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Frequently Asked Questions

12-15 minutes

What is redistricting?

Redistricting is the process of creating new districts or redrawing existing district boundaries to adjust for population changes that occurred in the last decade.

Why redistrict?

As states and communities grow and change, peoples' representation in government begins to get out of balance. Redistricting aims to distribute the population of the state evenly to ensure that every Washingtonian is represented fairly in the state Legislature and the U.S. Congress. The U.S. and state constitutions require that each congressional and legislative district represent roughly equal numbers of people and coincide with the boundaries of local political subdivisions and areas recognized as communities of interest.

What is reapportionment?

Reapportionment happens every 10 years to distribute seats in the U.S. House of Representatives among the 50 states following the decennial census as provided for in [Article I, Section 2 of the U.S. Constitution](#). The [Permanent Apportionment Act of 1929](#) permanently set the maximum number of representatives at 435, which are "apportioned" among the states based on their population. As the population of some states grows faster than other states, congressional seats move from the slow-growth states to those states whose populations are growing faster. Based on the 2020 Census, Texas will gain two seats; Florida, Montana, North Carolina, Oregon, and Utah will gain one seat each; and California, Illinois, Michigan, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and West Virginia will each lose a seat.

Has Washington always had a Redistricting Commission?

No. Up until 1983, the state Legislature oversaw the process of redrawing Washington's legislative and Congressional districts. By a vote of 61 percent, voters approved Constitutional Amendment 74 establishing an independent commission appointed by legislative leaders to redistrict legislative and Congressional districts every 10 years. The first time that the Redistricting Commission was formed and redrew district boundaries was in 1991.

How are the commissioners appointed and who may serve?

Every 10 years, following completion of the decennial [U.S. Census](#), the Redistricting Commission is formed. The commission has five members. Legislative leaders from the

two largest parties in each house of the legislature appoint a voting member by January 15 of the year ending in one. The voting members appoint the fifth member of the Commission, who serves as the nonvoting chairperson, by January 31.

A commissioner may be any registered state voter who:

- Is not, or has not been within one year of their appointment, a registered lobbyist.
- Is not, or has not been within two years of their appointment, an elected official or an elected legislative district, county, or state party officer.
- Will not campaign for elective office or actively participate in or contribute to any state or federal candidate running for office while a member of the commission.
- Will not hold or campaign for a seat in the legislature or Congress for two years after the effective date of the plan.

The Commission is dissolved when the redistricting is done.

What is the role of the nonvoting chair?

Perhaps the most unique aspect of Washington's Redistricting Commission is the position of the nonvoting chairperson. Most states that redistrict by commission appoint chairs or co-chairs that have a vote, which often is a tie-breaking vote.

The Washington chairperson, chosen by the four voting members appointed by the two largest parties, serves the vital role of facilitator who helps steer the discussions toward final agreement. She helps establish the common ground where at least three of four voting commissioners can agree to pass a truly bipartisan plan for Washington state. Meet the 2021 nonvoting chair [Sarah Augustine](#).

How is the Commission collecting public input for the 2021 redistricting process?

The Commission is asking for public comment in several ways. From May to August 2021, it will host at least 20 virtual public forums statewide to listen to your ideas and proposals about current and future Congressional and legislative district boundaries.

Washington's non-profit public affairs television network, [TVW](#), will broadcast these public forums to enable people across the state to observe the process. You can also register and watch public outreach meetings live via Zoom (or as a recording) on the [meetings page](#).

The public forums will be organized by Congressional districts – and we encourage those living within the Congressional district to sign up for public comment.

Equally, the public can always offer comments during the public comment section of the Commission's regular meetings, which are held the third Monday of the month. They can call and leave a message at [360-524-4390](tel:360-524-4390). They can send their comment to the Commission in an email at comment@redistricting.wa.gov, or submit their comment through our secure online form. They can also upload pre-recorded video testimony through our online form.

