

Lessons Learned & Recommendations From the Inaugural MICRC

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FOREWORD

After the 2010 election, federal judges criticized Michigan's legislative electoral districts as a "[political gerrymander of historic proportions](#)."

To address that imbalance, Michigan voters in 2018 approved a constitutional amendment to establish the **Michigan Independent Citizens Redistricting Commission (MICRC)** that was given exclusive authority to adopt new district boundaries based on census data for the Michigan Senate, Michigan House of Representatives and U.S. House of Representatives every 10 years beginning in 2021.

The [amendment](#) to the Michigan Constitution outlines a specific process for the random selection of the 13 commissioners. The Michigan Department of State used data from the 2018 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimate (which is available to the general public via the American Community Survey Data Profiles online search tool) to define the demographic and geographic makeup of the state for the purposes of the random selection. The Secretary of State's office was required to randomly select commissioners from the pool of eligible applicants. This selection process was completed between June and August 2020.

As mandated by the constitution, the 13 commissioners included four members who affiliated with the Democratic party, four members who affiliated with the Republican party, and five Independent members who were not affiliated with any major political party.

Together, the MICRC completed the first open, citizen-led redistricting process in Michigan history while far surpassing the MICRC's goals for public comment, public hearing attendance and news media coverage. The MICRC also successfully defended the fairness of its maps during each of four separate legal challenges in state and federal courts. The court rulings reinforce the belief by many that the MICRC ultimately produced the most fair maps we've ever had before in Michigan.

At the time of this publication, **two** legal challenges are pending in federal court against the MICRC's work. **However, per court order**, the MICRC's adopted congressional and legislative redistricting plans are being used for the 2022 primary and general elections.

The mission since the MICRC began was to lead Michigan's redistricting process to ensure Michigan's congressional, state Senate and state House district lines were drawn fairly in a transparent manner, meeting Constitutional mandates through citizen input.

The aims in the redistricting process included modeling transparency; heightening awareness; ensuring fairness; encouraging citizens to participate in the map-making process; generating consistent news media coverage to inform the public; and answering questions from the news media and public about the commission's work. Throughout the MICRC's work, members remained committed to the objectives of fairness, awareness, transparency and engagement.

Before commissioners could draft any plan, the MICRC was constitutionally mandated to host at least 10 public hearings throughout the state to inform the public about the redistricting process and the purpose and responsibilities of the commission, as well as solicit information about potential plans. The MICRC hosted 21 public forums and 130 open meetings (both virtual and on-site) during the first phase of the campaign, from late 2020 through early fall 2021.

The MICRC was constitutionally mandated to hold at least five public hearings throughout the state for the purpose of soliciting comment about the proposed plans. This second phase of the campaign, from October through December 2021, focused on drawing and finalizing the actual maps and required coordination and constant promotion by the MICRC's staff, partners, and promotional contractor. The five hearings were held in Detroit, Lansing, Grand Rapids, Gaylord and Flint.

Michiganders' response to the MICRC's map-making process was inspiring, far exceeding the MICRC's hope to generate at least 10,000 public comments. The commission received nearly 30,000 comments from across the state.

Planning and research were fundamental to the MICRC's work. The MICRC consulted with leaders of redistricting commissions from California and Arizona, the first and second states in the nation to approve similar commissions, respectively. They heard from experts from leading Michigan universities. They received feedback on our proposed maps from hundreds of organizations, elected officials, civic leaders and the general public that helped shape our decisions.

Getting public input and promoting transparency in the MICRC process was of the utmost importance so that the public had confidence in the inaugural MICRC's work as well as the work of future Michigan redistricting commissions. Holding dozens of meetings in every region of the state was instrumental to the MICRC's ability to gain knowledge and insights from the public, then systematically assess and make the changes needed to comply with the seven ranked redistricting criteria, which include compliance with the Voting Rights Act and partisan fairness.

The MICRC's final maps, approved Dec. 28, 2021, were based on the state's constitutionally set mapping criteria (in rank order):

1. Districts shall be of equal population as mandated by the United States Constitution and shall comply with the Voting Rights Act and other federal laws.
2. Districts shall be geographically contiguous. Island areas are considered to be contiguous by land to the county of which they are a part.
3. Districts shall reflect the state's diverse population and communities of interest. Communities of interest may include, but shall not be limited to, populations that share cultural or historical characteristics or economic interests. Communities of interest do not include relationships with political parties, incumbents, or political candidates.
4. Districts shall not provide a disproportionate advantage to any political party. A disproportionate advantage to a political party shall be determined using accepted measures of partisan fairness.
5. Districts shall not favor or disfavor an incumbent elected official or a candidate.
6. Districts shall reflect consideration of county, city, and township boundaries.
7. Districts shall be reasonably compact.

The MICRC is proud of what we achieved. We are not alone in that belief.

"If you're feeling discouraged about our democracy, (learn) about how citizens in Michigan took politics out of the redistricting process. It's why the work ... to fight gerrymandering is so important."

– **Former U.S. President Barack Obama**

"Congratulations to the Michigan Independent Redistricting Commissioners ... A bipartisan vote created fair districts for the state's voters. You proved that when the people, not the politicians, draw the lines, the voters win."

– **Former California Republican Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger**

The Princeton Gerrymandering Project, a nonpartisan research group that analyzes redistricting with the aim of eliminating partisan gerrymandering across the country, graded the MICRC's congressional map with an overall score of "A" and a "B" for the state House and Senate maps, saying "compared to a lot of maps across the country, they did very well."

"This is the quintessential success story of redistricting," Sam Wang, director of the Princeton Gerrymandering Project, [told The New York Times for a story published Dec. 29, 2021](#). "These (Michigan) maps treated the two parties, Democrats and Republicans, about as fairly as you could ever imagine a map being. There's competition in all three maps."

As one [New York newspaper editorial](#) observed after the MICRC's landmark maps were announced: "The state of Michigan has just done something almost miraculous in this time of political acrimony — and something every citizen in America should want their state to do: It has done away, as much

as possible, with political gerrymandering and taken a giant leap toward guaranteeing fair state and federal representation.”

Equally important, the MICRC commissioned the Glengariff Group Inc. to conduct two pre- and post-campaign statewide surveys of Michigan voters. The benchmarking survey was conducted March 27-31, 2021. The post-survey was a 600 sample, live operator telephone survey conducted Feb. 11-14, 2022, and has a margin of error of +/-4.0% with a 95% level of confidence.

Key results from the post-campaign public opinion survey show:

- Most impressively, at the conclusion of the survey, all voters were asked if Michigan should continue to allow the Michigan Independent Citizens’ Redistricting Commission to redraw the state’s maps or should Michigan go back to allowing elected representatives that have control in the State Legislature to redraw the maps. ***By an overwhelming margin of 65.5% to 10.1%, Michigan voters say the state should continue with the redistricting commission moving forward.***
- Voters were asked if Michigan citizens did or did not have a greater role in deciding how new districts would be drawn compared to previous efforts by politicians. By a margin of 45.0% to 22.1%, voters aware of the MICRC’s work believe Michigan citizens did have a greater role.
- Voters were asked if the Commission succeeded or failed in giving Michigan citizens a greater role than politicians in designing new districts. By a margin of 49.6% to 22.1%, voters aware of the MICRC’s work said the MICRC succeeded in giving Michigan citizens a greater role.
- At the same time, the MICRC recognizes there was a significant discrepancy between white and Black respondents on their views of how well the commission honored communities of interest: 53% of white voters approved of the commission’s communities of interest interpretation, while 14% disapproved. By contrast, 31% of Black voters approved, while 54% disapproved. This divide merits consideration during deliberations by the next Michigan Independent Citizens Redistricting Commission.

