



County of Santa Barbara

Citizens Independent Redistricting Commission

Independent Redistricting: Improving the Process

Background and Introduction

In 2018, the voters of Santa Barbara County approved Measure G, which changed the process for the decennial revisions to the districts used to elect members of the Board of Supervisors. Measure G shifted the authority and responsibility for creating districts from the Board itself to a newly mandated Independent Citizens Commission. The first redistricting cycle led by the Commission occurred in 2021 following the 2020 census. It is important for context to note that Santa Barbara County's commission was one of very few operating in California in 2021, particularly at a county-level.

The 2021 redistricting process was, ultimately, successful, with a unanimous vote by the Commission to adopt the final version of a map which will be used to organize elections to the Board of Supervisors in 2022, 2024, 2026, 2028, and 2030. Not surprisingly, as a new approach, there were learning moments and instances where translating the intent of the ordinance authors into real-world operations proved challenging.

The intent of the Commission in preparing and presenting this report was to acknowledge the more significant challenges and to capture and share potential adjustments that could be made to either the governing ordinance or to the operational procedures of future commissions. This report is presented in the spirit of sharing our experience and learning.

It is not within the scope of the current commission to enact any of these suggestions; ultimately, amending the ordinance or changing the bylaws/operating procedures for future commissions lies with others, including the voters in the County themselves. While individual commissioners may have suggested specific strategies for addressing the identified challenges, the Commission as a whole takes no official position on any; we limit ourselves to presenting options for consideration based on our collective experience.

This report is organized into two primary sections. In this first section, we summarize feedback about perceived challenges related to the formation and operation of the Commission during the 2021 cycle and suggested changes that could be considered to improve these issues.

In the second (separate companion document), we share direct responses from a survey collected by the Commission in the first quarter of 2022 as part of our effort to solicit feedback from the public.

Challenges Associated during the 2021 Redistricting Process and Suggested Responses

Forming the Commission.

One of the key areas highlighted by respondents to the survey and by members of the 2021 Commission was the general area of how the Commission is formed, including concerns and recommendations related to 1) process for recruiting applicants to serve on the commission, 2) ensuring that the members of the Commission be representative of the County's population, 3) the process for selecting the actual Commission members, and 4) replacing Commissioners when a vacancy occurs.

The role of the County Election Official in selecting the pool of applicants from which commissioners are drawn was raised by a number of commenters. Concerns included vague direction/criteria for the Election Official to use in evaluating applicants, a perceived lack of transparency about how individuals were selected, and an ultimate pool which made it challenging to create a Commission whose members reflected the diversity of the County's residents.

Potential changes that could be considered included the following:

- Consider making the appointments of each new Commission sooner than the required deadline. This would allow additional time for training, outreach, participation in vendor/contractor selection, etc.
- Consider making the pool larger, increasing the likelihood that the desired level of diversity could be achieved.
- Develop objective scoring/review criteria to guide the work of the Elections Official.
- Consider changing the two-stage selection process and instead select all commissioners by random draw (rather than just initial 5) - or by an impartial panel that can ensure that the demographics balance as much as is possible.
- Consider selecting an "alternate" for each commissioner who could shadow, assist with outreach, and be prepared to step in as a commissioner if needed.
- Determine whether individuals who withdraw (either from the pool or from the Commission itself) are eligible for future consideration as a replacement.
- Clarify the Ordinance's language dealing with the expectation that appointments (initial and replacements) be balanced in terms of demographic diversity and proportional partisan representation. The ordinance should clarify which of these criteria have priority when they cannot both be satisfied due to the characteristics of available candidates.
- Change the term of the commissioners' appointments to eliminate the need for individual commissioners to file personal financial disclosures for ten years following completion of their work.

- Ensure marketing campaign to recruit candidates is broad based and targets citizens from all sectors of the County. Ensure that candidates are well informed of the requirements of the role, including time, outreach expectations, potential disqualifying conflicts, etc.

Commission Operations/Support.

Another theme that appeared in the feedback received by the Commission included concerns and recommendations related to the process/criteria for selecting consultants/contractors.

Potential changes that could be considered include:

- Change the Ordinance's specified selection criteria which apply to businesses contracted to provide services to the Commission (e.g. legal, demography, administrative, marketing/outreach) to not be the same as those used to qualify commissioners.
- In order to ensure transparency of the political preferences of the consultants, consider requiring disclosure of partisan candidate contributions over \$500.00 statewide, in addition to any prohibitions on contributions to candidates or Committees in Santa Barbara.
- Consider requiring (or indicating a preference) that the Outreach/Marketing contractor have a regular Santa Barbara County presence, increasing the potential that they have the relationships to maximize the effectiveness of outreach efforts.

Completing the Work of the Commission.

The final general theme included topics including 1) the public meetings conducted by the Commission, 2) the process for selecting mapping tools, and 3) ensuring effective public outreach.

Suggestions that could be considered include:

- Post public comments as received, or earlier than the required timeline for the meeting agendas.
- Consider allowing a *per diem*, for commissioners' mileage expenses, recognizing their investment of time and energy in meeting with the public and performing their public duties.
- Ensure the Commission has a role in selecting the mapping tools to be used by the public and the Commission. There was a strong feeling that the tools should be selected and introduced much earlier in the process.
- Begin training/public use of the mapping tools earlier in the process/timeline.
- Expand use of the Commission's website, including ensuring that redistricting rules and VRA requirements are posted and explained in easily understood language.
- Encourage the use of non-Commissioners (including remaining pool members) on ad hoc committees and outreach efforts.

Additional Resources and Related Documents

- CIRC Feedback Survey & Responses.pdf (posted separately)
- Santa Barbara County Citizens' Independent Redistricting Commission Ordinance: https://drawsantabarbaracounty.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/CIRC_Ordinance.pdf
- SBC CIRC Bylaws: <https://drawsantabarbaracounty.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Second-Amended-Restated-Bylaws.pdf>
- Record of 2021 SBC CIRC Meetings (Agendas, Public Comments, etc.)