

Legislative Redistricting Criteria Considerations

The Districting and Apportionment Commission wants input on the criteria that will be used to draw new legislative districts. The criteria form the basis on which the commission will evaluate each district. There are several traditional and constitutional criteria that Montana and other states may use to draw legislative district boundaries.

The commission needs your thoughts on the bolded questions and other comments related to criteria.

Population Equality - Often referred to as "one person, one vote," meaning each district would have the exact same number of residents. But districts often deviate from the "ideal" number due to a variety of factors, including those listed below. What should the deviation be?

Compactness - This is an appearance test measuring the distance between boundaries. A circle or square is very compact. But districts are rarely circles or squares. Mountain divides and rivers as boundaries, or declining populations, can make a district less compact. How should a district look?

Contiguity - This means the district must be in one piece connected at some point. But districts rarely are a uniform size and shape. What should be considered contiguous?

Existing Political Boundaries - Consideration may be given to the boundaries of school districts, cities, and counties. How important are existing boundaries? What boundaries should be considered?

Geographic Boundaries - District lines may be drawn along city blocks, roads, mountain divides, rivers, and other features. What geographic boundaries should be considered?

Communities of Interest - This could be an urban neighborhood or a rural area. It might be an area where people have similar jobs or lifestyles. It might be an Indian reservation community. What kinds of communities of interest should be considered?

Starting Point - Redistricting could be characterized as a statewide ripple effect. Where one starts drawing lines affects other choices during the process. Should existing districts be used as the starting point? What are other possible starting points?

Party Affiliation - Montana does not require party registration. But should the political makeup of a district be considered? If so, how?

Incumbents - It may be that some incumbents may have to face each other for election in a new district. Should consideration be given to incumbents? If so, what should be considered?