Our democracy is stronger thanks to Michigan citizens’ engagement and vision for a fair, inclusive and transparent process that puts voters above politics and ensures gerrymandering in Michigan is done once and for all.

M.C. Rothhorn
Chair
Michigan Independent Citizens Redistricting Commission

Edward Woods III
Executive Director
Michigan Independent Citizens Redistricting Commission

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is to help inform future commissions on the lessons learned from the members of the inaugural MICRC.

Here is a summary of the highest priority recommendations that the 2020 MICRC members suggest for consideration in 2030 and beyond (which are explained in more detail throughout this report):

- The Michigan Legislature **should approve an annual budget for the MICRC that is more in line with the actual costs of its work**, incorporates the likely costs of anticipated fees for legal

bills related to inevitable court challenges, and is on par with other states' redistricting commission budgets.

- The Michigan Department of State **should begin the candidate recruitment process earlier**, asking eligible Michiganders to serve on the MICRC, at least two years before members are selected to better ensure diversity and regional representation.
- Serious consideration should be given to **hiring a larger staff** than the 2021 MICRC employed, including but not limited to more support on communications and outreach, legal counsel, information technology and financial management.
- MICRC members stress the importance of **developing relationships with their colleagues**, particularly by attending meetings in-person whenever possible instead of joining online.
- Because the knowledge of technology is likely to vary among future MICRC members, **more time should be dedicated to map-drawing training**.
- It would be helpful to **ensure mapping software is compatible to other platforms** to maximize public engagement in submitting proposed district maps.
- Future MICRCs **should have access to all partisan fairness and political data** and reporting functionality while drafting maps.
- Commissioners, **not staff or consultants**, should make decisions regarding access to data, tools and maps, although the MICRC should evaluate objections raised by staff and consultants.
- More time and training should be allocated by future MICRCs to an **orientation about Michigan's unique regional populations**, distinguished by economic and demographic diversity. Specifically, while the 2021 MICRC members were very familiar with the characteristics of the region of the state where they lived, many expressed they lacked knowledge about other regions of the state with which they were unfamiliar.
- Measures should be taken to **ensure the MICRC website is updated** in a more timely manner.
- Developing a more precise definition of what comprises communities of interest (COIs) is an important goal for future MICRCs to weigh. A common concern about the MICRC's work in 2021 is that members could have spent **more time and resources to better educate the public on its definition of what constitutes a community of interest** and where COIs rank on the constitutionally mandated map-drawing priority list.
- A significant challenge to future MICRCs is **developing a better system to sort and analyze the overwhelming amount of public comment** received.
- Implicit **bias training should continue on a regular and ongoing basis** throughout the work, rather than a single two-hour session early on.
- Future MICRC panels to take great pains to **avoid going into closed meetings**, unless it's a private personnel or lawsuit-related matter.
- Future commissions should follow the inaugural approach implemented by MICRC staff to media relations and **using online platforms** (Zoom, Facebook, etc.) that encourages news media and public participation in public events and news conferences without having to attend in-person.

Recruitment

The amendment to the Michigan Constitution that voters approved to create the MICRC charges the Michigan Department of State (MDOS) with the responsibility of recruiting and selecting the members who serve on the MICRC with oversight, input and participation of the Michigan Legislature. While this issue is beyond the control of the 2031 MICRC, this work directly impacts the future commission, and recommendations are included for consideration.

In mid-2019 and through 2020, MDOS and Secretary of State Jocelyn Benson tasked Gūd Marketing with the high priority of developing a public relations and marketing campaign that would achieve three distinct goals:

- Achieve a high return of applications from those who are randomly mailed the application.
- Build a diverse pool of applicants who are representative of Michigan for the commission from both mailed applications and the general public submissions.
- Create awareness and interest in applying to be on the Michigan redistricting commission that would outperform the results of California's first-in-the-nation independent citizens redistricting commission. (California received 4,500 applications in 2010.)

The constitutional amendment requires that 50% of the commissioners be randomly selected as a result of a statewide mailing to registered voters, while the other 50% of commissioners must be drawn from a pool of people who completed the application without receiving it in the mail. In addition, research revealed that our target audience would be Michiganders eligible/registered to vote by Aug. 14, 2020, (U.S. citizens, living in Michigan, ages 18+, not in jail or prison) — 7.4 million people were registered to vote in 2018 and 4.3 million voted.

Testing of the application language completed by Center for Civic Design underscored the importance of telling people **why it's important to apply** and **why it's exciting**. The research showed key questions and information sought that Michigan would need to address in messaging included **what redistricting is** and **what the job of a commissioner might be**.

The total budget for 2019-20 was \$200,000 for planning, development, implementation and measurement. Strategy was based around three phases of messaging:

- **Public Awareness Phase** (October-December 2019): Promote statewide awareness of application and opportunity.
- **Encouragement of Randomly Selected Voters** (January 2020): Targeted communications to randomly selected voters who were mailed applications to encourage them to apply to the commission.
- **Last Call Phase** (April-June 2020): Targeted communications to audiences underrepresented in the applicant pool from the randomly selected voter list.

During the public awareness phase, the goal was to raise public awareness of the commission; answer questions about the commission; and encourage Michiganders to apply through a mix of earned media coverage, social promotion of in-person events and TV ads.

Michigan voters began applying to serve as commissioners starting in October 2019.

The Secretary of State's office mailed applications to 250,000 selected voters Dec. 30, 2019. As part of an ongoing effort to increase accessibility to applications, MDOS held two periods of public comment, as well as 59 in-person events across the state pre-COVID-19 and 11 virtual town halls in the last month of the application period. MDOS and Gūd Marketing partnered with more than 150 organizations and philanthropic groups in the state to spread the word, host workshops, air public service announcements on television and encourage prospective applicants to apply

Press conferences featuring Secretary of State Benson and bipartisan groups of local officials announcing the opening of the online application were held in Detroit, Lansing, Grand Rapids and Traverse City on two days in late October 2019. Additionally, the town hall workshops held across the state, promoted through earned and paid social media placements, educated community leaders about the application process and the commission responsibilities. Television ads placed on the

Michigan Association of Broadcasters network were used to raise overall awareness of the commission and drive interest.

The second phase began in January 2020 with the Encouraging Randomly Selected Voters initiative. This phase focused on encouraging randomly selected individuals to send in the mailed application they had received. Paid media combined broad-reaching TV placements with highly targeted Facebook and Instagram ads were sent directly to the list of randomly selected voters who received the application, as well as a general message to the general voting-age population of Michigan, throughout the month of January.

Phase three was the Last Call Phase, which allowed us to analyze the current application pool before selecting audiences. Digital and social media ads were used to boost the number of applicants with a focus on underrepresented demographics in the pool, such as individuals under age 55.

RESULTS

More than 9,000 Michiganders submitted applications for one of the 13 seats on the commission — delivering far above Michigan Department of State campaign leaders' expectations. The final days of the application window ending June 1, 2020, saw a surge of applications that left the final applicant pool more diverse and representative of Michigan's demographics than ever before, including applicants from all 83 of Michigan's counties.

