-on-one conversations, and by making staff available to answer follow-up questions. This transparent approach to information sharing was foundational to garnering a commitment to ongoing conversations about and engagement in the redistricting process.

“The biggest win in redistricting was being able to educate the community about redistricting and the different systems at play. Engaging in redistricting gave Pillars a chance to bond with the community and build our community relationship to set up community leaders to be able to re-teach redistricting.”

– Malcolme Muttaqee
Muslim Organizer,
Pillars of the Community



Supporting Partners: Tiers of Engagement, Training, and Support

PANA developed the following tiers of engagement for local partners based on their interest and capacity:

TIER 1

Designed for organizations and coalitions that have a broad reach within the community but lack civic engagement infrastructure and staff capacity to engage in redistricting. Opportunities for engagement included organizational sign-on letters, email updates on process and timeline, and PANA tabling at organizational events to raise awareness about redistricting.

Partners: Islamic Center of San Diego, Muslim Leadership Council of San Diego, San Diego Refugee Communities Coalition

TIER 2

Designed for organizations that lack a civic engagement infrastructure but had some staff capacity to engage in redistricting. In addition to the opportunities for engagement offered by Tier 1, Tier 2 partners hosted an in-language community education and mapping workshop tailored for their community members. PANA either trained the organization's staff to lead the workshop or, where PANA staff spoke the language, PANA co-led the workshop. While Tier 2 partners lacked capacity to prepare and turn people out for redistricting hearings, organizational leaders submitted written and public testimony on behalf of their community.

Partners: Afghan Community Culture Center, American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee, Karen Organization of San Diego, Somali Bantu Community of San Diego, United Women of East Africa

TIER 3

Designed for organizations with an organizing infrastructure that wanted to develop and expand their political advocacy and community power building. Tier 3 partners led community workshops, mobilized and supported community testimony, and participated in collaborative mapping conversations informed by their community mapping. PANA provided training and technical assistance on workshop facilitation and mapping tools, direct access to a demographer, a space for collaborative mapping, and updates on hearings and draft map releases.

Partners: Asian Solidarity Collective, Majdal Community Center, Pillars of the Community, Council on American Islamic Relations-SD

Mapping with Partners: Building Trust and the Importance of Collaborative Mapping

The time PANA dedicated to building the knowledge and expertise of its staff and partners was key to supporting communities in owning decision-making and exercising their power in redistricting. This was key to PANA becoming a trusted resource for accurate and objective information about the redistricting process. Once funding for partners was secured, PANA facilitated bi-weekly meetings where partners discussed shared interests among the various COIs their communities had mapped, resolved competing tensions, and explored ways to unite COIs to maximize political influence for marginalized communities. Direct access to a demographer put partners on equal footing and empowered them to confidently participate in conversations and have trust in the collaborative mapping process.

Through their community workshops, PANA and its partners mapped COIs throughout San Diego County. Community members named COIs by neighborhood or city: City Heights, Clairemont, El Cajon, Encanto, La Mesa, Lemon Grove, National City, Paradise Hills, Rancho San Diego, Skyline, Southeast, and Spring Valley. Community and partner discussions revealed shared identities and interests across the COIs. All the COIs identified as Black and/or BAMEMSA refugee or immigrant with shared languages, cultural practices, religious and social institutions, and foods. They were predominantly low income, renters, and large households who shared the same policy concerns: affordable housing, improved

