

Redistricting for Local Officials

This fact sheet provides a general overview of the redistricting process for Wisconsin's local government officials. This summary includes a process timeline and resources for obtaining more information.

A National Perspective

The U.S. Census Bureau released the first data from Census 2010 in December 2010. The country's 22nd decennial census figures showed that the nation's resident population on Census Day, April 1, 2010, was 308,745,538, a 9.7% increase over the 2000 count.

Census 2010 and Reapportionment

As established by Article 1, Section 2 of the Constitution of the United States, the census is the basis for determining the number of representatives each state has in the U.S. House of Representatives. Congress determines the number of seats in the House of Representatives, which is currently set at 435. The process of dividing the 435 seats among the 50 states is known as apportionment.

As was the case 10 years ago, Census 2010 shows that the greatest population growth has occurred in the South (14.3%) and West (13.8%), while there was slower growth in the Northeast (3.2%) and Midwest (3.9%). Nevada had the highest population growth (35.1%). Michigan was the only state to lose population over the last decade (-0.6%). Wisconsin's 2010 population was 5,686,986, an increase of 6%.

Shifts in population among the states mean that some states will gain or lose congressional seats. In 2011, Arizona, Georgia, Nevada, South Carolina, Utah, and Washington will all gain one seat; Florida will gain two; and Texas will gain four. States that are losing one representative include Iowa, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Michigan, Missouri, New Jersey, New York, Ohio, and Pennsylvania. Illinois and Ohio are each losing two seats. Wisconsin will continue to have eight members of Congress, meaning each congressional district in Wisconsin will have approximately 710,873 people.

Redistricting

Redistricting is the process of revising the geographic boundaries within a state from which people elect their representatives to the U.S. House of Representatives, state legislature, county board, city council, and school board.

Although this process involves all levels of government, the creation of congressional, legislative, county, and municipal districts are completed separately.

The process begins with the adjustment of municipal wards, the building blocks used to form election districts. Wisconsin law requires all cities, villages, and towns with populations of 1,000 or more to establish wards. Although towns and villages of 1,000 or more must establish wards, their board members continue to be elected at large. Municipalities will receive the necessary population data in April, 2011.

In the fall of 2011, state legislators will begin the process of redrawing Wisconsin's 33 senate and 99 assembly districts.

Redistricting at the Local Level

The three-step process for municipal and county redistricting requires cooperation and coordination among counties and their related municipalities. This process begins at the county level, moves to the municipal level, and finally culminates with county adoption of supervisory districts and city adoption of aldermanic districts. Each of the three phases is comprised of a sixty-day work period.

Three-Step Process

Step One: Within sixty days of receiving the census data, county boards will submit a tentative County Supervisory District Plan to each municipality in the county. Each county board is required to hold a public hearing on the tentative plan and to solicit suggestions from both the municipalities and the general public. The tentative plan may be amended after the public hearing to incorporate the suggestions. A copy of the tentative plan is then sent to the municipalities within the county. *This step must be completed no later than July 1, 2011.*

Step Two: Municipalities adjust ward boundaries in line with the proposed county supervisory district plans. The wards established govern the adjustment of supervisory districts. An ordinance or resolution describing ward boundary lines must be adopted.

Step Three: Within sixty days of receiving municipal ward adjustments, counties are required to adopt final supervisory district plans consisting of whole municipal wards. Cities must also establish aldermanic district plans. In order to adopt a final county plan, a public hearing is required. Following adoption of the plan, each county must file a copy with the secretary of state.

Redistricting Timetable

<i>April, 2011</i>	Population data distributed to local governments
<i>June</i>	Counties adopt tentative supervisory plans (no later than July 1)
<i>August</i>	Municipalities adopt ward plans
<i>October</i>	Counties establish supervisory districts
<i>October</i>	Cities establish aldermanic districts
<i>Winter, 2011-2</i>	State establishes legislative and congressional districts
<i>April, 2012</i>	County board and municipal elections with new districts

Guiding Principles and Considerations

What makes the redistricting process and the resulting plan fair and legal? There are several key points for redistricting committees and staff to keep in mind:

Population sizes in aldermanic and supervisory districts should be substantially equal: While “substantially equal” is not clearly defined in federal or state law, there is precedent for supporting the plan with the lowest deviation. In order to minimize boundary changes in 2021, some municipalities may consider placing fewer people in a ward that may be considered a high growth area. Deviation from a district’s “ideal population” must be justified by attempts to accomplish one of the goals below.

Aldermanic and supervisory districts should be compact: “Compact” is another term that can be defined in a variety of ways. Frequently, municipalities will attempt to draw boundary lines that follow geographic features, roads, or neighborhood boundaries. Doing so is often easier said than done. However, it is important to avoid “gerrymandering.” The term gerrymandering dates back to 1812 when, to favor his political party, Massachusetts governor Elbridge Gerry created an election district that resembled a salamander.

Districts should respect communities of interest: The Voting Rights Act provides that a citizen’s right to vote shall not “be denied or abridged” on account of race or color. These populations should have as much opportunity as possible to elect representatives who reflect their backgrounds and interests. Once again, gerrymandering should be avoided.

When possible, aldermanic and supervisory boundaries should retain the core of existing districts: Political turmoil will be minimized if continuity and composition of districts are maintained. By doing so, incumbents will not be forced to run against one another or seek re-election by voters who were formerly part of another district.

Cooperation: Last but not least, every effort should be made to encourage cooperation between the county and municipalities. Given the time constraints of the process, politics, and limited staffing resources, education and communication from the beginning of the process through its completion are necessary.

Mapping It Out

For the most part, technical staff working on the mapping of boundaries will use a software program called Wisconsin Shape Editor for Local Redistricting, or WISE-LR. This software program will allow technical staff to assign census blocks and population data to build plans for supervisory districts, aldermanic districts and municipal wards. The software can help generate alternative plans for comparison.

It is important for local officials to remember that the mapping process and options are a “work in progress” and that the technical staff should not advocate one option over another. Ultimately, each redistricting committee will receive input about the boundary options in a variety of ways and will make a final decision that minimizes unwanted changes.

Road Shows

Local officials and technical staff will have the opportunity to attend one of several redistricting educational programs offered throughout the state during April 2011. These “road shows” are being conducted by the Legislative Reference Bureau, the Legislative Technology Services Bureau, and University of Wisconsin-Applied Population Laboratory. Information on the basic legal requirements of redistricting, description of a ward, and how to report ward boundaries will be presented. In addition, technical staff will receive hands-on training on the WISE-LR application. Further information and registration forms are available by calling (608) 265-9545, or at the WISE-LR website: <http://www.legis.state.wi.us/wiselr/>

Information and Resources

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Web-based Resources:

For the state resource page on redistricting:
<http://www.legis.state.wi.us/ltsb/redistricting/>

For guidelines regarding the adjustment of municipal wards: <http://www.legis.state.wi.us/lrb/pubs/ib/01ib3.pdf>

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