The commission received 9,367 completed applications, including 3,412 from individuals randomly selected to be mailed the application (36.6% of the pool and 1.4% of those mailed the application). That means we surpassed the number of final submissions processed by California when it first launched its similar commission. Despite having a population nearly quadruple that of Michigan, [California processed 4,546 final applications in 2010](#).

Voters Not Politicians (VNP), the Michigan Nonprofit Association (MNA) and the Michigan League of Women Voters (MLWV), among others, remained energetically engaged in promoting awareness of applying to serve on the MICRC after successfully winning the 2018 constitutional amendment ballot proposal.

They and many other advocacy organizations and interest groups deserve Michigan voters' gratitude for their aggressive efforts to recruit redistricting commission applicants from populations that have historically been excluded from the state's political life. VNP's user-friendly website was especially helpful in assisting political newcomers and veterans alike to navigate the application process, even connecting them with volunteers who were ready to assist with video notarization of the required forms.

Recruitment: Lessons Learned & Recommendations

MICRC members and outside leaders interviewed for this report recommend that the State of Michigan partner again with these same organizations and even more groups for the 2031 iteration of the MICRC.

A consensus agreed **that** the process is strengthened when any group of citizens mobilizes to recruit redistricting commission applicants, and future success will be dependent on vigorous input from voters all over the state.

However, many of the contributors to this report recommend consideration of:

- **Increasing the budget** to promote the awareness campaign, and
- **Starting earlier** on the statewide awareness campaign to promote applications to serve on the MICRC, such as in 2027 or 2028, to help ensure the candidate pool is as large and diverse as possible.
- In addition, future versions of the MICRC application to serve should include language that **more accurately reflects the true amount of time and work that is required**.
 - A nearly unanimous sentiment expressed by those interviewed was that the projected workload was completely underestimated. The MICRC application stipulated an expected workload of 20-40 hours per week until the maps were approved.
 - The reality proved quite different. Many MICRC members said their duties far exceeded expectations both for attending public hearings, traveling to meetings and during the map-making process, with the arduous task essentially becoming greater than a full-time job.
 - Commissioners also suggested future MICRC applicants consider the sacrifice to their family that comes with serving before they submit the form and that they should anticipate the MICRC service as a full-time job.
- In addition, many of the MICRC members interviewed for this report said future MICRC panels should **consider increasing the members' salary as a way to better promote diversity on the commission**.
 - They noted, for example, that the inaugural panel largely skewed younger and older than Michigan's median-age population, meaning that middle-aged/middle-income residents were less likely to apply to the MICRC.
 - Some MICRC members suggested future commissions consider **providing health insurance** as a way to recruit and attract more diversity in the candidate pool.
 - The MICRC acknowledges the Michigan Department of State (MDOS) has no authority to set the MICRC members' salary or provide health benefits in the recruitment phase.
 - The MICRC is vested within the Michigan Constitution to set their own salary. The Michigan Constitution simply states that the *minimum level of funding* for the MICRC's members' compensation will be at least 25% of the governor's salary. The MICRC has the power to go beyond that funding floor set in the constitution if members believe it's warranted.
 - That means the MDOS could promote via its candidate recruitment campaign that the opportunity exists for future members of the MICRC in 2031 and beyond to schedule a vote among themselves that would determine whether a higher salary or provision of health insurance for members is appropriate.

Selection

The Secretary of State's office hired Saginaw-based Rehmann LLC, an independent third-party certified accounting firm, to randomly select the 13 Michigan residents who would serve on the state's first Independent Citizens Redistricting Commission. The office used the standard bidding process.

The constitutional amendment that created the MICRC included factors that can disqualify a voter from serving on the commission, like being an elected partisan official or immediate family member of that official, an employee of the legislature or being a lobbyist.

The Secretary of State's office processed [more than 9,300](#) applications from across the state. Rehmann LLC randomly selected [200 semifinalists](#) in June, 2020, including 60 who affiliated with Democrats, 60 who affiliated with Republicans and 80 applicants who affiliated with neither major party. The random selection process considered the geographic and demographic make-up of the applicants to ensure the final pool of semifinalists mirrored the population of the state as closely as possible.

The list of 200 semifinalists was submitted to the top GOP and Democratic leaders in the Michigan Senate and House. They were given the chance to remove up to [20 applicants](#) before Aug. 1, 2020. Rehmann LLC input the names of the remaining applicants into software primarily used in the auditing community to make random selections. The software extracted four names each from the list of Democratic and Republican applicants and five names from the list of independent applicants. The final selections of the 13 MICRC members were made in a [livestreamed drawing Monday, Aug. 17, 2020](#). The commission was seated Sept. 17, 2020, to begin the year-long process of reconfiguring the state's political boundaries.

Each selected commissioner expressed in their applications a desire to serve their community and country. In their applications and in interviews with the MLive newspaper chain and other news outlets, all of the commissioners expressed a common theme — they saw their work as a civic duty that, if done correctly, could help change the state's redistricting process for the better.

The inaugural MICRC members are:

Douglas Clark

- **Party:** Republican
- **Age:** 74
- **Occupation:** Retired operations and development manager

Juanita Curry

- **Party:** Democrat
- **Age:** 72
- **Occupation:** Retired specialized foster care worker

Anthony Eid

- **Party:** Independent
- **Age:** 28
- **Occupation:** Medical student

Brittni Kellom

- **Party:** Democrat
- **Age:** 34
- **Occupation:** Entrepreneur and trauma practitioner

Rhonda Lange

- **Party:** Republican
- **Age:** 48
- **Occupation:** Real estate broker

Steven Terry Lett

- **Party:** Independent
- **Age:** 74
- **Occupation:** Semi-retired lawyer

Cynthia Orton

- **Party:** Republican
- **Age:** 55
- **Occupation:** College student

M.C. Rothhorn

- **Party:** Democrat
- **Age:** 48
- **Occupation:** Financial cooperator

Rebecca Szetela

- **Party:** Independent
- **Age:** 47
- **Occupation:** Lawyer

Janice Vallette

- **Party:** Independent
- **Age:** 68
- **Occupation:** Retired banker

Erin Wagner

- **Party:** Republican
- **Age:** 54
- **Occupation:** Household engineer

Richard Weiss

- **Party:** Independent
- **Age:** 73
- **Occupation:** Retired auto worker and handyman

Dustin Witjes

- **Party:** Democrat
- **Age:** 31
- **Occupation:** Payroll specialist

[For more details about the MICRC members, click here.](#)

Selection: Lessons Learned & Recommendations

The MICRC was composed of six men and seven women. Two are Black, one is Middle Eastern, and the rest are white. Their ages range between 28 and 74 — only one was under 30 at the time of his selection. A majority of the commission — seven members — live in southeast Michigan. Two live in the northern Lower Peninsula, two live in or near Lansing, one lives in Battle Creek, and one lives in Saginaw.

The inaugural MICRC generally reflects Michigan's diverse population, which the large majority of MICRC members and others interviewed for this report agree means the algorithm used by Rehmann LLC in the MICRC applicant selection process proved successful.

However, the inaugural MICRC did not include any residents from the Upper Peninsula; no one identifying as Hispanic or Latino, Native American, Asian or Pacific Islander; and nobody from Grand Rapids, the state's second-largest city, was selected. This drew some public criticism.