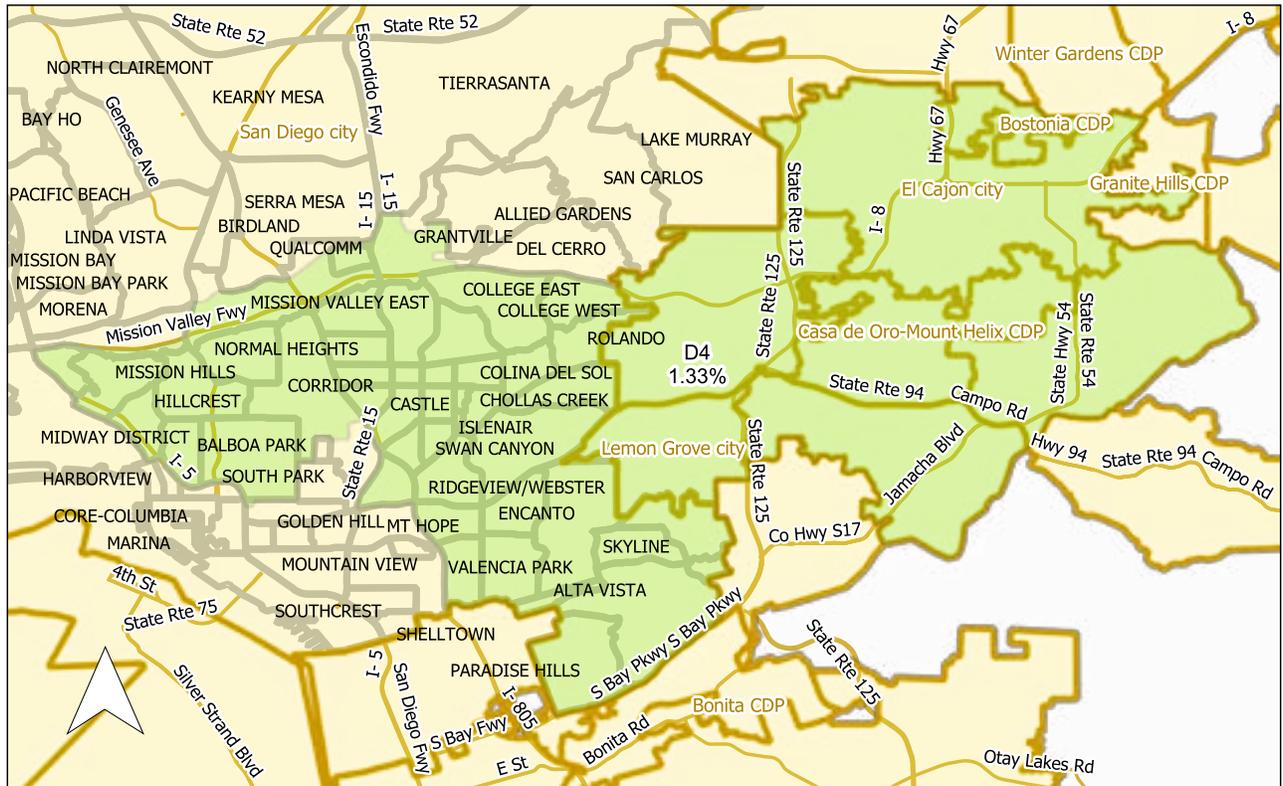
language access, equitable public transportation, and inclusive education opportunities. As the communities came to understand how their interests coincided, they consistently expressed a desire to be united in the same political districts. However, in most instances, the 2011 congressional, state legislative, and local district maps split them into multiple districts.

“Having a demographer was incredibly critical to the whole process. It allowed Majdal to look at communities in El Cajon, understand them better, and draft talking points in support of our communities of interest and map. It also granted us the ability to understand the map deeply and intentionally.”

**- Ramah Awad
Programs Manager, Majdal Center**



Community drawn map made in collaboration with PANA, the Majdal Center, and the Afghan Community Culture Center.



District	Population	%Deviation	%Latino	%White	%Black	%Asian	%MMR
D4	669219	1.33	34.35	38.66	10.24	12.96	1.09

BIPOC, Immigrant, and Refugee COI map drawn by PANA, Majdal Center, Asian Solidarity Collective, and Pillars of the Community.

During collaborative mapping discussions, PANA and its partners were able to look beyond the architecture of existing district maps to envision ways in which the COIs mapped by their communities could be unified. At the county level, the COIs ran along a corridor running east to west that could be woven together into a larger, singular COI that PANA and its partners ultimately named the “BIPOC, Immigrant, and Refugee COI.” The 2011 supervisorial district maps split the BIPOC, Immigrant, and Refugee COI among three supervisorial districts. With the expertise of the demographer, PANA and its partners were able to explore and ultimately map a proposed district that would keep the entire BIPOC, Immigrant, and Refugee COI intact in a single district while complying with all other redistricting criteria. Uniting multiple COIs—and the diverse but collective voices in support of those COIs—meant that previously invisible BIPOC and BAMEMSA communities were seen and centered in the county redistricting process.

Although collaborative mapping conversations primarily focused on the county, PANA and its partners shared both the individual COIs and the unified BIPOC, Immigrant, and Refugee COI with the Black Census and Redistricting Hub to inform its mapping and keep those COIs together to the extent possible in proposed congressional and state legislative districts. In addition, partners supporting the growing refugee community in El Cajon worked with the demographer to unite the COIs mapped for El Cajon, split into three districts under the 2017 district map, into two proposed districts. At the request of partners, the demographer drew a full city council map to demonstrate how the proposed district could be mapped with other districts in compliance with all federal and state law criteria.



FACILITATING AND SUPPORTING COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IN THE MAPPING PROCESS

PANA's approach to redistricting was community-based and community-led to empower the community to define, draw, and advocate for fair districts. Redistricting presented a unique opportunity to further engage and educate the community about the origins, potential, and parameters of political power and representation.

In California, all redistricting bodies —whether independent commissions or elected officials drawing their own districts— are required to accept and consider community of interest (COI) testimony before drafting new district maps. COI testimony is a critical advocacy tool for BAMEMSA communities, which are so often undercounted, misrepresented, or completely unseen in the Census data due to the lack of categories on the decennial Census questionnaire that accurately capture the race and ethnicity of these diverse communities. Put another way, to show up in redistricting, the community literally needed to show up for redistricting.

