



Frequently Asked Questions

About *Communities of Interest*

What is the official definition of a COI?

There isn't one. The key considerations are **shared interests** that can be **affected by legislation**. Another way to phrase this is that if a COI is a group of people (not defined solely by political party or race) that stands to benefit from being considered in redistricting.

How big is a COI?

It varies! A COI can be, for instance, whole adjacent towns, a large rural area, or a small neighborhood. The key is that they share interests that would benefit from collectively having a **voice in government**. Also, while usually considering COIs entails keeping them whole, it occasionally entails splitting them into multiple districts -- the latter especially for larger COIs.

Do people that are more distributed across a wide area count as a COI?

It depends. The key is whether they **share common concerns that relate to where they live**. One way to think about this is that communities on a map should include **residential areas**. Districtr's Important Places can be used to mark the shared interests.

What is the difference between building districts with COIs and packing?

COI mapping is to improve how well districts **represent the people** in them. Packing is to increase **inequality in representation**, by race and political party. If COIs were used for packing, they would be subject to criticisms of gerrymandering.

Why do you say to avoid exclusively describing a COI by race or political party?

Although a few states have definitions of COIs that include race and political party (e.g., Alabama), **case law** has suggested that COIs described primarily as such would be considered **racial or partisan gerrymanders**.

Don't Census places and neighborhood maps show you all of the communities?

Community mapping research has shown that **official data don't often line up** with what people actually consider their communities. However, official data are still useful in planning and as "seeds" to start conversations and maps at community meetings.



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