Some of the contributors to this report believe:

- **Slight adjustments could be made to the algorithm** Rehmann LLC employed that might bring more geographic and racial diversity to the future potential MICRC candidate pool.
- But the majority of those interviewed for this report, including a majority of the MICRC members, said **rather than changing the algorithm, more energy should be devoted to recruiting more residents** from the Upper Peninsula, Grand Rapids, other populous communities and ethnic populations and urging them to apply to serve on future MICRC panels.
- The consensus opinion was that greater interest in serving on the MICRC in 2031 and beyond will occur over the next decade because those who felt under-represented in the inaugural process will strive to ensure they are better represented in the next MICRC iteration.

In addition, Voters Not Politicians (VNP) and the Michigan Nonprofit Association (MNA) shared separate post-campaign findings and suggestions with MICRC for its development of this report. The VNP report is based on VNP interviews with the leaders of 10 Community of Interest partner groups (COIs) across the State of Michigan that VNP worked closely with during the inaugural redistricting cycle. The MNA report is based on interviews with leaders of MNA member organizations.

Recommendations from MICRC members, VNP and MNA and third-party organizations who contributed to the report for the selection process in 2030 include **increasing public education on the process for selection of the commissioners**, particularly regarding how the semi-finalist pool and final commissioners are weighted and selected. Collectively, they recommended considering **additional mechanisms for hearing marginalized voices** not included on the commission when convened.

VNP says COIs reported concerns about representation and historical/cultural competence on MICRC. According to VNP, some of these concerns could have been alleviated had the public understood how the final 13 commissioners were chosen (i.e., that they were not individually selected by the secretary of state, and that the constitution does not allow a certain number of seats to be reserved for Detroit residents, for example, or members of a particular ethnic group).

[For more details about the MICRC membership selection process “mechanics,” click here.](#)

[For more details about the MICRC membership random selection process, click here.](#)

Training & Technology

Michigan is one of only a handful of states where citizens' initiatives led to the creation of citizen-led, independent redistricting commissions, according to the [National Conference of State Legislatures](#). In order to prepare the 13 members of the inaugural MICRC for the task of redistricting, training and education was crucial.

In September 2020, commissioners attended a two-day orientation organized by the Michigan Department of State covering:

- Introduction to Role as a Commissioner
- Basics of Article IV, Section 6
 - Process and mapping criteria
 - Panel discussion on Criteria and Public Hearings featuring Matt Grossmann, director of the Institute for Public Policy and Social Research at Michigan State University; John Chamberlin, professor emeritus at University of Michigan; and Jon Eguia, professor at Michigan State University
- Lessons from California and Arizona commissions
 - Presentation and reflections from other citizen commissions nationwide. Panelists: Andre Parvenu (CA, no party preference), Vincent Barabba (CA, Republican), Cynthia Dai (CA, Democrat), Colleen Mathis (AZ, independent)
- Redistricting 101
 - Panel presentation and discussion on redistricting history and basics. Panelists: Tom Ivacko, executive director of the Center for Local, State, and Urban Policy at the University of Michigan Ford School of Public Policy; Ellen Katz, professor of law at the University of Michigan Law School; and Justin Levitt, professor of law at Loyola Law School
- Redistricting in Michigan
 - Panel presentation by Matt Grossmann, director of the Institute for Public Policy and Social Research at Michigan State University; Chris Thomas, former director of the Michigan Bureau of Elections; and John Pirich, faculty at the Michigan State University Law School
- Transparency & Independence Workshop
 - Overview of Open Meetings Act and the Freedom of Information Act

The orientation and resource materials compiled for the inaugural commission are [available here](#).

In addition to the initial orientation, the MICRC relied on support from experts, including, but not limited to:

- **Thomas Ivacko**, executive director, Center for Local, State, and Urban Policy at the University of Michigan Gerald R. Ford School of Public Policy, and
- **Matt Grossman**, director of the Institute for Public Policy and Social Research (IPPSR) and professor of Political Science at Michigan State University

Grossman and Ivacko's teams partnered to enhance MICRC members' knowledge of best practices implemented in other states on such complex issues as communities of interest (COIs) and included materials for MICRC review in its inaugural packet. U-M also shared with MICRC a database of more than 1,200 potential COI groups and hosted a series of webinars inviting those groups to get involved with the MICRC's work. In addition, U-M and MSU provided technical support in test-mapping sessions. They encouraged the MICRC to invest more funding in data management and analysis of the public comments on maps, noting the sheer volume of comments in California's experience proved overwhelming.

- **Matthew Petering**, a professor from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, who presented a map-drawing algorithm he developed.
- **Moon Duchin**, a math professor at Tufts University, who specializes in geometry and has been immersed in redistricting problems since 2016. She is the founder of [MGGG Redistricting Lab](#), an effort to apply data science to redistricting. The lab, which grew out of an informal research

collective called the Metric Geometry and Gerrymandering Group, has helped refine techniques that construct representative samples of the universe of valid redistricting maps for a given jurisdiction. When human-generated maps deviate far from statistical norms, it can be a sign of gerrymandering or some other agenda, Duchin and other mathematicians say. Duchin has worked with commissions and groups across the country, including the [People's Maps Commission in Wisconsin](#) and [Arizona's Independent Redistricting Commission](#). Her work has flagged numerous instances of gerrymandering by both parties.

These experts, as well as others, provided continuing education to the commissioners.

Mapping Software Training

Redistricting has been called one of the most complicated undertakings of state government, and part of this difficulty arises from the amount of math and data that goes into the process in order to comply with legal requirements.

The MICRC members had access to mapping software so they could draw their own districts. The cost to the MICRC to purchase the software from Electronic Data Services was approximately \$4,000-plus per member. Not all MICRC members chose to use the software, citing their lack of IT knowledge. Some commissioners who did download the software with the MICRC paying the fee said they attended training sessions to learn how to use the technology, but they said the training was insufficient given their relative lack of IT knowledge, so they ultimately did not use the tool. This proved to be a waste of MICRC resources.

Bias Training

Members of the MICRC received one two-hour training session July 8, 2021, on bias training from its consultant Bruce Adelson during an in-person meeting in Lansing. Natural bias is defined as “a predisposition or a preconceived opinion that prevents a person from impartially evaluating facts that have been presented for determination; a prejudice.”

There are at least 14 different types of bias people experience that influence and affect the way people think, behave and perceive others. Understanding personal biases and assumptions is crucial to clear thinking and scientific literacy. All individuals, no matter their education, intellectual commitment or good intentions, are susceptible to biases.

According to Adelson and other experts on the topic, the 14 types of bias include:

1. Confirmation bias
2. The Dunning-Kruger Effect
3. Cultural bias
4. In-group bias
5. Decline bias
6. Optimism or pessimism bias
7. Self-serving bias
8. Information bias
9. Selection bias
10. Availability bias
11. Fundamental attribution error
12. Hindsight bias
13. Anchoring bias
14. Observer bias

After Adelson's presentation, MICRC members expressed more confidence that they were cognizant of the need to remain alert to their individual natural biases.

Commissioners also praised the media trainings they received, which helped inform them on what they could and could not discuss in terms of the MICRC's work with reporters and the public. Special attention was devoted to Section 11 of the new amendment that stipulated the MICRC — its members, staff, attorneys and consultants — could not discuss redistricting matters with members of the public outside of an open meeting of the commission, except that a

commissioner may communicate about redistricting matters with members of the public to gain information relevant to the performance of his or her duties if such communication occurs (a) in writing or (b) at a previously publicly noticed forum or town hall open to the general public.