Educating and Mapping with the Community

PANA facilitated or supported 12 education and mapping workshops, attended by 266 community members, in seven languages: English, Arabic, Somali, Oromo, Swahili, Dari, and Pashto. Here are the lessons PANA and its partners learned planning for and conducting community workshops:

- **In-language workshops were the most effective.** Rather than holding large-scale workshops where multiple-language translation would be needed, PANA and its partners hosted in-language workshops to enable community members to directly engage with the facilitator rather than through an interpreter. Communicating information in the community's first language created a direct pathway to complicated redistricting concepts for community members whose political education is often an afterthought in English-first spaces. In addition, in-language workshops encouraged broader and more meaningful discussions, and facilitated shared inquiry among participants.
- **Location, timing, and turnout were key.** Bringing workshops to commonly used and accessible community spaces was key. In addition to outdoor spaces like parks and mosque parking lots, PANA partners hosted workshops at places like barbershops and boxing clubs. Hosting workshops in the evenings and on weekends also ensured participation from a broader cross section of the community. Most importantly, redistricting alone was not an exciting topic that would draw the masses. Community members needed information and encouragement to attend a redistricting workshop. Thus, PANA and partners utilized organizing principles to engage and turnout the community.
- **Combined education and mapping workshops worked best.** Integrating education and community of interest mapping into a single workshop was not only more efficient in terms of organizational capacity, but it makes turnout easier for organizations strategically engaging community members in multiple campaigns and events. Just as important, combining education and mapping in a unified workshop enabled the community to apply newly learned redistricting concepts to the discussion and mapping of their community while it was at their immediate attention.

- **Different communities and age groups preferred different mediums.** In-person was the preferred format for in-language workshops, likely because PANA and its partners primarily engage their communities in person due to language and technology barriers. Only workshops done in English with youth and communities comfortable with technology, like the more established Arab community, were conducted via zoom and incorporated features like breakout rooms and jam boards to facilitate community conversation. However, the community conversations during in-person workshops flowed most naturally. Of course, the biggest challenge during the pandemic was holding outdoor workshops, which limited the ability to utilize online presentations and mapping tools, and even the physical maps blew in the wind. Although the pandemic prevented it, the ideal workshop would be indoors, with people working together on large, printed maps while a facilitator captures conversation and communities of interest on a virtual mapping tool displayed on a large screen.



Rahmo Abdi, Community Organizer facilitating a community education and mapping workshop at Colina del Sol park.

“Engaging in this process had a positive impact on how the community thinks about elections and power building, and I’m excited to see this impact on language access and services.”

– Saliyo Usman
Oromo Interpreter





Community members gather to map out where they live, community landmarks, and institutions.



Community mapping session with the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC) of San Diego.

Preparing the Community to Testify

Testifying at a public hearing can be a life changing experience where people feel seen and heard or, in the worst-case scenario, end up feeling even more marginalized. It was critical that community members had the support they needed to speak publicly about their community, often for the first time. Ensuring community members were able to feel confident presenting COI testimony was a big lift, requiring individual engagement and support to ensure a successful experience.

With support from the Black Census and Redistricting Hub, PANA developed a community of interest testimony template. Prior to each hearing, PANA and its partners used the template to help community members craft testimony that described their community and highlighted community interests and concerns through the lens of personal experience. In addition, PANA customized a community testimony toolkit that provided step-by-step visual instructions on how to dial into or electronically submit testimony for each hearing. For community members who would be calling in to state redistricting hearings in languages other than English, PANA and its partners hosted drop-in hours immediately prior to the hearings to explain instructions, rehearse testimony, and provide logistical support.

Presenting Community Testimony

An organizing infrastructure was critical to the successful turnout of more than 315 community members for participation in state, county, and City of El Cajon redistricting hearings. PANA staff had to research and educate partners and community members on the wide range of options for presenting COI testimony, the timing for live testimony, and whether and how live interpretation would be made available and in what languages. In addition, PANA staff worked tirelessly on interpretation logistics for live testimony, including working with state and county commission staff on remote interpretation logistics and helping staff secure trusted community interpreters. Ensuring trusted community interpreters were used increased the comfort level for community members, many of whom were publicly testifying for the first time.

PANA and its partners learned that to ensure community testimony is heard and considered, organizations must get creative and utilize all possible avenues of presenting testimony. Below is a summary of the community's experience with presenting COI testimony:

CALLING IN

Calling in to hearings was challenging for a variety of reasons, and especially for LEP speakers. There are the logistical challenges of finding experienced and competent interpreters who understand redistricting terminology; complicated instructions and meeting access codes; the sheer volume of calls that result in long wait times, especially at the state level; and the fact that, even for those who manage to successfully dial into a hearing, one-way interpretation is a frustrating and alienating experience for LEP speakers who are essentially excluded from what is being discussed before and after they speak. Thus, it was primarily English-speaking youth and organizational staff who called in to the state and county commissions. The city of El Cajon refused to provide a dial in option, despite multiple requests.

