

# Community Mapping: What It Is and Why We're Doing It

2021 is the redistricting year we have been waiting for! This is the year that the Ohio legislature and the Ohio Redistricting Commission will be drawing new Ohio House and Senate districts along with U.S. Congressional districts. This will be the first time we will draw districts using the new procedures that were made part of the Ohio constitution after our successful reform efforts in 2015 and 2018.

Our Fair Districts volunteers are eager to get involved drawing maps, but there is a while to wait before we get started on drawing district maps. Official mapping in Ohio will begin this fall -- we're not quite sure precisely when due to delays in the delivery of census data. Fair Districts will be running a mapping competition starting in late summer. While we wait to start drawing district maps, we are engaging volunteers in a project to draw **community maps** across Ohio.

## What are community maps?

Community maps are exactly what they sound like: maps of communities, as defined by the community members themselves. These maps are based around neighborhoods, or areas with shared interests. Community maps are created by community members -- without any specific rules regarding how those communities must be drawn in terms of population numbers, county splits, and so forth. The idea is simply to have communities tell their own stories and draw lines around the area that they consider their community where they share values, traditions, concerns, and lifestyles.

## Why are community maps useful?

Community maps are not official, but they build knowledge and power. They encourage community members to think through what their community really is, what it looks like on a map, and why that community should be kept together. Those community members will be better able to participate in public hearings and articulate, for example, what is wrong with a map that dissects their community.

## How will they be used?

Community maps will educate and empower citizens and enable them to better participate in public hearings to weigh in on what maps are good or bad and why. In addition, community maps can become the building blocks of district maps. Volunteer mapmakers can use the maps they have made to more meaningfully participate in public hearings.

## How are they created?

We are using a software program called [DistrictR](#) to create community maps. This software is free and accessible to all. We also have trainers to help answer your questions and practice map-making with you.

## What is an example of a community?

A group with significant shared interests that should be given careful consideration by the line drawers, such as...

- Small family farmers
- Residents of mountainous regions with unique environmental concerns
- Commuters who rely on the same public transit
- Residents of tourist-centric beach towns
- People who work in the same industrial sector
- Families that rely on the same public school system
- Can be rural, urban, suburban, etc.

## Interview prompts for collecting community narratives:

- Who is part of your community? Where do they live? What do they have in common? (Employment sector, languages spoken, pedestrian-friendly areas)
- What are some important places? (Commercial areas, places of worship, community centers, employers)
- What issues need attention from officials? What community projects need resources? (Parks, transportation, social services, schools, sidewalks, affordable housing, flood risk)

- What might a community meeting be about? (Violence, policing, pollution, food security)

### **Join the Fair Districts Community Mapping Team**

Fair Districts welcomes volunteers to be part of our community mapping team. You can take part in a couple of ways:

- **As a facilitator:** Learn to use the [districtr.org](https://districtr.org) mapping software and help groups create their own community maps
- **As a helper:** conduct surveys with neighborhood groups; spread the word about community mapping; take part in a mapping discussion of your own community.

Check out the [slides](#) and a [recording](#) from our 1/25/2021 **Community Mapping & DistrictR Tutorial**, and the [slides](#) and a [recording](#) from the 2/22/2021 **Community Map-making training for facilitators**.