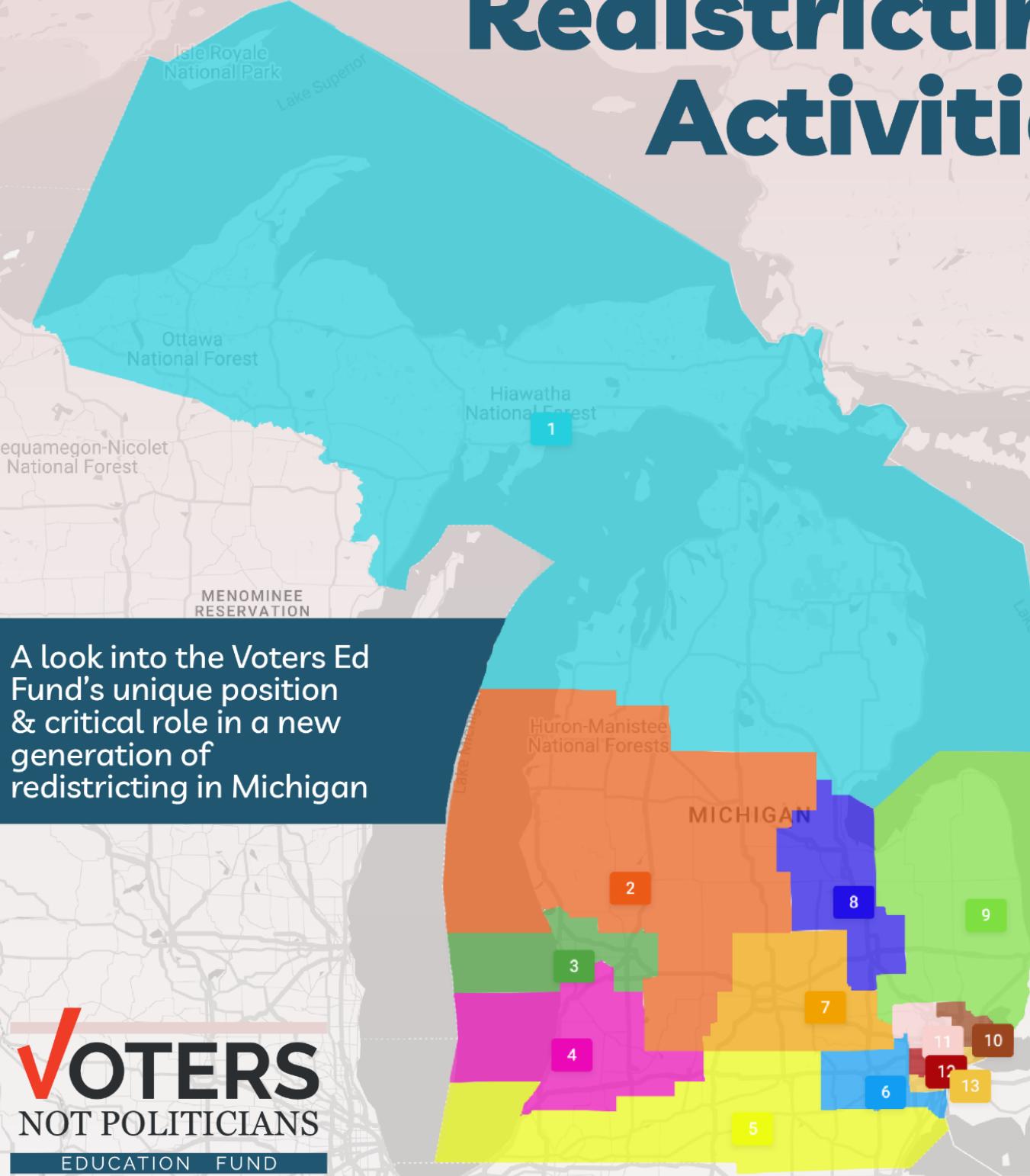


Final Report on Redistricting Activities



Voters Not Politicians

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Last Revised: September 1st, 2022

Executive Summary

In 2018, after decades of extreme partisan gerrymandering by politicians, Michigan voters took matters into their own hands and amended the state Constitution to take redistricting away from politicians and entrust it to an independent citizens commission.

In December 2021, the state's first-ever Michigan Independent Citizens Redistricting Commission (MICRC) approved State Senate, State House and Congressional voting district maps that will be used in Michigan elections from 2022-2030.

For the past three years, Voters Not Politicians (VNP), the non-partisan group that wrote the amendment and led the successful initiative campaign to pass it, has sought to empower the general public and community groups to ensure that the MICRC's process would be citizen-led and centered around transparency and public input, as the voters intended.

This report describes VNP's education and outreach programs and assesses their impact in order to refine activities for the next redistricting cycle and to substantiate the value of investing in such programs.

VNP's programming was led by **a large, diverse, and skilled Redistricting Team** that educated the public and engaged communities of interest (COIs) in the redistricting process. Its key recommendations for the redistricting cycles to follow include:

- **Work with community groups** to educate members on the voter-driven redistricting process and encourage Michiganders to apply to be a commissioner on the MICRC. Efforts to remove barriers to applying should include holding **one stop, hands-on application workshops** about how to fill out an application form and **having notaries on site** to notarize applications. The Commission can only be diverse if the applicant pool is diverse;
- **Provide small grants** to help community groups build the capacity they need to focus on redistricting;
- **Connect redistricting to specific policy priorities** relevant to community members;
- **Foster networks of COI organizations**, which empower COIs to share information, tactics and best practices for involving members in redistricting;

- **Monitor the MICRC's activities** for the public. Especially once mapping starts, there will be too many developments for the public to easily digest. This will require Team volunteers to closely monitor the MICRC's activities and **serve as a trusted, up-to-date source of information** for the press and citizens on the MICRC's work; and
- **Distribute accessible redistricting educational materials** through websites, blogs, and presentations.