At the county level, the redistricting commission offered the option to testify by phone or through Zoom and offered interpretation upon request. However, once the county commission agreed to receive testimony through group presentations, LEP community members opted to participate this way, and organizing and supporting group testimony was easier for PANA and its partners. Unfortunately, dialing in by phone was the only option for live engagement with the state redistricting commission due to pandemic restrictions on their ability to host live hearings and their refusal to provide a group presentation option for COI testimony. Despite early attempts to support individual testimony before the state commission, PANA and its partners soon realized this was not a viable option for the community.

While the state commission was willing to accommodate interpretation requests in any language with advance notice, the option to present critical testimony in language at the end of the redistricting cycle, when maps were constantly changing, was essentially foreclosed for non-English speakers who found the process incredibly inaccessible due to unpredictable call-in times, hours-long wait times, and general confusion because limited English speaking community members were sandwiched between English speakers, unsure of what was being said until finally being addressed by an interpreter if one had been arranged. Thus, for the state hearings, PANA and its partners pivoted to turnout of English-speaking grassroots leaders who could speak on behalf of their communities of interest because those were the only people who could take the time to stay on hold for hours waiting to speak.

IN-PERSON

While both the county and the City of El Cajon had in-person hearings, it was challenging to turn community out to participate in person. Marginalized communities face significant barriers to getting to meetings - lack of transportation, lack of flexibility with work schedules, and inability to attend evening meetings due to family obligations. The pandemic added another barrier because many were uncomfortable attending indoor meetings. PANA and its partners did not use resources to turn large numbers of people out for in-person county hearings given the option for group presentations. For those who did testify in person, it was primarily grassroots and a small handful of community members who appeared in person at the final county commission hearings.

But in person testimony was the only option for live testimony in El Cajon, and El Cajon partners turned out 80 people to talk about their communities of interest and ultimately testify in support of a proposed district map that would unite those communities into a single district. As the redistricting process progressed, however, the refugee community in El Cajon became increasingly fearful of testifying at the El Cajon redistricting hearings due to intimidation by supporters mobilized by El Cajon city council members, who were upset with advocacy to unite El Cajon with other refugee communities in county redistricting maps. As a result, in the final stages of the El Cajon process, only 10 people attended the hearing to advocate for their community map, despite widespread community support.



Zoom community of interest group presentation at Iftin Charter School.

LIVE GROUP PRESENTATIONS

Testifying can be daunting for anyone but is especially so for limited English proficient (LEP) speakers. Community members were eager to engage and describe their community, but they wanted to do it together. PANA therefore asked the state and county commissions to offer a group-presentation option, where groups could call in, zoom in, or present in person together. The state commission declined this request, but the county commission was willing to make this accommodation and allowed for group presentations at all of its hearings. In the end, PANA and its partners organized and supported a total of 11 group presentations to the county commission.

For one county hearing, PANA hosted a group presentation by more than 70 community members from Iftin Charter School, a public school in City Heights. Supporting 70 community members to give individual testimony would have taken significant staff capacity. Instead, PANA organizers worked with community members to select and support nine trusted community members to present in Somali, Oromo, and Amharic while surrounded by more than 60 members of the East African community holding signs in the background that read “Keep Refugees Together.”



PANA Community of Interest group presentation at Iftin Charter with the Somali, Oromo, and Ethiopian community of City Heights.

In the same hearing, the Majdal Center hosted a group presentation by more than a dozen community members at its community center in El Cajon. Syrian and Iraqi refugee community members testified in Arabic on behalf of more than a dozen community members. Asian Solidarity Collective opted to organize an in-person group presentation at the same hearing on behalf of the Southeast Asian, East Asian, and South Asian COIs within the proposed BIPOC, Refugee, and Immigrant district.

Multiple group presentations in support of the proposed BIPOC, Immigrant, and Refugee district gave intersecting communities the ability to uplift the different regions, languages, and communities in the unified district. The group presentations not only succeeded in making refugee and immigrant communities visible to the county redistricting commission, but for the virtual presentations, also succeeded in bringing the commission to the community. Speakers were able to address the commission from a location that embodied the spirit of the community while residents stood behind them as visible and powerful advocates. In addition, the group presentations were an energizing, positive community building experience that boosted participation through the redistricting process. People continued to show up.

“The biggest win was the community’s engagement in the process and being able to testify in Somali and Oromo. This sets the stage for future engagement and language access.”

– Rahmo Abdi
Community Organizer



ELECTRONIC SUBMISSIONS

Both the state and county redistricting commissions offered the opportunity to submit e-comments. The ease of the online submission form was key. The state's e-comment portal was a detailed form with multiple fields that changed multiple times and was not accessible for most community members. Even youth needed technical support with submissions. In contrast, the county's e-comment portal was briefer and easier to use, and was an especially useful tool for English speaking community members at the end of the county process, when maps were rapidly changing and last minute advocacy was critical. In the end, community members submitted a total of 196 e-comments in English to the county commission.