Technology Shortfalls

MICRC members and staff did not receive state-issued computers and cell phones until January-February 2021 due to COVID-19-related supply chain issues. The delay frustrated commissioners and MICRC staff, who said during interviews that they hoped that those problems would not exist in 2031. Additionally, the computers issued to commissioners were not well equipped to run the mapping software. They did not have discrete graphic cards or enough processing power to carry out key functions with ease.

Training & Technology: Lessons Learned & Recommendations

Recommendations for improvement include:

- Commissioners interviewed for this report said future MICRC leaders should receive **more extensive training** on how to use the mapping software more effectively and **earlier in the process**.
- Commissioners who found the mapping software training sessions helpful **cited the two-hour, 1-on-1 trainings as especially beneficial** and encouraged more individualized training be available to commissioners.
- Commissioners, not staff or consultants, **should make decisions regarding access to data, tools and maps**, although the MICRC should evaluate objections raised by staff and consultants.
- Certain aspects of their training MICRC members found especially helpful were:
 - **Presentations by the University of Michigan and Michigan State University** were generally deemed instrumental in providing the MICRC with a base level foundation of the challenges and opportunities surrounding redistricting. Some MICRC members, however, felt the presentations could have been discussed in more accessible laymen's terms.
 - Presentations by the leaders of previous redistricting commissions for the states of California and Arizona, respectively.
- Subject matter that some commissioners cited as deserving of more training and expedited timing included:
 - **Providing MICRC members with a stronger understanding of Robert's Rules of Order should be mandatory for future MICRC panels because virtually all of the MICRC members had little to no experience conducting formal meetings.** Robert's Rules was first published in 1876 as an adaptation of the rules and practice of the United States Congress to the needs of non-legislative societies. It is the most widely used manual of parliamentary procedure in the United States and has a proven track record of helping membership groups apply codes of conduct to serve as a parliamentary authority within a given assembly.
- **Getting the redistricting software earlier into the MICRC's hands** would have been helpful so commissioners could have started practicing sooner with the map-drawing technology.
 - The MICRC could have started learning about map drawing in July 2021, but they did not begin the practice until September 2021.
 - Several commissioners felt more of their colleagues should have devoted additional time with consultants and on their own practicing how to draw blocks, precincts, etc.
 - Several commissioners also expressed frustration that the Auto Bound Edge software the MICRC used to understand partisan fairness features was disabled around August 2021 and not re-enabled until October 2021. Future MICRCs **should have access to all partisan fairness and political data and reporting functionality** while drafting maps.
 - The sentiment expressed from these commissioners was that it would be better for the MICRC to have all software functions available to them in order to see partisan fairness numbers.
- Providing a **more in-depth education to commissioners about Michigan's geography, population and local economies** should be considered by future MICRC panels, as many

of the inaugural MICRC members admitted they were unfamiliar with communities big and small in different regions of the state. They eventually came to understand how these factors play into what defines communities of interest, but wished they understood these factors earlier.

- Commissioners felt they could have benefited from initial demography lessons to orient them to the size, locations and nature of the diverse cultural, ethnic, religious, economic and other communities that make up our state. Many commissioners reported being unfamiliar with Michigan's demographics in certain parts of the state, such as Metro Detroit, at the start of the process.
- Others said they were unaware which areas of the state have the highest populations of senior citizens; where the highest tourism rates exist; and how the changes of seasons in Michigan impact local and regional economies.
- As noted above, the MICRC members received a single training session on recognizing potential pre-existing individual biases from MICRC consultant Bruce Adelson. But some commissioners lamented **there was no follow-up training on identifying and remedying personal bias** and wished the panel would have taken more tests to measure individual bias. Having this task assigned to a MICRC staff member may be advisable for future MICRC panels.

“Please hire a registered parliamentarian to review and provide written advice and recommendations concerning your approved Parliamentary Authority Manual and proposed Rules of Procedure amendments.”

— **James Gallant, Marquette**

“If there was just one lesson to be learned, in my opinion, it is that, after developing these plans through whatever algorithm you may have used, you could've gone back and applied a human touch to these plans. It appears that some communities may have split unnecessarily. Had you gone back and taken a really close look at those plans, you might have been able to fix some of them without having an adverse effect on the integrity of the plan. As good as computers and algorithms are, sometimes, there is no substitute for a final touch by the human hand.”

— **Jack Bengtsson, Kentwood**

Hiring Personnel

Staffing is among the first decisions that future iterations of the MICRC will need to make, and some potentially helpful resources for making those decisions are listed below.

The 2021 MICRC was tasked with hiring the following personnel described below. This is meant purely as a starting point and are not necessarily listed in order of priority:

- Executive director to oversee all operations of the commission, administration and commission staff and assist with navigation of government agencies and protocols
- General counsel to serve as the primary legal counsel for implementation and legal compliance with Michigan Constitution article IV sec. 6, helping guide and assist the commission in executing a robust, independent, fair, citizen-led and transparent redistricting process.
- Communications and outreach director to handle all media logistics; advise the commission on its message and otherwise manage all public information aspects; as well as to organize public hearings and serve as a primary point of contact for stakeholders, public input and engagement
- Office manager to serve as support staff in overseeing day-to-day operations and correspondence of the commission

To begin the hiring process, the MICRC asked the Michigan Department of State (MDOS) to place advertisements and job postings on relevant websites during late 2020 to solicit applicants for the three positions of executive director, communications and outreach director, and legal counsel.

The MICRC then created three separate sub-committees from its membership who were tasked with a singular focus on each position. MDOS collected all the resumes and applications for delivery to the MICRC, and the MICRC divided up the files based on the job being sought. Throughout the process, all MICRC members could review all applications as he or she wished. In addition to reviewing each candidate's resume, the MICRC conducted searches of their social media history for further insights and background.

Each subcommittee then provided the entire MICRC with its recommendations for interviews with the top-ranked candidates. The MICRC scheduled interviews with each prospective candidate that were held as part of open public meetings.

The Princeton Gerrymandering Project estimated that for a state the size of Michigan in 2021, the budget for commissioners and staff salaries, payroll taxes and human resource expenses should total approximately \$1.48 million. That line item in the MICRC budget from the 2021 fiscal year totaled \$1.034 million.

In September 2020, the randomly selected commission convened for the first time and voted to proceed with its first hire – an executive director of the commission. The executive director would be charged with assisting the commission in all its duties as it embarked on a new process involving new redistricting criteria and requiring transparency and public engagement throughout the map-drawing process.

Suann Hammersmith, who retired as president and CEO of the Lenawee Community Foundation on Aug. 1, 2020, received the highest number of votes out of six finalists during a Dec. 1, 2020, meeting for the position to facilitate the state's redistricting. She told news media at the time of her official hiring on Dec. 17 that she expected to serve 1½ years in the role, which proved accurate.

The MICRC's second hire was Julianne Pastula, as general counsel, on Jan. 11, 2021. Edward Woods III was hired Feb. 1 as communications and outreach director. Executive Assistant Sara Martinez was hired June 1 as a part-time staff member.

On March 31, 2022, the MICRC officially announced the appointment of Woods as its new executive director to replace Hammersmith, who retired from the helm effective the same day.

Across the board, MICRC members praised the diligence of the staff they hired, with particular gratitude expressed for the service of Hammersmith, Martinez, Pastula and Woods. The MICRC recognized they worked extremely long hours, often six or seven days per week for months on end.