Having a new commission made up of everyday Michiganders leading an independent, public, redistricting process for the first time would have its challenges under any circumstances. But delays in the 2020 Census data and a shutdown of in-person gatherings due to the COVID 19 pandemic, meant that both VNP and COIs had to be nimble and work creatively to adapt and develop novel ways to engage their members in the constantly changing process.

VNP focused on educating and empowering the public, as well as playing an essential role as watchdog of the MICRC to ensure the Commission adhered to the Constitution and the will of the voters. VNP monitored every MICRC meeting and became a reliable source of information for communities, the media, and citizens throughout the redistricting process. Building on these activities and lessons learned through the evaluation process, we propose a timeline in the conclusion and summary section for non-partisan activities in future redistricting cycles.

Because of VNP's unique position and critical role in initial adoption of the constitutional amendment, VNP staff and volunteers have a unique perspective on public engagement with the MICRC.

This report, prepared for future non-partisan program developers at VNP, and groups in Michigan and other states, presents VNP's experience and suggestions for future redistricting efforts.

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1. Introduction

In 2018, Michigan voters amended the state Constitution to put the power to draw voting district lines in the hands of everyday Michiganders. The Constitution now requires the formation of an independent citizens commission every ten years, and it stipulates a variety of ways in which that commission must take into account public input in the redistricting process.

Among other rules governing the maps, the Michigan Independent Citizens Redistricting Commission (MICRC or Commission) must draw districts that “reflect the state's diverse population and communities of interest.” The Constitution defines communities of interest (COIs) broadly as communities that have “cultural, economic, historical, and/or other shared interests.”

The MICRC began Michigan's first-ever citizen-led redistricting process in September 2020 and completed maps for the State House, State Senate, and US House of Representatives in December 2021.

Voters Not Politicians (VNP) began its public engagement programming in early 2020 to support voter involvement in every part of the process, including encouraging Michiganders to apply. This report catalogs the findings of VNP's internal evaluation of its programming.

VNP's public engagement efforts took place in four phases, which are discussed in Parts 2 through 5:

1. Forming the VNP Redistricting Team;
2. Soliciting applications to the MICRC;
3. Empowering COIs in the redistricting process; and
4. Educating the general public on redistricting.

We discuss VNP actions and accomplishments during each phase, as well as the lessons learned. Our evaluation relied on surveys and focus groups with VNP staff and volunteers, document analysis, and interviews with leaders of eleven community of interest partners.

(Introduction continued on page 7)

The 2020-21 Michigan redistricting process was a unique civic engagement program. We hope to preserve in this report the insights and lessons learned over the course of this redistricting cycle to support future non-profit teams working on redistricting and other public engagement in state political processes.

Specifically, we hope that it will reach and be useful to groups in Michigan in preparing for the 2030 redistricting cycle (including future VNP volunteers) as well as groups in other states looking to initiate or enhance voter engagement programs.

This report has been prepared by VNP volunteers and staff, drawing on the collective expertise of the organization and individuals who led the effort to pass Michigan's constitutional amendment establishing the MICRC (Proposal 18-2) in 2018.

Since the passage of that amendment, VNP has worked tirelessly to promote public engagement with the new redistricting process and with Michigan governance more broadly. In this report, the insights of those years of engagement are synthesized with reflections from communities of interest across the state of Michigan, offering a unique perspective on the importance of and best practices for community engagement in redistricting.

This evaluation was conducted primarily from January through May 2022, though some data collection occurred in 2020 and 2021.

2. Forming the VNP Redistricting Team

2.1. The role of volunteers

In July 2020, VNP formed the largely volunteer “Redistricting Team,” which did most of the work described in this report. Volunteer leaders recruited other volunteers who had demonstrated their capability and reliability in previous VNP volunteer work. Over the course of the project, more volunteers joined, which brought new ideas and much needed capacity. Most of the time, the Redistricting Team had about 15-20 active members. That number worked well in maintaining a knowledgeable and cohesive group.

The same features that made the VNP Redistricting Team so successful are responsible for VNP’s success generally. Voters Not Politicians’ secret sauce for organizing includes:

- An unwavering commitment to non-partisan democracy reform.
- An inclusive volunteer culture where everyone brings what they can and everyone’s contribution matters.
- Pairing, as much as possible, volunteers’ passions with the organization’s needs.
- Discipline and rigor, which includes robust volunteer training.
- Staying nimble.

Redistricting Team volunteers applied the same approach to redistricting implementation: a strictly **non-partisan** agenda; a culture of **inclusiveness and accessibility**; focusing on issues that are most **salient to participants** and designing content most relevant to them; robust volunteer **training and support** as they learn by doing; and staying **nimble and flexible** in a fast-moving world.

Note on volunteers: We acknowledge that the ability to volunteer is not accessible to everyone. It is a privilege that requires time, and often requires access to transportation, technology, and child care. VNP works to make our volunteer opportunities as widely accessible as possible, but we realize that it is difficult to impossible to make them universally accessible. A more volunteer-based approach may work for some organizations, and a more staff-based approach may work for other organizations. We intend this report to be beneficial to both approaches.

2.2. Actions and accomplishments

The Redistricting Team found it efficient to divide the work into tasks:

- Finding applicants to the MICRC;
- Finding, engaging and supporting COIs;
- Creating slide decks, speaker notes, and handouts;
- Doing public speaking to educate the public about redistricting;
- Training groups on the mapping process;
- Providing tech support for speakers and for mapping; and
- Observing and reporting on MICRC meetings.