While the state, county, and the city of El Cajon offered online COI and map submission tools, these tools were difficult for community members to use and, other than the state's Draw My CA Community tool, difficult for even PANA staff to navigate. Even PANA's demographer opted out of using the online map submission tool offered by the county commission, and instead submitted a shapefile with a narrative letter explaining the district proposed by PANA and its partners.

SOCIAL MEDIA

After seeing how responsive some redistricting bodies were to social media, PANA organizers worked with community members to film their testimony and live tweet that testimony at the state and county redistricting commissions during their hearings. It is not clear if videos had a greater impact than written or live submissions, and it was not necessarily easier for community members who found it intimidating to be filmed speaking, as opposed to reading their notes. With more planning and youth involvement, this could be a useful tool in future redistricting cycles. An example of video testimony can be seen here.

Reviewing and Responding to Draft Maps

Once the state and county commissions started posting, and then revising, draft maps, the remainder of the process was dynamic, fast moving, and required significant staff capacity to ensure authentic community voices were heard in the final phase of the redistricting process. During the roughly two months between the release of initial draft maps and adoption of final maps by the state and county commissions, PANA and its partners met regularly to assess multiple iterations of maps, educated and got feedback from their respective communities about the impact of the various drafts, and supported community testimony and pushed for turnout in support of or opposition to the draft maps.

Diligent monitoring of the simultaneous state and county processes was challenging as PANA and its partners tried to keep up with commission discussions about draft maps. In addition, there was a dramatic increase in participation from the general public once draft maps were posted and especially when draft maps were poised to be voted on, which meant monitoring a high volume of public testimony and e-comments. PANA heavily relied on the Black Census and Redistricting Hub (BCRH) to monitor the state commission discussions, evaluate the state commission's draft maps, and track public testimony that potentially threatened the Black, African, and Muslim refugee COIs PANA and its partners were fighting to keep together.

At the county level, the constant presence of a demographer to evaluate and explain the impact of draft maps was critical to PANA and its partners' understanding of and ability to respond to draft maps. Due to significant early engagement and advocacy prior to the release of draft maps, the proposed BIPOC, Immigrant, and Refugee District submitted by PANA and its partners was an anchor district in initial drafts released by the county commission. To the surprise of PANA and its partners, elected officials in El Cajon who were opposed to the city being united with refugee and immigrant communities in central San Diego, began mobilizing in direct opposition to the BIPOC Immigrant, and Refugee District, often using Islamophobic and anti-refugee and immigrant rhetoric. The demographer's expertise helped PANA and its partners demonstrate the ways in which draft maps with their proposed district best complied with legally mandated redistricting criteria, including respect for the Black, African, Muslim refugee and AMEMSA communities of interest across San Diego County.



The final phase of the redistricting process is a sprint and can be unpredictable, with everything the community has worked for on the line. Because there was greater interest from the general public as the process progressed, the final hearings necessitated the most turnout.

At times, it seemed the commissions were influenced by quantity of testimony rather than quality and authenticity. While the county commission remained open to group presentations, they became harder to coordinate on short notice at the end of the process. Instead, PANA and its partners relied increasingly on e-comments from English-speaking community members and in-person testimony from grassroots leaders. Given how quickly the state process was moving – and how challenging it was for community members to call in to state hearings – it was primarily PANA staff and partners’ staff who called to speak in support of or in opposition to the quickly evolving state maps. And PANA experimented with video testimony of a handful of community members, shared on Twitter when it seemed the state commission was being swayed by statements on social media.



Rahmo Abdi, Community Organizer facilitating a community education and mapping workshop at Colina del Sol park.

For the city of El Cajon, a process where the elected officials were responsible for drawing their own districts, the final phase of the process was dramatically different because it required advocacy to get the city council to even conduct a draft mapping phase instead of simply re-adopting their existing city council plan. PANA’s El Cajon partners successfully pushed the city to contract with a demographer, the idea being that the city council would instruct the demographer to draft a plan that assessed the demographic shifts in the city, incorporated community of interest testimony, and took into account proposed districts submitted by the public. [See Appendix O.](#)

Instead, the city council simply instructed the demographer to evaluate maps submitted by the public, including an eleventh hour map that was the same as the existing city council plan. In a less than transparent process, the contracted demographer presented analysis in support of the council’s

existing district map and discredited the map submitted by PANA and its partners, asserting that it resulted in a district that was not contiguous. Without their own demographer, PANA and its partners would have found it challenging to counter this claim. And while they argued that their proposed districts were contiguous and would unite the growing refugee community in El Cajon into a single district, the council rejected the plan because it would have resulted in council members being mapped out of their existing districts.

