

# REDISTRICTING IN INDIAN COUNTRY

*Removing gerrymandered districts and voting restrictions empowers Native communities to elect representatives that will address their needs and interests.*

*A fair map is a first step to addressing centuries of sustained, systemic racism.*

## PREPARING REDISTRICTING TESTIMONY

Testifying at public hearings and meetings is an important way to advocate for your community. This guide can help you prepare your testimony for these meetings that is focused specifically on your community.<sup>1</sup> You may also want to testify about fairness in the redistricting process itself, decisions about whether to use single-member or multi-member districts, or other related issues.

Also, your testimony should be influenced by your state's laws—make sure you know what factors are most important in your state. More information is at <http://vote.narf.org/redistricting/>.

### Introduction

- Introduce yourself, your tribe, and the people who you are representing. Explain who you are working with.
- Share your goals. Are you hoping that your tribe is kept in a single district, proposing a larger coalition district, or something else?

*Example:* “My name is \_\_\_\_\_. I am a member of \_\_\_\_\_ Tribe and I’ve been a resident of \_\_\_\_\_ Reservation for \_\_\_\_\_ years. I’m here with a group of my fellow tribal members. I would like the [commission, committee, etc.] to keep my tribe together.”

*Example:* “My name is \_\_\_\_\_. I am the Vice President of \_\_\_\_\_ Tribe, and I’m here with a community organizer from \_\_\_\_\_ Tribe, other tribal leaders and council members, elders, \_\_\_\_\_. We are here with several members of both of our tribes, who share common interests. We would like the Redistricting Commission to keep our tribes in one district.”

### Describe a Map of Your Community

- What are the boundaries on each side? Are there streets or geographic features like a river that indicate where your community stops or starts?
- Are there any significant landmarks that are a part of your community: rivers, mountains, canyons, historic sites, etc.?
- Are there important gathering places: community centers, social service agencies?
- Do the current district boundaries divide your tribal community or keep it together? If there is a proposed new map, will it divide your tribal community or keep it together?

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<sup>1</sup> This guide is adapted from materials prepared by Common Cause, Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund, and State Voices in collaboration with other groups.



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*Example:* “The northern boundary of our community is the river, the eastern boundary is Highway 10, the southern boundary extends to the end of the reservation, and the western edge goes to the county boundary where we meet the next county. The fairgrounds by the river, although not within the boundaries of the reservation, are where our tribal members gather to celebrate.... Our community currently is split into two county council districts.”

## **Describe Your Community and its Voting History**

Describe your community using social and economic data and narratives about your history and culture. Describe what connects the people and why it’s important that they be kept together. Remember that your community need not consist solely of tribal members or of Native people—consider whether your community might be broader than that. As you describe your community, you can also explain how it is different from the communities around you.

The Voting Rights Act may provide your community additional protections. If this is the case, make sure to explain if you live relatively close together, generally support the same candidates, and have enough people to be a majority of the eligible voters in a district. More information on this law is at <https://vote.narf.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/NARF-redistricting-toolkit.pdf>.

### • **Share stories**

- Who are the members of the community? What sort of things do they do for a living?
- How large is your community? How many eligible voters live in the community?
- Does your neighborhood have important celebrations or other traditions?
- What is the history of your tribe?
- Do the Native voters tend to support the same candidates? Are these candidates often defeated by non-Native voters’ candidates?
- Is there a history of discrimination related to voting? Are there things that make it hard for Native voters to vote?
- Have Native people faced other discrimination, like in education or housing?
- Have there been racial appeals made in political campaigns?

*Example:* “My tribe is a sovereign, federally recognized tribe located in central Nevada with 1,239 enrolled members, over 800 of which reside within the boundaries of the reservation. Blue Lake was once totally part of our original reservation and it has great significance to our people. We have numerous cultural and historical sites that are off-reservation which have important cultural ties to our tribe, including pine nut picking, ceremonies, and prehistoric petroglyphs.”

*Example:* “Under the Voting Rights Act, our tribe is entitled to a district that gives us an opportunity to elect candidates of our choice to the State House. A typical district has 10,000 people of voting age, and our reservation has 6,000 voting-age Native people on the reservation. But we haven’t been able to elect a representative because we are divided into multiple districts, and the non-Native voters vote to defeat the candidates we usually support. Given this, plus the history of discrimination against Native people in this state, the legislature must create a district that gives us a real opportunity to elect candidates of our choice.”



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- **Include data from reliable sources like the U.S. Census Bureau to describe your community and what neighbors have in common.**
  - What is the average level of education or graduation rates?
  - What is the average income level?
  - What kind of housing is common? Single family homes, large apartment buildings? Do people rent or own their homes?
  - Is there a common language?
  - What are the different ancestries, races, and ethnicities? (Note that race can be *factor* in defining your community, but it shouldn't be the *predominant* factor.)

*Example:* “My tribe, overall, lives in significant poverty. The median income of our tribe is less than \$40,000/year. The eastern part of our reservation, where most of the tribal members live, has a lower median household income than the western side of our reservation where most of the Anglos live. The western side has relatively higher levels of median income and lower levels of poverty. Employment on the reservation is very limited, resulting in high unemployment rates. Housing on our reservation is scattered with tribal members living in small, isolated areas in a widely scattered settlement pattern, and our tribe suffers disproportionately from homelessness and housing instability. 76.9% of our tribe are high school graduates or higher (compared to 94.2% of whites) and 10.4% of our tribe has a bachelor’s degree or higher (compared to 34.7% of whites). A significant portion of our tribe speak our language: \_\_\_\_\_, and others experience difficulties using the English language. Our tribe lacks access to clean water and to health care.”

- **Describe your community’s major concerns and how you have worked together in the past**—Highlighting community issues helps demonstrate the importance of elected officials who understand and respond to community needs.
  - Has your community come together to advocate for important services, like more translated information, or health centers in your neighborhood?
  - Have you worked for more recognition or support for your community, like having your holidays recognized or historical events commemorated?
  - What harms have been caused because your voice has been ignored, like poor health caused by pollution from nearby coal plants or industrial farms?
  - What kind of relationship do you have with elected officials in your area? Are you able to meet with them? Are they responsive to your community’s needs?

*Example:* “Last summer, our tribe, as well as the \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ tribes collectively took aggressive measures to combat the spread of the virus in our communities, including shelter-in-place orders and highway checkpoints at our reservation borders to conduct health screenings and limit travel if needed. Our three tribal nations also enacted measures for contact tracing and established quarantine sites.”



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## **Closing:**

- Thank the members of the redistricting body. Restate your goals one last time.
- Provide them with your written testimony and exhibits, including any maps you have prepared.

*Example:* “I believe my tribe should be kept together for the many reasons our tribal leaders and coalition members have outlined. I want to thank the commissioners for their consideration of keeping my tribe together.”

**#ShapeNativeFutures**

**More information available at <https://vote.narf.org/redistricting/>.**

**Contact us at [vote@narf.org](mailto:vote@narf.org) .**



A project of the Native American Rights Fund  
<https://vote.narf.org/redistricting>  
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