Also, for the first time, the Commission plans to embed [has embedded] a simple mapping tool into this website to enable the public to draw their community of interests, to submit maps, and/or to comment on maps drawn by other members of the public. Once the Census Bureau delivers the redistricting data and the Commissioners have a chance to develop draft plans, the public will be able to see and comment on them through the

mapping tool.

What type of public input would be useful to the Washington redistricting process?

There are many ways for you to share your community feedback.

1. **Tell us about your community.** Send us your comments and insights about your community and what makes it whole. You can send your ideas by mail, email, phone, webform, or by submitting a video. Communication through any of these methods will reach each Commissioner directly.
2. **Draw your community using our mapping tool.** Share your idea of how voting district boundaries should be drawn in your community or throughout the state. Use our **DRAW YOUR WA** mapping tool to easily draw the boundaries of your community and send it directly to the commission.
3. **Share your testimony with the Commission.** Participate in a public forum in your outreach district. Find out where and when by finding your outreach district on our map. All forums will be held virtually, and participation is easy. If you have trouble accessing the internet, we have formed a partnership with Washington public libraries who will make available laptops and WIFI at their branches so you can sign up and participate.

You can also submit public comment about Commission business during open comment period at regularly scheduled meetings of the Commission, which take place on the third Monday of every month.

What have people told the Commissioners so far?

We have just launched our [public outreach schedule](#), and we are eager to begin receiving feedback from you and your community.

You can follow all the comments we received by visiting the Community Feedback page.

How can I know what the Commissioners are doing and how are you keeping people informed about the redistricting process?

We'll post regular updates on our progress through our website, email listserv, and public announcements. You can [subscribe to our email listserv](#) to ensure notifications are sent straight to your inbox.

All commission meetings are virtual and open to the public. Regular meetings take place on the third Monday of the month, and we will announce any special meetings at least 24 hours before they take place.

In addition, we work with traditional media statewide, so they have the information they need to cover redistricting events for you—their readers, viewers, and listeners.

How many people will be in each district?

The number of people allocated to each district is based on the 2020 Census, which determined that the population of Washington state was 7,705,281 as of April 1, 2020. This figure represents a 14.6 percent growth in population over the last decade, but it does not change the number of Congressional representatives or Electoral College votes that the state is allocated. That number remains at 10.

As a result, each Congressional district in Washington state should represent 771,595

people, while each of the 49 legislative districts should represent 157,251 people.

While the state has received the apportionment counts from the Census Bureau, it is still waiting for the redistricting data, known as the [P.L. 94-171 data](#). That data will provide more granular details of how the population in Washington state has changed. Which neighborhoods have grown more than others? What do we know about the demographic makeup (age, sex, race, and ethnicity) of our state neighborhoods? All of that information will be delivered to the states by August 16, 2021 and be available to the public one week to 10 days later. On September 30, 2021, the Census Bureau will make available simple, easy-to-navigate tables.

Where and when does the data needed for redistricting come from?

Title 13 of the U.S. Code gives the U.S. Census Bureau the authority to collect population data to determine the number of seats each state has in the U.S. House of Representatives. The same data is used to develop the legislative redistricting plan.

The redistricting process usually begins after the census apportionment and redistricting data is released to the states. By law, the Bureau must deliver apportionment data to the President by December 31 of the year ending in zero, which is then transmitted to Congress and the states. Redistricting data, known as [P.L. 94-171 data](#), should be delivered to the states by March 31 of the year ending in one. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Census data collection was delayed, leading to delays in the processing of the required deliverables. Therefore, Washington does not expect to have the necessary redistricting data until August 16, 2021 at which time it can begin the process of drafting maps.

What criteria must be considered in redrawing district boundaries?