Some people took on more than one job responsibility, and some took a leadership role (e.g., in organizing and preparing for the public presentations by conducting rehearsals). Throughout the redistricting process, Team volunteers worked closely with two VNP staff members. Staff support was important to keep volunteers up to date on MICRC activities and lawsuits, as well as provide expertise and extra help when needed, but the demand was modest. While the volunteer leadership typically spent over 40 hours per week on average during the project, the Team volunteers varied widely. At the same time, the two staff members spent an average of 25 hours per week working with the Team.

Volunteers reported a high level of satisfaction with the actions of the Redistricting Team, despite the challenges they faced in engaging underrepresented groups for the first MICRC redistricting process: ***"There were low points, but there was some good comeback and tremendous success."***

The Team worked closely together, developing strong relationships that underpinned VNP's efforts to engage the public with the MICRC:

"I have never experienced working with a group like this, from the leadership to the collaboration amongst each one of us. I've never been a part of a group that was so focused on the goal, the vision, and devoid of ego ... It's been just wonderful and inspiring. I just want to say that to every one of you. I've learned so much. That was a huge success for me personally." - VNP Volunteer



The Detroit/Dearborn team had the chance to table with applications between services at a church. They had applications, flyers, a notary public, and knowledgeable volunteers on hand.

2.3. Lessons learned and best practices

During the 2020 redistricting cycle, VNP split up the work by task, as discussed above – one subcommittee was in charge of recruiting applicants for the Commission, while another was focused on creating slide decks for presentations, and so on. This worked well for engaging and educating the general public, but we also worked intensively with eleven “deep engagement” community of interest partners. Through the Deep Engagement Program, we identified eleven communities of interest and provided both grant funding and frequent interaction with Team volunteers that served as liaisons. With deep engagement work, we found that assigning volunteers as liaisons to specific community of interest partners, who partner with them on the entire continuum of civic engagement and redistricting work, is efficient and effective.

The Redistricting Team’s success was due in large part to the excellent group assembled. Team leaders recruited and trained highly motivated, very capable volunteers. In this report, we identify best practices that may serve future groups in thinking about the composition and structure of the group.

A future Redistricting Team should be structured to promote engagement, reliability, and a sense of community. This means the Team should:

- Have strong, consistent volunteer leadership who will work long hours, run weekly meetings throughout the course of the redistricting process, and shoulder multiple responsibilities including planning presentations and assisting Team volunteers.
- Ask volunteers to choose roles relevant to their interests and expertise, e.g., COI liaisons, slide deck and handout preparation, public speaking, mapping, technology support.
- Have regular meetings and respect people’s time: start and end on a predictable schedule. Use weekly meetings to provide updates on the redistricting process, discuss strategies for having maximum impact, assign roles, get updates on volunteer activities, and share decision-making. It is also helpful to use these sessions for regular debriefing and reporting out. This can help volunteer morale and support learning.
- Use a message group to provide information between meetings, as well as using Basecamp or a similar tool for project management and team communication.
- Be nimble and ready to change course whenever the situation changes.

- Work with volunteers to set realistic deadlines. Provide support if volunteers struggle to meet deadlines.
- Have quantitative goals, e.g., a certain number of COIs, a certain number of education presentations, a certain number of maps submitted.
- Have high standards for the quality of the work undertaken by the Team and get regular feedback from partners about presentations and supporting materials.

The group assembled should be enthusiastic, diverse, and skilled. There should be no minimum requirements for joining the Team aside from interest and availability.

Therefore, the discussion below is not intended to be read as barring entry to any individuals; however, several characteristics of the group as a whole may be useful to consider:

- Volunteers should be diverse in as many ways as possible including geography, race, gender, age, etc. When building relationships, it can be important for a COI to see itself represented in VNP and in the teams speaking with it. This includes both demographic and geographic differences: groups like VNP need a diverse team of volunteers from around the state. This can be helpful on several fronts. First, a diverse team is likely to know a broader array of groups to make initial contacts and is more likely to be able to identify and empathize with key issues facing COIs. Second, volunteers who look and sound like community members with similar backgrounds are more likely to gain the trust of communities that have historically been underserved by government processes like redistricting.
- The group needs to bring varied expertise, especially in education, statistics, mathematics, law, social work, geography, etc. This includes software expertise, experience with mapping, and other capacities that will prove useful in hands-on support of COIs.
- Recruit individuals from within communities of interest to work within or advise the Team.
- Recruit staff and interns who fill gaps in the Team's capacities. For example, recent graduates or interns may bring additional mapping skills from their GIS coursework.

3. Raising awareness and soliciting applications

3.1. Actions and accomplishments

VNP conducted a successful campaign to generate interest in and directly solicit applications for the MICRC. VNP took several approaches to this work:

- VNP held 3 types of outreach events to raise awareness and solicit applications to the MICRC.
 - “AWWA” (advocacy while walking around): VNP attended events such as farmers markets, local fairs, and community meetings, and talked with individuals. Volunteers described the work of the future MICRC, outlined the job description, and created an email list of those interested in learning more about potential service on the MICRC (our “interested-in-applying” list). We then kept those on the list informed about the application process.
 - Team members presented information on the amendment and the MICRC either in a formal setting using PowerPoint slides, or with brief comments at other groups’ events. For example, they visited neighborhood group meetings in Detroit, occupying a 10 minute speaking slot. In both the first and second type of event, volunteers handed out flyers/cards and collected contact information for the interested-in-applying list.
 - After the Michigan Department of State (MDOS) had finalized the process to apply to be a commissioner, VNP conducted “one stop” application workshops that proceeded as follows:
 - i. VNP volunteers gave a short slide presentation on the Constitutional amendment and the work of the future Commission;
 - ii. VNP volunteers encouraged attendees to submit applications to be a commissioner at the workshop;
 - iii. Applications were online, so attendees would fill out the application online (requires computers connected to the internet; libraries were a good location to hold workshops because of computer availability);