Finally, PANA and its partners did not have capacity to engage in the city of San Diego’s redistricting process. But after the independent commission for the city posted draft maps that would have split the BAMEMSA refugee and immigrant community in City Heights into two districts, PANA and its partners sent a letter successfully advocating for the City Heights community to be kept whole in its current district. [See Appendix P.](#)



PANA saw firsthand the tremendous impact that community-led and community-centered redistricting work can have on the movement to build political power for California, and San Diego's BAMEMSA refugee and immigrant communities. Key results of PANA's two-year investment in the redistricting process include the political education of BAMEMSA refugee and immigrant communities, the unification of BAMEMSA communities into single districts with other communities who share similar interests and policy concerns, and increased understanding and acceptance of the unique characteristics and interests of BAMEMSA refugee and immigrant communities.

PANA not only viewed redistricting as an opportunity to further engage community in the political process. Redistricting also presented a unique opportunity to deeply educate PANA's organizing and policy teams about political forces and power structures that have historically marginalized BAMEMSA refugee and immigrant communities. For PANA, the investment in staff education and training on redistricting was an investment in the development of its long-term policy, movement, and coalition building work. The work to ensure BAMEMSA communities were seen, understood, and heard throughout the redistricting process was a critical step toward achieving broader political power, and PANA and its partners intend to harness the momentum from redistricting to achieve policy wins over the next decade. The potential for future impact is exciting. A description of more immediate impacts follows.

Impact on Maps

Under the 2011 redistricting maps, the evolving and growing BAMEMSA refugee and immigrant communities in San Diego County were split, in different configurations, into three different districts at all levels of government. Excitingly, by the end of the 2021 redistricting cycle, these communities had been united in unprecedented ways and to varying degrees across congressional, state legislative, and county supervisorial district maps.

Perhaps even more importantly, San Diego's BAMEMSA communities were visible, recognized, and heard throughout the redistricting process. The state and county commissions were committed to growing their understanding of BAMEMSA refugee and immigrant experiences and policy concerns. That understanding and respect for BAMEMSA (COIs) was largely reflected in their final maps. Even in the few instances where San Diego BAMEMSA COIs were split, both commissions carefully discussed and were cognizant of the impact it would have on BAMEMSA communities of interest (COIs) during the drafting and revision of maps. And while the El Cajon city council may not have honored the requests of the city's growing refugee community to be represented in two districts, the advocacy by the refugee community ensured they were seen and potentially recognized as a growing political force with specific community needs and concerns that are not being addressed by the current council.

“I appreciated that PANA gave a voice and perspective that often isn't known about the Black community. It was helpful to understand that the Black community includes more than the African American, multigenerational descendants of slaves. This nuanced view was really important.”

- Linda Akutagawa
California Citizens Redistricting
Commissioner



Below is a summary of where San Diego BAMEMSA communities landed in the final maps:

CALIFORNIA CONGRESSIONAL PLAN

All COIs mapped by PANA and its partners, many of which were split into as many as three congressional districts under the 2011 maps, are now all kept whole in either the 51st or the 52nd Congressional District. While PANA and its partners had advocated for all of their COIs to be united in a single district, it was not possible due to the requirements for a Voting Rights Act district that pulled City Heights and Southeast San Diego COIs, which have both a high Black and Latinx concentration, into the VRA district. Excitingly, the city of El Cajon, previously split into two congressional districts, was made whole in the new 51st Congressional District.

CALIFORNIA STATE SENATE PLAN

All the COIs mapped by PANA and its partners are now united in the 39th District. This is a huge win and opportunity for community members to come together and give voice to shared issues. Notably, when the California Citizens Redistricting Commission explained its reasons for mapping the district as it did, it highlighted the importance of keeping San Diego's diverse refugee communities together in one district.

CALIFORNIA STATE ASSEMBLY PLAN

All but one of the COIs mapped by PANA and its partners are united in the new 79th Assembly District. This historically Black stronghold district now includes Black refugees, previously split off into two separate assembly districts, who share similar interests and policy concerns. PANA and its partners had advocated that the remaining COI - the refugee community in El Cajon - be included in the 79th District or, at a minimum, be kept whole in the 78th District, but the COI was split between the 78th and 79th Districts. Even this, however, was a partial win, as the city of El Cajon was previously in the 71st Assembly District with communities to the north and east that have very little in common with the growing refugee population in El Cajon.

SAN DIEGO COUNTY SUPERVISORIAL PLAN

The "BIPOC, Immigrant, and Refugee" district proposed by PANA and its partners fundamentally changed the architecture of the existing supervisorial map and contributed to the county commission and other stakeholders' ability to reimagine the way political power is distributed across San Diego County. In the end, over 90% of PANA and its partners' communities of interest (COIs) are now united within a single district in the new Supervisorial District 4, with only El Cajon being split off and remaining in Supervisorial District 2.

EL CAJON CITY COUNCIL PLAN

Despite the submission of proposed maps and intensive advocacy by the Majdal Center, the El Cajon City Council refused to change its 2017 map. By keeping the 2017 districts in place, the City Council effectively split the growing refugee and immigrant communities into no less than three of the four city council districts, effectively diluting the voting power and representation of the city's most marginalized and underserved communities.