State and federal law tells us how the redrawing of district boundaries must happen. Legislative and Congressional district boundaries must be drawn to:

- Encompass, as nearly as can be done (or is “practicable”), equal numbers of people.
- Comply with the Federal Voting Rights Act to ensure that minorities have an equal opportunity to elect representatives of their choice.
- Coincide with the boundaries of local political subdivisions and areas recognized as communities of interest, trying to the extent possible to minimize the number of counties and municipalities divided into more than one district.
- Be convenient, contiguous, and compact with an understanding that a ferry, highway, bridge or tunnel could aid in ensuring contiguity and some artificial barriers and geographical boundaries could create obstacles to contiguity.
- Provide fair and effective representation, encourage electoral competition, and do not purposely favor or discriminate against any political party or group.

How does the Commission adopt a redistricting plan? Can the plan be changed by the Legislature or vetoed by the Governor?

A redistricting plan must be approved by three of the four voting Commission members. This plan becomes final within 30 days after the beginning of the next regular or special legislative session unless the Legislature amends it. By law, if the Legislature wants to change the plan approved by the Redistricting Commission, any new district boundary

lines proposed can affect no more than 2 percent of a district's population and must have approval from two-thirds of the members of both legislative chambers.

What laws address legislative and congressional redistricting?

- [WAC Governing Third Party Submissions](#)
- [U.S. Constitution - Article I, Section 2](#)
- [Voting Rights Act of 1965 \(Federal law\)](#)
- [State Constitution - Article II, Section 43](#)
- [State Legislation - 44.05 RCW \(Washington State Redistricting Act\)](#)

How has redistricting changed over the years?

Visit the [Washington State Redistricting Historical Timeline](#)

How can I keep up to date on what is happening with redistricting?

- Follow us on [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#), [YouTube](#), and [Facebook](#)
- Watch for stories about our activities in the news.
- Join our [Mailing List](#) to receive updates on our activities by email
- [Contact Us](#)

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Redistricting Commission Members

3 minutes

Commissioners are appointed once every 10 years to redraw Washington's legislative & congressional district boundaries.

Four commissioners are appointed by the Legislature, and the Commissioners appoint a fifth, non-voting, non-partisan chairperson. Meet your 2021 Commissioners by watching the video below and reading their bios.

Sarah Augustine

Chair

Sarah Augustine is the Executive Director of the Dispute Resolution Center of Yakima and Kittitas Counties. A social scientist, she has taught at Heritage University, Central Washington University, and Goshen College.

[Full Bio](#)

April Sims

House Democratic Caucus Appointee

April Sims serves as Secretary Treasurer of the Washington State Labor Council (WSLC) AFL-CIO. She is the first woman of color and the first Black person to be elected as a WSLC executive officer and is the second highest ranking labor leader in the state. She previously served as the WSLC's Political and Strategic Campaign Director and as Field Mobilization Director.

[Full Bio](#)

Paul Graves

House Republican Caucus Appointee

Former state representative Paul Graves was born and raised in Maple Valley. One of five children, he attended Tahoma public schools and graduated from Western Washington University—where he served as the student body president—and earned his law degree from Duke University. After law school he served for a year as a law clerk to Washington Supreme Court Justice James Johnson. He then worked at Perkins Coie LLP, the state's leading law firm.

[Full Bio](#)

Brady Piñero Walkinshaw

Senate Democratic Caucus Appointee

Brady Piñero Walkinshaw is the CEO of Grist, a leading national environmental media organization. Brady served two terms in the Washington State Legislature representing Washington's 43rd Legislative District in central Seattle. Brady was raised in rural Whatcom County, in today's 42nd Legislative District, educated in Nooksack Valley public schools.

[Full Bio](#)

Joe Fain

Senate Republican Caucus Appointee

Joe Fain is the President and CEO of the Bellevue Chamber. He previously served two terms in the Washington State Senate where he worked extensively on economic development, transportation, and education issues. He was a leading negotiator of Washington's 2015 statewide transportation package. He also led the negotiations and prime-sponsored Washington's Paid Family Leave legislation, which passed in 2017.

[Full Bio](#)

Learn more our Commissioner Mission & Core Principles, Commissioner Code of Conduct on our policy page.