**A successful
Commission is one that
truly represents
Michigan voters and
citizens**

**But that only happens if
YOU apply!**



- iv. Attendees would print out their completed application forms (requires printers);
- v. Because Michigan applications had to be notarized, VNP recruited volunteers to become notaries public, and they would attend workshops and notarize applications free of charge; and
- vi. VNP volunteers were on hand to offer support and answer attendees' questions.
- VNP hosted a website to generate attention for the MICRC, provide information about the application process, and gather contact information from Michiganders who were interested in applying or receiving more information about applying (VNP's "interested in applying" email list).
- In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, VNP switched to Zoom and hosted remote application sessions. This required approval from MDOS and other governing bodies to permit using remote signing by applicants using the DocUSign program, including remote notarization.

VNP recorded a number of accomplishments during this phase of redistricting engagement, including:

- Working with 129 partners and allies across the state to offer 291 events with a total attendance of 10,424.
 - This included 83 application workshops where volunteers walked voters through the application process and provided free notary services for 518 applicants.
 - After COVID-19 hit Michigan, VNP rapidly pivoted to online workshops and held the final 13 workshops online. The free, online notary process was exceptional in Michigan – we were the only group to offer it. In the final week of the application period, MDOS office was referring requests for notaries to VNP so that we could help voters meet the deadline.
- Recruiting 12,128 voters to our interested-in-applying list.
 - This included 1,910 Michiganders from underrepresented groups.
 - 13 of the 200 semi-finalists were on VNP's interested-in-applying list.
- Earning over 320 press hits for recruiting applicants.



3.2. Lessons learned and best practices

- “One stop shop.” Application workshops are most successful if prospective applicants can fill out the applications online during the workshop, with volunteers there to answer questions, and then print them out and have them notarized on the spot.
- The Redistricting Team should hold application workshops in spaces where they anticipate that underrepresented groups may already gather – for example, churches, libraries, and community colleges.
- Ask COI organizations to host a workshop(s). Since applications begin so early, this process serves as a foot in the door for working with COIs and community leaders on the redistricting process. In addition to continued general outreach, we recommend partnering with COI leaders to conduct application drives in communities of interest across the state, perhaps in collaboration with early Census outreach.
- Although the Michigan Department of State (MDOS) was supportive of the application process in 2020, that may not be true in future iterations of redistricting. VNP may have an even larger role to play in some of these initial engagements if MDOS support is limited.

4. Empowering “Deep Engagement” COIs and guiding them through redistricting

4.1. Actions and accomplishments

VNP’s work with COIs began with outreach and recruitment in July 2020. The goal of the COI Committee was to raise awareness and generate interest for COI engagement with the MICRC among underserved communities. VNP made hundreds of cold calls from July 2020 through spring 2021 and ultimately developed eleven “deep engagement” partnerships. The committee focused on COIs in areas of highest need of representation – Detroit, Grand Rapids, Flint – and among minority groups – Hispanic, Asian-American, Black, Native, and LGBTQ+ Michiganders.

For each deep engagement partner, VNP conducted a series of educational events, training COI leaders and members on the Census, on decennial redistricting, on the new constitutional amendment guiding redistricting, and how to engage with the MICRC. Special purpose mapping workshops trained COI leaders and members on relevant software: DistrictR, Representable, Dave’s Redistricting, Google maps, and paper-and-pencil options. VNP considered these trainings successful because they generated a number of COI maps and testimonials which helped to shape the final MICRC maps.

Each deep engagement group was partnered with one or more VNP volunteers (their “liaisons”) who presented to the COIs, served as on-call advisors for COI leaders, monitored COI activity at MICRC meetings and on the portal, and kept in regular contact with COI leaders to offer ideas and next steps. VNP also made grant money available to deep engagement partners for additional staffing and/or technology that would aid in their engagement effort. In some cases, for instance, grant money was used to translate MICRC materials in order to make them accessible to COI members.

At four times during the COI engagement process, VNP conducted formative assessment of our work with COIs, surveying volunteers on topics like quantity and quality of the communication between VNP volunteers and the COIs, barriers to progress, drivers of success, and likelihood of COI testimony and/or community map submission. After the final MICRC maps were adopted, VNP interviewed the leaders of deep engagement partners, and many of the lessons learned below emerged from these surveys and interviews.

The results of this engagement were substantial:

- Deep engagement partner leaders were highly satisfied with their collaboration with VNP and report positive experiences regardless of their satisfaction with map outcomes.
- About half of VNP's deep engagement partners report that their communities would likely not have engaged in redistricting at all without VNP, and all leaders agree that their involvement would have been more limited without VNP.
- Liaisons provided 26 presentations and 19 mapping workshops to our deep engagement partners.
- VNP provided \$44,500 in grants distributed among nine deep engagement partners to underwrite their redistricting programming. Several partners indicated that this funding functioned as seed money, and their final expenditures on redistricting programming far exceeded the modest grants supplied by VNP. Two deep engagement partners did not receive funding because these partnerships began after funds had been distributed.
- All deep engagement partners testified before the MICRC and submitted testimony via the online portal. 92% of partners submitted a map reflecting their interests, while others endorsed existing maps from other COIs.

Deep engagement partners reported new political empowerment resulting from their work with VNP, including new practices and plans for continued community outreach.

- One partner wrote:

“Through this process we're reinvigorating our resident outreach corps, and we're going to be compensating people to do just that, because the old resident outreach corps was sort of just like a free for all - touch as many people as you can without a whole lot of structure... So I also want to thank you for your support because it really did help change how we do that.”