Impact on Community

PANA and its partners learned that community-centered redistricting work was a powerful movement building tool, serving as a catalyst for political education and activism for San Diego’s historically marginalized BAMEMSA refugee and immigrant communities. The 2021 redistricting cycle was the first time most BAMEMSA community members had participated in a redistricting process. And while it was often challenging, the state and county commissions’ language interpretation accommodations, and especially the county’s option for group presentations, meant that BAMEMSA community members were able to tell their unique stories and experiences on the county redistricting stage and, to a more limited extent, on the statewide redistricting stage. It was incredibly exciting and motivating for the community.

Community members are now encouraged to engage and use their voices in other political processes that directly impact them. Redistricting presented an opportunity to build foundational knowledge within the community – from youth to elders – about not just the importance of redistricting and elections, but also how different levels of government work and the control they have over policies and resources that determine outcomes for people in their daily lives. They felt the power of their authentic voices being heard and recognized the significance of BAMEMSA refugee and immigrant experiences being introduced to a broader set of stakeholders. Redistricting ignited conversations among diverse refugee and immigrant communities about their shared interests and concerns. In addition, the challenges in securing effective and accessible, in-language options for participation ignited community interest in fighting for language access more broadly in other government processes and services.

Now that they have successfully advocated to be united in congressional, state legislative, and county supervisorial districts with communities that share similar policy concerns, BAMEMSA refugee and immigrant communities are ready to organize and advocate – at all levels of government – for policy solutions and deeper investment in their communities. This includes El Cajon, where the city council’s refusal to listen to the refugee community, and the council’s prioritization of its own political interests and incumbency over community needs, has motivated the community to engage in local elections, learn more about the city council’s policies and process, and engage council more intentionally to address pressing community issues.

Impact on Partners

Redistricting provided an avenue for further relationship building between PANA and partner organizations. PANA worked to secure funding for Census partners to continue to engage with their communities and expand their civic engagement capacity. It was challenging to find funding, and in the end, it was extremely limited. But partners nonetheless found ways to successfully engage and represent their communities.

Despite the absence of a statewide redistricting hub for Arab, Middle Eastern, Muslim, and South Asian (AMEMSA), PANA was able to provide a local infrastructure for redistricting education and support for partners working with AMEMSA communities. In addition to training and technical support, PANA was ultimately able to facilitate a space for deeper discussions about shared interests among communities that may not have traditionally worked together. In addition, the Black Census and Redistricting Hub created a space for discussion and coordination between Black African immigrant communities and Black African American communities, and this translated to ongoing discussions and coordination at the regional level.

Overall, many of PANA’s partners reported that it would have been difficult to engage in redistricting without a trusted partner providing transparent education, support, and the tools they needed to educate, engage, and map their communities. For partners who utilized the shared demographer, they felt empowered to confidently engage in larger redistricting discussions and negotiations. Several organizations reported that learning more about local government and power imbalances had motivated them to engage the community more deeply in local government and policy advocacy.

“Having a support system and network is critical to effectively engage in the redistricting process. PANA provided an opportunity for learning, technical support, and an independent demographer to help us better understand the Asian/Asian American COI and the larger Black, Indigenous, People of Color Communities.”

**– Miss Piggy Rock
Organizer, Asian Solidarity Collective (ASC)**



Key Recommendations

The lessons and best practices that PANA and its partners learned throughout the redistricting process are incorporated throughout this report. The following are key recommendations for improving the redistricting process for marginalized communities in future redistricting cycles.

- **Establish an independent redistricting commission for the city of El Cajon.** Both the county and state redistricting commissions worked hard to reach marginalized communities and made PANA and its partners feel like welcome and equal participants in their processes. In contrast, the El Cajon city council, responsible for analyzing and redrawing their own districts, only reluctantly engaged in a redistricting process at all, and openly centered the protection of their existing districts and incumbency over the needs and interests of communities advocating for fairer districts. Over the next decade, work must be done to ensure that an independent redistricting commission draws the city council lines in 2031.
- **Codify an increased number of hearings for the San Diego County IRC.** State law currently requires the IRC to hold 7 pre-draft map hearings. The 2021 IRC commendably went above what was required by state law and held 13 hearings to provide expanded opportunities for public input before it produced its initial draft maps. For a county the size of San Diego, the same or more should be required in future cycles. In addition, the required number of post-draft map hearings (currently just two) should be increased. Public participation in the process dramatically increased after the release of draft maps. Two hearings were insufficient for the IRC to respond to new public input, reconcile competing interests and redistricting criteria, and get sufficient input on new iterations of maps at this critical final stage of the process. And while the IRC graciously continued to take public comment during its meetings, the number of post-draft map hearings should be formalized and codified to reflect what is actually needed.
- **Compensate local independent redistricting commissioners for their time.** Service on the San Diego County Independent Redistricting Commission (IRC) was volunteer. Commissioners should be compensated so they can justify time away from work and family to be fully engaged in all hearings and meetings and to ensure the commission reflects the racial, ethnic, and economic diversity of the county.
- **Require coordination among redistricting bodies to maximize public participation in simultaneous processes.** State, county, and local redistricting meetings and hearings too often happened on the same days and times, forcing organizations to choose participation in one process over the other. Better coordination among redistricting bodies is needed to ensure the public has an equal opportunity to participate in all processes that impact representation at the state and local level for the next decade. And while the Census delay wreaked havoc on redistricting deadlines for the 2021 cycle, consideration should be paid to staggering deadlines as much as possible given how time intensive it is for community-based organizations to participate in the rapidly moving, final phase of any redistricting process.
- **Increase the number of supervisorial districts for San Diego County.** The San Diego County IRC's ability to map districts in compliance with the mandated criteria, including respect for communities of interest, was inherently limited by the fact they had to divide a population of more than three million people into five districts. It simply is not possible to ensure fair representation in local government – especially for a county as richly diverse as San Diego – when supervisorial districts are the size of congressional districts. The San Diego County Board of Supervisors controls an annual budget of more than \$7 billion dollars. How those dollars are spent directly impacts the lives of the county's most marginalized and struggling communities. Yet supervisors represent anywhere from 636,285 to 689,991 people under the new district maps. Until the San Diego County Charter is amended to expand the number of supervisors, San Diego's most marginalized communities will continue to have their voices – and their votes – sidelined.