They were especially impressed such a small staff produced several key policy documents that proved essential to the process, such as developing a rules and procedures guideline that was so effective it was later adopted by the Colorado Independent Redistricting Commissions.

The policy and procedural documents relevant to future iterations of the MICRC to review that were created by the [inaugural MICRC staff](#) include:

- [Public Record Requests Procedures](#)
- [Document and Record Retention Policy](#)
- [Financial Procedures, Procurement Review Policy](#)
- [Policy for Approval of Expenses](#)
- [Conflict of Interest Policy](#)
- [Code of Conduct](#)
- [Strategic Plan](#)
- [Communications and Outreach Policy](#)
- [Communications and Outreach Plan](#)
- [Mapping Policies and Procedures](#)
- [Rules of Procedures](#)

Hiring Personnel: Lessons Learned & Recommendations

At least four common themes emerged among the MICRC members interviewed for this report regarding hiring practices they recommend for future MICRC panel consideration:

- Without question, they said **future MICRC panels should hire more support staff from the beginning** to assist the executive team. They noted Michigan, in comparison to previous redistricting states like California and Arizona, had staffing levels routinely insufficient to its needs. Assistants for the executive director and general counsel eventually were hired, but far later in the process than would have been preferable.
- Given the heavy workload for the MICRC's legal team, some commissioners suggested **future MICRC panels should hire two attorneys as legal counsel**, as opposed to one. These commissioners noted that 11 of their 13 MICRC colleagues were not attorneys and had no legal expertise or backgrounds whatsoever.
- **The importance of the MICRC communications and outreach director is critical** to informing the public, and particularly the news media, about MICRC activities, which the MICRC did not sufficiently appreciate in the initial hiring process. In retrospect, some commissioners said they would advise future MICRC panels to consider selecting a communications and outreach director even before the hiring of the executive director.
- **Future commissions should consider hiring their own IT staff** rather than relying on the Michigan Department of State to provide that service. While using the MDOS staff helped save budget resources, it also resulted in overly long delays in uploading maps and meeting minutes to the MICRC website, prompting criticism from the public and news media.

Consultants

In addition to full-time staff, the MICRC hired a team of consultants to assist in its duties. This included, but was not limited to, marketing and public relations experts who helped support the MICRC's public awareness and education activities.

For the first phase of the map-making public awareness campaign, the MICRC hired Detroit-based Van Dyke Horn and McConnell Communications, Inc. The MICRC teamed with GÜD Marketing to handle the PR and communications efforts during the second phase of the MICRC's public hearings. The MICRC contracted with Lansing-based Good Fruit to handle video production and with Chase Creative for audio visual (AV) assistance at live events.

Consultants who assisted in map-making were of particular importance to the citizen-led panel. For example, the term "gerrymandering" refers to the manipulation of congressional district boundaries to favor a particular party. Many district boundaries in Michigan historically were intentionally weaved around specific homes, neighborhoods and streets to include voters with a particular ideology in one voting district.

To better understand how to address the gerrymandering challenges that existed in Michigan, a team of experts was hired to help MICRC draw new congressional and legislative districts for the state. Its contract with Virginia-based Election Data Services (EDS) to serve as the commission's line drawing firm was finalized May 25, 2021.

EDS President **Kimball Brace**, who worked for many Democratic clients over the years, led the mapping team that included **John Morgan**, a redistricting expert frequently hired by Republicans; **Fred Hejazi**, who developed the mapping software the commission used to draw the new districts; and **Kent Stigall**, who had recently retired from Virginia's nonpartisan legislative services agency.

In addition, an EDS partner, Dr. Lisa Handley, a racial polarization voting and partisan fairness rights expert who has become the premier racial bloc voting expert in the country for the past three decades, was brought onto the team at the commission's request to undertake an analysis of racial voting patterns in Michigan's communities to ensure the new districts didn't dilute the political representation of minority populations.

In response to concerns about Brace and Morgan's history of working with Democratic and Republican clients, Hejazi told the commissioners that "the person who's going to be drawing is actually Kent (Stigall), who's not a partisan person."

Brace worked with Arizona's commission, which is similarly structured to Michigan's, during previous redistricting cycles. Stigall previously worked for Virginia's nonpartisan legislative services agency for 35 years. The composition of the team was designed to protect the commission against allegations of redistricting that favors one party over the other, Hejazi asserted in a Detroit Free Press interview.

"Nobody's going to be able to come back and say, 'Well, you guys had this drawn by people that strictly work with the Democrats or people that strictly work for Republicans, so the map is going to be skewed.'"

The partisan makeup of the team was a deliberate attempt to achieve political balance, Brace told the Detroit Free Press.

Brace pulled together the census data that helped the commission determine where the lines should be drawn. He told the Detroit Free Press he saw his role as more than just crunching numbers, but rather as that of an educator to the group of randomly selected citizens who make up the commission. Brace delivered this advice during a March 4 presentation to the group: **Don't expect everyone to be happy with the final maps.**

“I’ve always said that when I get finished with a project, I think I’ve probably been successful if everyone is just a little bit mad at me,” he told the commissioners.

Morgan saw himself as the commission’s problem-solver who could step in when the commission needed to reach a compromise on where the lines should be drawn.

“Ideally I’ll put a bunch of options in front of them or help them assess options that other people propose,” Morgan told the Free Press. But ultimately, Morgan said, the commissioners are the decision makers.

The MICRC selected **Bruce Adelson**, the president of Federal Compliance Consulting LLC, in early April 2021. Adelson was tasked with ensuring the congressional and legislative districts drawn by the MICRC would comply with state and federal law. Adelson previously worked with Arizona’s Independent Redistricting Commission.

He told the MICRC that keeping “a very robust, transparent record” as the commission drew its maps would help defend the commission’s work and decision-making.

“As we all learned back in elementary school in math, we were all told, ‘show our work.’ That is absolutely true when it comes to redistricting,” he said to the MICRC. “You want everybody to know what you’re doing and then, in the event of a legal challenge, you can just ... cite the record to confirm what it is that you actually did.”

Members of the MICRC interviewed for this report were unanimous in their support for, and appreciation of, the services provided by the consulting team they hired to help in their map-making deliberations, as well as experts from across the nation who provided expertise free of charge. **The MICRC members gained fundamental knowledge from these experts. With that said, it’s important to note all of the MICRC’s line-drawing decisions were made by the commission itself.**

It also should be noted the Michigan Department of Civil Rights disagreed with MICRC’s consultants’ assessment of the Voting Rights Act (VRA) compliance criteria. The state’s civil rights department recommended to the MICRC a 40% Black-population district was insufficient to comply with the Voting Rights Act.

Adelson advised the MICRC the VRA did not require a specific number of minority-majority districts (e.g., districts with greater than 50% Black Voting Age Population, or BVAP); however, MICRC did need to create “opportunity to elect” districts.

MICRC was advised by Adelson that an “opportunity to elect” district is one where the district contains the requisite number of minority voters to enable those voters an opportunity to elect their candidates of choice. Hanley’s analysis was intended to determine the necessary percentage of Black Voting Age Population needed to provide the opportunity for Black voters to elect their candidates of choice in elections in four racially polarized counties (Wayne, Oakland, Saginaw and Genesee).

The Michigan Department of Civil Rights wrote in an analysis of the MICRC’s proposed maps they would dilute the votes of people who live in places with heavy minority populations by cracking them into different districts and combining them with predominantly white areas.