4.2. Lessons learned and best practices

4.2.1. Begin Recruiting COIs

COI engagement begins with engaging COIs for redistricting work, and building relationships with them. VNP relied primarily on existing contacts and cold-calling of groups outside of our network. Having a diverse team membership can assist in attempting to connect with possible COIs. This process was long and challenging, but ultimately successful in recruiting eleven COIs to work with VNP. Despite the fact that many of the Team's contacts had to be done remotely due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the team facilitated deep engagement with each of these partners. In our reflections on this process and in interviews with COIs, we have identified several key features of this process for future groups:

4.2.1.1. Map networks of COIs and connect with partner organizations embedded in communities.

Under-resourced COIs have a multitude of competing priorities and therefore require additional time to engage meaningfully, so cold-calls may be inefficient. VNP volunteers had trouble reaching communities directly, so these connections should be established through partner organizations. One system for reaching new nonprofits and COIs is to coordinate with existing partners about groups VNP has not reached (i.e., snowball sampling). In doing so, the Redistricting Team can construct a map of COIs and organizations, identifying new opportunities or outreach gaps.

Instead of trying to connect with community members directly, VNP often chose to partner with existing non-profit organizations already active in communities whose regular partners, volunteers, and constituents might be considered COIs under the Michigan Constitution. Redistricting Team leaders found that working with trusted intermediaries is often a particularly effective approach to reach underrepresented communities, and it became even more important in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, VNP was able to use its contacts at the Michigan Environmental Council to reach and partner with underserved Hispanic communities in Detroit. Early in its outreach efforts, VNP mobilized Michiganders through educational presentations, ad-hoc grassroots outreach at events, and beauty salon/barber shop outreach, but all of these were cut short by the COVID-19 pandemic. Because of the unique conditions under COVID, it is difficult to evaluate how effective these early outreach efforts were or could have been.

To find underserved communities and partner organizations, VNP and other nonprofits should tap into gateway organizations such as churches, libraries, nonprofits, and

community foundations. In particular, some statewide organizations may be particularly helpful in finding COIs across multiple jurisdictions (e.g., Michigan Nonprofit Association, United Way, Michigan Environmental Council – i.e., grassroots or umbrella organizations). This would not entirely eliminate the need for cold-calling and extended searching; some communities are underserved in part because they are not on the radar of umbrella organizations.

4.2.1.2. Build relationships on trust and reciprocity.

Once interested COIs are identified, VNP and other nonprofits must seek to create strong, trust-based relationships with them, in particular with COI leaders (see section 4.2.2). These relationships must be based on mutual respect, reciprocal benefit, and responsible follow-up. Trust is earned on the COI's terms. For example, some COI leaders engage most effectively with in-person activities. Others require multilingual materials as a demonstration of commitment. In surveys, VNP liaisons identified barriers to trust as some of the most important obstacles to early engagement with COIs.

4.2.1.3. Start early

VNP and other redistricting nonprofits must start engaging communities early. This may be difficult, since redistricting can seem distant and abstract. A way to start early is to start building trusted relationships with underserved communities during the Census and the MICRC application process. While VNP did work on Census outreach in 2020, it did not focus on doing this work with partner communities. VNP volunteers and COI leaders agree that this was a mistake. We recommend that the 2030 Redistricting Team should focus more extensively on engaging COIs during the Census (as shown in the proposed timeline in the Conclusion). This early engagement may also pay dividends during early MICRC work, as the first few meetings in the 2020-21 redistricting cycle were largely administrative and discouraged some members of COIs and the public excited to get to work.

4.2.1.4. Understand the concerns COIs may have about mapping and engagement

Describing and delineating a community is an intimidating prospect for those that have had adversarial relationships with governmental authorities, for example: immigrant communities; communities with significant number of homeless, previously incarcerated, or undocumented residents; and communities that are mostly persons of color. VNP must understand this when encouraging communities to engage in the Census and the redistricting process.

4.2.2. Work with COI leaders first

VNP sought to engage COI leaders and create interest and excitement about redistricting. COI leaders serve as gatekeepers for the communities, so close relationships with leaders are essential. In surveys, liaisons identified their relationship with COI leaders as a singularly important determinant of success. Liaisons reported that active leaders who showed particular interest in redistricting were key to engaging communities in the redistricting process. Furthermore, as COI leaders learned about redistricting, they identified ways in which redistricting was most relevant to their community and suggested engagement strategies that VNP could not have predicted without their support. We find five key principles associated with partnering with COI leaders:

4.2.2.1. Put funds in the hands of those embedded in communities.

VNP set out to engage underserved COIs through existing nonprofits embedded in those communities. In underserved contexts, nonprofits are often over-tasked and under-resourced, leaving them with little physical and financial capacity for new projects. Liaisons reported that their most persistent and challenging obstacle to engaging communities was that the COI leaders were diverted by other issues.

As one way to circumvent this, VNP was able to provide COI leaders with small grants to support their redistricting-related programming. Funding is essential at all points in the redistricting process – before, during, and after the drawing of maps. For example, grants in 2020-21 were used to support high-engagement phases of the redistricting process, including to support MICRC application drives/events and to support town halls and mapping workshops. COIs reported that continued funding to educate their members on the outcomes of redistricting would have enabled them to extend their engagement with VNP and redistricting. Examples of ways that COIs used these funds include:

- Redistricting events (e.g., space reservations, translators, door prizes, and food);
- Support for attending MICRC events (e.g., transportation, babysitting); and
- Creation of tailored educational materials (e.g., handouts, translation of documents, videos in multiple languages, culturally-relevant outreach).

Granting was particularly successful because it allowed VNP to reach groups that are often underserved by government and other non-profit organizations. However, the VNP grants were small, and the COIs would have benefited from more funding for their redistricting efforts.