- **Improve language access for both the state and county processes.** Both the state and county commissions put considerable time into exploring ways to make their processes more accessible, and both offered interpretation in any language upon request. PANA spent considerable staff time trying to coordinate with state and county commission staff so that limited English proficient (LEP) speakers had the opportunity to participate. Everyone involved, including interpreters and community members, would likely agree it was incredibly challenging, and for PANA and commission staff, it was time consuming. A few things that would improve access and the public testimony experience for LEP speakers in the future:
 - *Both the state and the county commissions should have a staff member dedicated solely to language accessibility.*
 - *Commissions should contract with interpreters who are assigned for the entire redistricting process and provide training on redistricting terminology, public testimony protocols, and interpretation technology so they can build their knowledge and vocabulary and better support LEP participants.*
 - *The state commission should offer the option for group presentations so that LEP speakers can present alongside other LEP speakers and with the support of other community members. The county should continue to offer this option in future cycles.*
 - *When there are long speaker queues – either in person or virtually – group speakers by language preference. The experience is less alienating for LEP speakers when they are speaking alongside other people in their language group as opposed to being sandwiched between English speakers.*
 - *Let people know wait times when they are in a long queue.*
- **Invest early, equitably, meaningfully in local redistricting.** Redistricting work is complicated, is resource intensive, and requires expertise, planning, collaboration, and an organizing infrastructure to ensure community participation. Earlier and larger investments in local, grassroots organizations that serve marginalized communities would have enabled them to effectively plan and incorporate redistricting education and engagement into existing movement work and goals. While PANA received support for redistricting and was able to funnel support to a handful of partners, this funding came late in the process, and it was a scramble for partners to get up the learning curve and organize their communities. More funding would have resulted in more staff training and building of institutional knowledge, more collaboration and community mapping among partners, more conversations and coordination with organizations and non-traditional stakeholders with competing interests, and more in-language community workshops and engagement.

Appendices & Online Resources

- Appendix A** Letter to San Diego County Independent Redistricting Commission
RE: Selection of Remaining Commissioners to the San Diego County Independent Redistricting Commission
- Appendix B** Letter to San Diego County Redistricting Commission
RE: Recommendations for Commission Next Steps
- Appendix C** Letter to California Citizens Redistricting Commission
RE: Language Access for the Draw My CA Community of Interest tool
- Appendix D** Letter to California Citizens Redistricting Commission
RE: Language Access Recommendations
- Appendix E** Letter to California Citizens Redistricting Commission
RE: Meeting Interpretation Recommendations
- Appendix F** PANA's Language Access Presentation to the California Citizens Redistricting Commission
- Appendix G** PANA's Best Practices for Community Engagement Presentation to the San Diego County Independent Redistricting Commission
- Appendix H** Media Articles
- Appendix I** Letter to El Cajon City Council
Re: Redistricting Process
- Appendix J** PANA Partner Redistricting 101
- Appendix K** PANA's Community-Centered Community of Interested 101 & Mapping Presentation
- Appendix L** PANA Youth Community of Interest Jamboard Virtual Discussion tool
- Appendix M** Facilitator's Redistricting Agenda & Talking Points
- Appendix N** Community Testimony Toolkits
- Appendix O** Majdal Center Letter to El Cajon City Council Re: El Cajon Communities of Interest
- Appendix P** Letter to City of San Diego Redistricting Commission
Re: City Heights Community of Interest
- Appendix Q** 2022 Redistricting Final Maps

<https://www.panasd.org/mapping-our-future>



Partnership for the Advancement of New Americans

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