The MICRC recognizes its lines drew heavy criticism during a public hearing in October 2021 in Detroit, where nearly 80% of the population is Black. The proposed maps linked voters in Detroit with voters in whiter suburban areas.

The commission’s [advisers have said](#) it’s possible for minority voters to elect the candidate of their choice in districts, even if they don’t comprise a majority of the population. Determining the appropriate percentage of a minority population needed to comply with the Voting Rights Act can be a complex analysis that depends on the unique political characteristics of an area.

Consultants: Lessons Learned & Recommendations

The majority of the MICRC members interviewed for this report expressed overall satisfaction with the performance and counsel provided by its consultants. Commissioners recommend future MICRC should use the experts they hire to the fullest extent possible.

Public Comment on Improving the Process

“Don't take spurious advice about the VRA and have multiple sources for that sort of stuff. One voice dominated this time when there should always be multiple viewpoints, which resulted in some questionable choices.”

– **Mark Graham**

Communities of Interest

One of the most complex and difficult challenges the MICRC faced during the map-making process was defining “communities of interest,” which is the third-ranked priority in the state constitution preceded only by complying with federal population size and Voting Rights Act requirements and a directive to make districts geographically contiguous.

The guidance provided in the Michigan Constitution is as follows:

“Districts shall reflect the state’s diverse population and communities of interest. Communities of interest may include, but shall not be limited to, populations that share cultural or historical characteristics or economic interests. Communities of interest do not include relationships with political parties, incumbents, or political candidates.”

MICRC members noted during interviews there is no definitive list of communities of interest in Michigan to draw from, and a community of interest is not a traditional city or county borders. In order to fulfill this criteria, the MICRC identified a [communities of interest process](#).

This process included identifying characteristics of a COI to be:

- Self-defined by the local community members
- Associated with a contiguous area on a map
- Shared common bonds linked to public policy issues that would be affected by legislation; likely to result in a desire to share the same legislative district in order to secure more effective representation

And defining “cultural,” “historical” and “economic” characteristics as:

- Cultural: Artistic and intellectual pursuits/products, including the arts, letters, manners; ways of living transmitted from one generation to the next; a form or stage of civilization; behaviors and beliefs characteristic of a social, ethnic or age group
- Historical: Past events and times relating to people, country or time period; aggregate or record of past events; a notable past; acts, ideas or events that will shape the future
- Economic: the production, distribution, and use of income, wealth and commodities; affecting or apt to affect the welfare of material resources; financial considerations; wealth and wage disparities

Communities of interest could include places of worship, neighborhoods, ethnic communities, social service organizations, local historical societies, school districts, outdoor recreation areas, arts and cultural institutions or a group of vacation homeowners.

Communities that have a shared interest that makes them want to stay together in one district for purposes of political representation can tell MICRC where they want to be located geographically. MICRC did consider the maps it received from communities of interest when drawing the new congressional and legislative lines. However, it didn’t consider COIs where citizens mentioned not wanting to be a part of a community.

While many states consider communities of interest, no other state assigns them such a high priority in its criteria for redrawing districts as Michigan. Redistricting experts interviewed for this report said making communities of interest a top priority was meant as a corrective to gerrymandered districts that split up communities in the past. Groups including [Voters Not Politicians](#), the [Michigan Nonprofit Association](#) and the [University of Michigan’s Center for Local, State, and Urban Policy](#) compiled resources to learn more about communities of interest and how to encourage public participation in the new redistricting process.

One of the main factors MICRC has to consider is keeping residents with similar interests together. Because the definition is so vague, Michigan citizens have a lot of leeway to help chart MICRC’s course.

“It’s very elastic,” John Chamberlin, professor emeritus of political science and public policy at the University of Michigan’s Ford School of Public Policy, [told the MLive newspaper chain in a story published May 25, 2021](#). “As long as you’re not a political party or a front group for a candidate, you could be a community of interest.”

According to the National Conference of State Legislatures, [25 states, including Michigan, currently include communities of interest](#) as a qualifying form of criteria in drawing state legislative maps, congressional maps or both. The most comparable system to Michigan’s is the state of California, which also has an independent redistricting commission that relies in part on communities of interest.

The term itself isn’t unusual for people who are familiar with the redistricting process, but for the average citizen it’s nebulous, Chamberlin told MLive.

He and other researchers at the University of Michigan’s Center for Local, State and Urban Policy [drew up a list of examples](#) for MICRC review of what [communities of interest could be](#) after looking at various state organizations, associations and groups. They suggested communities of interest include populations sharing cultural or historical characteristics, economic interests or bonds through policy issues that would be affected by legislation.

“The fact that there’s no exhaustive list of these things means that either communities of interest, on their own, need to decide, ‘We are one and let’s participate,’ or some other group needs to get in touch with them to say, ‘Have you thought about this? Here’s how the process works,’” he told MLive.

In remaining steadfast and not disregarding the seven ranked redistricting criteria, the MICRC heard sentiments of former state Supreme Court Justice Stephen Markman. He teaches constitutional law at Hillsdale College, which commissioned him to write a report summarizing his concerns with its definition of community of interest in forming district lines.

Markman urged the MICRC against using racial, ethnic or religious groups as a determiner of the state’s new voting boundaries for the 2022 election. He also said a redistricting commission that prioritizes traditional municipal boundaries when redrawing voting maps should avoid using “racial, ethnic and religious’ calculations” as proxies for drawing maps that provided partisan advantage in the past.

Instead, Markman called on the commission to consider actual neighborhood and municipal boundaries when redrawing the state voting maps instead of more nebulous bonds such as shared concerns over the environment, creative arts communities, media markets or tax assessment districts — elements the University of Michigan study offered as examples of “communities of interest.”

Here is a link to a July 7, 2021, [story published by the Detroit News about Markman’s views](#).

Communities of Interest: Lessons Learned & Recommendations

A common critique on the MICRC's COI application from Markman, dissenting MICRC commissioners and some members of the public who submitted comments is that city/county lines were broken in pursuit of COIs and/or that certain cities/counties were not considered COIs.

The counterpoint to that sentiment is that the sixth-ranked criteria states, "Districts shall *reflect* consideration of county, city and township boundaries," which is lower than the third-ranked COI criteria.

The following content represents VNP's contribution to MICRC's Lessons Learned & Recommendations report. The findings and observations are based on VNP interviews with the leaders of 10 COI partner groups across the State of Michigan that both MICRC and VNP worked closely with during the inaugural redistricting cycle.

According to VNP, COI partners reported multiple challenges during the 2021-22 redistricting process, such as a lack of awareness among their members of the redistricting process in general. In addition, there was confusion as to what would or would not be considered a COI in MICRC's eyes and how MICRC would weigh submissions from a few motivated individuals as compared to large COIs. The COI partners recommended MICRC:

- Publicize and share widely a definition of "community of interest" and clearly and proactively explain how it will weigh different pieces of public input.
- Provide COI examples and counterexamples.
- Prioritize public education and presentations in more populous areas.
- Have adequate financing and staffing for its important public education role.

"Earlier public education before public testimony begins would give more time for communities of interest to understand how they can participate in the process."

— **Susan Demeuse, Caledonia**

"I believe I watched every meeting and hearing held by the MICRC, and if there was one takeaway I could offer by way of suggested process improvement, I believe greater clarification surrounding what constitutes a COI as it relates to mapping criteria priorities taken as a whole.