4.2.2.2. Train the trainers.

A fundamental principle in rapid community outreach is to train the trainers: in other words, support the COI leaders to master the basics so that they can take over the outreach. Not only does this free up VNP time, but the information will be more effective coming from within the community: “*We want to be mindful [that] the presenters reflect the community.*” [COI 3]

This can be particularly important in communities for whom English is not the primary language. While VNP and other groups could benefit from hiring translators or multilingual consultants in the future (see Public Education section), some COIs may have internal methods for facing this challenge.

4.2.2.3. Explain connections between COIs, redistricting, and organization goals.

COIs exist because of certain bread-and-butter challenges facing their community members, including environmental, economic, and racial justice issues. Since COI leaders and nonprofits are already overtasked, it is important to relate redistricting to these core issues to gain and retain the attention of COI leaders. Some communities found it helpful to relate redistricting to specific political issues where they felt unheard; others focused on representation in the state legislature. It is worth remembering that these bread-and-butter issues are not always policy-related; the Redistricting Team also found it useful to engage with groups which had not traditionally engaged in politics.

4.2.2.4. Liaisons should serve as on-call consultants for COI leaders for questions and ideas.

One way to keep folks engaged and comfortable with the rapidly evolving process is to act as an on-call consultant. COIs were grateful for this support: “*Every time I sent them a question, I got an answer immediately. I wish I had people like you for every facet of my life!*” [COI 4]

4.2.2.5. Don’t be afraid to follow up.

Community leaders have a lot on their plates and often appreciate a reminder about the urgency of issues like redistricting.

4.2.3. Foster a network of COIs

By forming relationships and building capacity among COIs leaders across the state, VNP can serve both as an information hub and a networking hub for COIs. Community leaders report that networking with other COIs working on redistricting was extremely helpful, in addition to the structured support of VNP: “*We had [support from another organization]*

– and it wasn't necessarily [them] – it was more the cohort of people – it was ... being able to talk to everybody else who was also confused.”[COI 10]

4.2.4. Reach COI members

“Redistricting isn't sexy,” [COI 6] – Even after engaging community leaders, it is hard to generate COI interest in redistricting. Attendance at redistricting events is unpredictable at best. In fact, COIs report struggling to generate interest in redistricting as an abstract concept. However, there are ways to overcome a lack of engagement.

4.2.4.1. Make redistricting easy to understand and relevant to the locale

- Make complex topics like COIs and redistricting understandable to non-experts. Just as importantly, VNP and COIs must distill the implications of redistricting into simple ideas that capture the attention of Michigan residents. Concepts like “majority minority communities” and “partisan fairness” are abstract. VNP must help COIs find ways to make redistricting concrete and understandable in their communities. It is important to focus on the relevance of redistricting to “bread and butter” policy issues, as recommended above. As part of this effort in 2020-21, VNP worked with representatives from two early deep engagement partners to revise and reframe outreach materials so that they were relevant and accessible for Michiganders.
- Provide VNP liaisons with coordinated information in the form of rough slide decks (i.e., PowerPoints), or abstracts. Liaisons should customize these to their communities. In 2020-21, the Redistricting Team produced many such slide decks, revising them regularly as the MICRC process became clearer or as new issues confronted COIs. For example, VNP created slide decks concerning some background on gerrymandering and redistricting, then about the nature of the MICRC and the ranked constitutional priorities it had to consider, then about how to do mapping, then about participation in public hearings and map submission. Each slide deck had to be tailored to its audience: either an individual COI (and its linguistic preferences) or the general public (e.g., Rotary Clubs). With each slide deck, VNP prepared speaker notes and, often, handouts.
- Some communities won't be ready for redistricting education at the beginning. Sometimes, this will mean starting with simple civics lessons on representative government, then moving on to why redistricting matters. Groups that are particularly disenfranchised and disengaged need to understand the democratic process before they can buy into the significance of redistricting. Create a slide deck and remarks on civics education.
- Outreach in English will not always be enough: translations are needed. Outreach materials and presentations must reflect Michigan's diversity. Ideally, VNP will

recruit multi-lingual volunteers who can present in several languages. Alternatively, VNP can work closely with COI leaders to support multilingual presentations from within each community.

4.2.4.2. Mapping is challenging and requires support

- VNP should focus on making mapping workshops engaging and easy to understand. This was one of the areas of greatest success in the 2020-21 redistricting cycle. COIs found VNP's hands-on, action-oriented workshops very helpful for engaging with the redistricting process: “*That was a really informative process ... through the discussions with VNP ... when they were actually helping to map that out... Here are all the grocery stores... Here are the schools... And then this is how we're going to draw the community of interest based on all of these locations. That was the part that made us realize the point of the redistricting process.*” [COI 10]
- Workshops began by introducing basic mapping concepts and engaging community members in the process of identifying the geographic bounds of communities. The workshops were adapted to each community context, with help from community leaders.
- After introductions and participatory mapping, VNP volunteers worked directly with community leaders and members to submit maps to the MICRC, providing technical and subject matter support. Unlike some consulting groups, VNP chose not to write community descriptions or draw maps for community members. Instead, volunteers worked closely to support community members as they did this themselves. There were several reasons for this:
 - Maps and descriptions are most authentic when developed by community members for community members.
 - VNP remained non-partisan throughout the redistricting process. Direct mapping and endorsing maps can give the impression of partisan bias, especially considering VNP’s unique stake in Proposal 18-02.
 - VNP did not want to flood the MICRC with duplicate maps or testimonials.
 - VNP seeks to create long-term relationships with COIs. Respecting their own plans was integral to those relationships.
- For the purposes of mapping support and workshops, it can be helpful to recruit a number of tech-savvy volunteers or interns, but it is equally important for workshops to be hosted by skilled facilitators. Workshops should engage residents in conversations about the everyday experience of their COI. Describing features of one’s community and pointing out cornerstones of everyday life is fun

and more natural than thinking of a community as a nebulous thing: “We had a lot of fun talking about who we related to and who we didn’t.” [COI 4]

- Commenting on maps is easier than making maps. The process of digitizing a map comes with many obstacles, particularly technological ones. Many residents found it easier to comment on maps already submitted to the portal than to make their own maps. Some groups also had tremendous success generating public engagement through the portal comment feature: “I count us as being one of the most successful in our state on getting the word out about this process... I just took some time to really look at the comments that were given through the portal. We had western support, and a little bit of northern support, [and] the majority of our support did come in Metro Detroit... We had a lot of support from the west – Kalamazoo, Grand Rapids – those areas really supported our map.” [COI 6]

4.2.5. Encourage COIs to draft maps

Commissioners are not experts on every aspect of Michigan’s geography, population diversity, culturally centered communities, environmental features, etc. It is important to use mapping to make a community’s requests clear. Furthermore, district maps may be easier for the MICRC to integrate into their decision making, but it is hard for COIs to make district maps compared to maps solely of their communities.

4.2.6. Ensure COIs view and understand the Commission’s draft maps

The response period for the MICRC draft maps should be a time of focus and action. Once the MICRC maps are drafted, it is much easier to make specific changes to those maps as a way of demonstrating what a COI wants. Since commissioners are so familiar with the draft maps, they quickly understand these changes. Several groups found that making small, clear changes to the draft maps could be very influential when those changes were accompanied by clear explanations and data. During the 2020 redistricting cycle, NextVote played an important role for many of our groups by overlaying community maps with the proposed district lines as well as analyzing district diversity and voting patterns and then proposing maps that reflected the groups’ preferences.

If VNP hopes to internalize this sort of coaching, it is very important to expand technological and subject matter expertise within the committee. Furthermore, VNP recorded a consistent decline in contacts between deep engagement partners and liaisons between May 2021 and January 2022, and several liaisons perceived a steep drop-off in activity after COIs submitted maps. Since draft map responses will likely occur

between late summer and early fall, liaisons must ensure that COIs remain sufficiently engaged with the process at that time.

4.2.7. Prepare COIs for developing impactful and timely public comments

As with any public comment forum, the timing and setting of comments are important. Some COIs chose meetings strategically to help them stand out (e.g., avoiding crowded meetings in cities like Detroit despite proximity). Others coordinated large groups with pamphlets to make their points clear to the Commission. Several groups reported that having a coordinated message helped commissioners to remember their goals despite the volume of comments (i.e., repeating themes across testimonies, while not actually repeating the same script). Some distributed maps to illustrate their points.

5. Public education and monitoring the redistricting process

5.1. Actions and accomplishments

The final portion of the COI Committee's work between 2019 and 2021 was focused on public education about redistricting, the selection of commissioners and operations of the MICRC, and how to engage with the MICRC. For public education, the Team used a website and regularly updated blog, press releases and conferences, webinars and educational events for the general public, and outreach events with specific groups. The first goal of VNP's public education programming was to offer a free, online curriculum about the new redistricting process. Accordingly, VNP posted an educational toolkit to its website, which supported organizations across the state in learning about the MICRC, sharing information with their constituents, and engaging with VNP's outreach efforts. VNP also played a particularly important role in translating the day-to-day and meeting-to-meeting MICRC minutiae into digestible takeaway points, which we shared with media outlets throughout the state; this required lines of communication with media organizations which a consulting firm helped VNP to cultivate. While VNP has recorded many successes related to public education in the process, we have also noted areas of future improvement, including more effective explanations of how the commissioners are selected, clearer explanations of what constitutes a COI, and more accessible materials across multiple languages, formats, and target audiences.

VNP reached hundreds of thousands of Michiganders during this public education and outreach work through a number of platforms:

- VNP's online toolkit was shared by over 100 partners across the state and estimated to reach more than 300,000 Michiganders. The online [toolkit](#) received 3,812 visits during the redistricting period and served as the foundation for educational programming provided by partner organizations, including the Michigan Nonprofit Association.
- VNP put on 45 public presentations with 1,158 attendees, in addition to 10 town halls with 6,161 attendees.
 - Among these public events, VNP partnered with the Ford School of Public Policy at the University of Michigan and produced 4 webinars. Each time, the events had several speakers (VNP, academics, commissioners, journalists, CA commissioners and national experts), and the programs were co-sponsored by the League of Women Voters, Detroit Public

Television, and Michigan State's Institute for Public Policy and Social Research. The events aired on the Ford School's website and were posted on YouTube, gaining significant audiences:

- The Next Big Thing: Redistricting in Michigan and the Role of Communities of Interest (Feb. 2021) — 2,662 live viewers
- Michigan Redistricting: Making Public Hearings Fair and Effective (April 2021) — 1,102 live viewers
- How Communities Can Promote Their Interests in Michigan's Redistricting: Lessons Learned (Sept. 2021) — 664 live viewers
- Michigan Redistricting: A Model for the Nation? Evaluating the State's New Maps and Process (Jan. 2022) — 944 live viewers
- The MICRC had a limited budget for direct community outreach and advertising. VNP was able to fill this gap by generating more than 800 media hits between August 2019 and September 2021.



NYTIMES.COM
Ungerrymandered: Michigan's Maps, Independently Drawn, Set Up Fair Fight



FREEP.COM
Michigan redistricting commission votes on new maps mark a historic first



DEADLINEDETROIT.COM
Arnold Schwarzenegger Applauds Michigan's Redistricting Commission



SEATTLETIMES.COM
Ungerrymandered: Michigan's maps, independently drawn, set up fair fight

- VNP monitored and recorded the historic first MICRC redistricting process and published 42 volunteer-powered blog posts during the height of map-making. This included detailing staff and consultant selections, data use and analysis, mapping tools, criteria adherence, public hearing processes, mapping approaches and redistricting plan selections.

5.2. Lessons learned and best practices

- Serve as an honest broker of information on the MICRC.
 - Journalists and citizens do not have time to sit through dozens of meetings that may last 8 or more hours each, so they need a group they can trust to digest and share the information and decision-making.
- Contract with a communications firm.
 - VNP hired a consulting firm to help cultivate relationships with key media outlets and to support ongoing press briefings and outreach.
- Provide the public with multilingual and easy to understand information.
 - MICRC, the MDOS, and VNP all have a responsibility to make educational materials accessible to all Michiganders. This means working with communication professionals to create materials that are accessible (e.g., public health guidance on accessibility of technical documents) and disseminating translations when possible.
- Reiterate the basic characteristics and history of the MICRC.
 - While VNP and other groups have reached hundreds of thousands of Michiganders, millions of folks remain to be reached, and many could benefit from a deeper understanding of the MICRC, the process by which the MICRC came to be, and the history of redistricting. Even within our COI partners, there were some misunderstandings about the formation of the MICRC.

6. Conclusions and summary

This evaluation report aimed to: 1. Document VNP's approach to engaging COIs and the public in the first-ever Michigan independent redistricting process; 2. Measure accomplishments and challenges from this process; and 3. Identify key lessons learned and best practices associated with engaging individuals and communities in a process of this type.

VNP developed a four-phase approach to engaging communities and the broader public which can inform future VNP work, the work of other voter-engagement nonprofits, and redistricting work in other states. In the first phase, VNP formed a Redistricting Team composed mostly of volunteers who partnered with VNP staff and community-engaged nonprofits to execute extensive outreach efforts. Second, VNP focused on pre-redistricting education and sought to solicit applications to the first-ever MICRC. Third, VNP identified and partnered with eleven Deep Engagement Partners whose work placed them in unique positions to engage underrepresented COIs. Finally, VNP focused on documenting the 2020-21 Michigan redistricting process and accompanied this with continued public education and outreach.

VNP and COIs had many accomplishments. Among other things, VNP succeeded in supporting their deep engagement partners to offer input on the character and geographic scope of COIs across the state. Every deep engagement partner provided extensive in-person and digital testimony, and COIs submitted dozens of maps to the MICRC. VNP directly reached tens of thousands of Michiganders with its public education, and materials prepared by VNP were shared with hundreds of thousands of Michigan residents. Furthermore, both this report and the VNP blog serve as a record of this first-ever independent redistricting process in Michigan, and VNP continues to engage with established partners and media contacts as the state moves towards the 2022 election cycle, the first under the new maps.

In addition to the lessons learned and best practices identified through this evaluation, we also propose the following general timeline for VNP's 2030 redistricting activities:

- Pre-November 2029: Outreach to existing COI partners and COI identification by staff and volunteers
- November 2029: Redistricting Committee formed before the end of the year so they can hit the ground running in 2030
- January 2030: New COI liaisons assigned and outreach to new COIs begins

- January-May 2030: Solicitation of applications to the MICRC and introduction to redistricting/Census outreach (with general public and COI partners identified to-date)
- April-November 2030: Census outreach and education (with general public and COI partners identified to-date)
- November 2030-April 2031: Redistricting training, community outreach, COI relationship building
- April-August 2031: Support comments to the MICRC and community mapping
- August-November 2031: Support comments to the MICRC – focus on map drafts.
- November 2031: Maps adopted
- November 2031-April 2032: Post-redistricting, pre-filing education + Redistricting Committee evaluation interviews, focus groups, mapping
- May 2032 and beyond: Primary and general election education, evaluation of map outcomes based on election results

As could be expected in a first-of-its-kind independent redistricting effort, the MICRC's work did not proceed without challenges. For example, Southeast Michigan proved difficult to map for the MICRC: COIs observed this in their public comments at MICRC meetings, and several have argued that this struggle is reflected in the final maps. This may be an advantage or a disadvantage in 2030. While some COIs expressed concern over disillusionment with the redistricting process, others argued that the perceived problems with SE Michigan maps point to an important role for the COIs to play in future redistricting efforts.

VNP's work does not end with redistricting. In addition to other voting-related projects, the process of public education and engagement on redistricting must continue. For example, VNP can play an important role in explaining the ways in which the MICRC has improved on past outcomes. In part, this is important for generating support and engagement for future redistricting processes. More immediately, this can help to combat voter demoralization.

Likewise, COI engagement does not end when the maps are drawn. We recommend following up with COIs after the first round of primaries, first election, and beyond to see how the new districts and representatives are affecting their communities. Both post-redistricting education and redistricting evaluation are therefore iterative and should inform one another as we move towards the next redistricting cycle.

In 2030, we predict that organizations and partisan interest groups will be better prepared for addressing redistricting in 2030. Groups and organizations like VNP should be equally well-prepared to deal with more aggressive approaches on the part of some organizations and interests. In this new environment, it may be more challenging to adhere to constitutional strictures which were so effective in 2020-21. The role of

non-partisan groups will be even more important in a likely more partisan, more combative future. With that challenge in mind, this report provides an initial set of best practices, guidelines, and recommendations for future non-partisan groups aiming to support fair redistricting in Michigan and throughout the US.

Supplemental materials

- [COI descriptions](#)
- VNP's [2020 Volunteer-led Redistricting Logic Model](#)
- [Materials used by VNP for MICRC Application Support](#)
- [Materials used by VNP for COI Engagement and Public Education](#)