"For example, there were obvious tensions with which the commission struggled when it was necessary to weigh issues of partisan fairness against the interests of a COI."

— **Karen**

Public Participation Process

Public participation was key to the work of the inaugural MICRC. Despite the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic — limited in-person meetings, changing local and state health rules, etc. — MICRC sought to exceed the requirements of the Michigan Constitution by hosting more public hearings. Additionally, all meetings of the MICRC were live streamed via YouTube to maximize public participation and transparency.

The MICRC's work in collecting public feedback is segmented into two phases:

Phase One | May-July 2021

The state constitution required the MICRC to hold at least 10 public hearings around the state to inform Michiganders about the redistricting process, the purpose and responsibilities of MICRC and gather information from the public about potential plans.

The 16 public hearings were held in the following cities and hosted by specific commissioners familiar with each area. Commissioners attended in person, as required by the Open Meetings Act.:

- Jackson — May 11 at American 1 Event Center
- Kalamazoo — May 13 at Wings Event Center
- Marquette — May 18 at Northern Michigan University
- Gaylord — May 20 at Treetop Resorts
- Midland — May 25 at the Great Hall Banquet and Convention Center
- Lansing — May 27 at the Lansing Center
- Pontiac — June 1 at Centerpointe Marriott
- Flint — June 3 at Dort Financial Center
- Novi — June 8 at the Suburban Collection Showplace
- Dearborn — June 10 at the Ford Community and Performing Arts Center
- Detroit — June 15 at The Village Dome at Fellowship Chapel
- Detroit — June 17 at the TCF Center
- Port Huron — June 22 at the Blue Water Convention Center
- Warren — June 24 at the MRCC Banquet Center
- Muskegon — June 29 at the VanDyke Mortgage Convention Center
- Grand Rapids — July 1 at the Devos Place

The MICRC also launched an online public comment portal in May 2021 that made it easy for residents to submit written comments, draw or upload maps, and more. The public comment portal served as a one-stop shop for members of the public to engage in the redistricting process. This comprehensive tool was developed by the MICRC in partnership with the [MGGG Redistricting Lab](#), a nonpartisan research group at Tisch College of Tufts University and procured by the Michigan Department of State (MDOS). The public comment portal enables members of the public to easily do the following:

- Submit written public comments
- Draw and submit a Community of Interest map
- Draw and submit a complete or partial district map (congressional, Michigan House and Michigan Senate)
- Upload or link to a map/shapefile or document
- Comment on other maps or submissions

Commissioners and the public were able to see submissions and comments in real time. The public comment portal can be found at Michigan.gov/MICRC.

Members of the public were encouraged to use the public comment portal to submit materials. The MICRC also received comments via email, mail and/or paper submissions at public meetings. MDOS continued to provide these comments to the commission and uploaded them to the website for public viewing regularly.

Phase Two | August-December 2021

After months of preparation, public input and a long delay for updated U.S. Census data due to COVID-19 delays in data collection, the MICRC began the process it was created to do — draw political district maps for the state’s congressional, state House and state Senate districts and invite the public to participate by weighing in on its draft maps.

It should be noted the MICRC began its map-drawing process by dividing the state into 10 regions, then focused on each region. The MICRC chose to start with the Upper Peninsula and Lower Northern Michigan region first, then worked its way downward to address the rest of the state.

Critics have suggested that approach did not leave sufficient time for drawing maps in Michigan’s most populous regions, such as Metro Detroit and Greater Grand Rapids. They recommend that in the future the MICRC should devote more time and resources to build outlying maps after those two regions are completed.

On Oct. 14, 2021, the MICRC unveiled several draft federal and state legislative district maps built collaboratively, as well as maps drawn by a single commissioner. The MICRC also announced details for a new phase of public hearings and comments. The MICRC was required to hold at least five public hearings throughout the state for the purpose of soliciting comments from the public about the proposed maps being considered for redistricting of the Michigan congressional, House and Senate districts.

The five hearings were held:

- **Wednesday, Oct. 20, 1-8 p.m., recess 3:30-5 p.m.**
TCF Center, 1 Washington Blvd., Detroit 48226
- **Thursday, Oct. 21, 1-8 p.m., recess 3:30-5 p.m.**
Lansing Center, 333 E. Michigan Ave., Lansing 48933
- **Friday, Oct. 22, 1-8 p.m., recess 3:30-5 p.m.**
DeVos Place, 303 Monroe Ave. NW, Grand Rapids 49503
- **Monday, Oct. 25, 1-8 p.m., recess 3:30-5 p.m.**
Treetops Resort, 3962 Wilkinson Road, Gaylord 49735
- **Tuesday, Oct. 26, 1-8 p.m., recess 3:30-5 p.m.**
Dort Financial Center, 3501 Lapeer Road, Flint 48503

At each of the five public hearings, the MICRC established an on-site Public Portal Station with volunteers to assist the public in submitting comments; added monitors to enhance viewing of draft proposed maps; and provided technical assistance in displaying information available on the Public Comment Portal or Mapping Portal for Michigan residents to reference during their public comments.

Michiganders also were invited to provide comments on the proposed maps via another online portal – My Districting. Individuals could comment on specific maps or districts. The MICRC also continued to accept comments submitted via email and mail.

To review the public comments, visit:

[Comments on Final Congressional Map \(Chestnut\)](#)

[Comments on All Proposed Maps](#)

[Public Comment Portal Comments](#)

[Commission Meeting Comments](#)

[Comments on Final State Senate Map \(Linden\)](#)

[Comments on All Proposed Maps](#)

[Public Comment Portal Comments](#)

[Commission Meeting Comments](#)

[Comments on Final State House Map \(Hickory\)](#)

Summary

As a result, the MICRC obtained nearly 30,000 public comments for consideration in drawing Michigan's congressional, state Senate and state House maps.

Collectively, the MICRC received 2,141 in-person comments; 1,023 written/emailed comments; 1,369 remote (virtual) comments; 7,580 comments through the public comment portal; and 17,731 remarks through the mapping comment portal, for a final total of 29,484 comments.

Public Participation Process: Lessons Learned & Recommendations

Several MICRC members reflected that more time was needed to draw and refine maps to incorporate public comment more fully.

In its defense, the MICRC's ability to meet its constitutionally mandated deadline for approving maps was challenging due to unforeseen circumstances, including:

- The outbreak of the historically deadly global COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020 forced the commission to initiate its public participation campaign strategy virtually.
- The pandemic resulted in the U.S. Census Bureau creating a new timeline. The U.S. Census Bureau was to provide census data to the MICRC by April 1, 2021, under federal law, but it was not released until Sept. 16, 2021.
- While the lack of timely census data did not ultimately impede the commission from faithfully serving the people of Michigan, it did contribute to the MICRC not adopting final maps until Dec. 28, 2021.
- Much discussion during the completion of this report about public participation raised the issue of **what is the appropriate length of time for public comment** during MICRC hearings (e.g., 2-3 minutes, 1 minute, 30 seconds, etc.).
 - The time allotted at public hearings for comments about the MICRC's work varied, beginning at 2 minutes in the first phase of public hearings, but eventually decreasing to 1 minute for the second phase of public hearings.
 - Some MICRC members expressed a preference for the shorter timespan because of the repetitive nature of the public comments; others expressed a desire for 2 or even 3 minutes of public comments to ensure Michigan residents felt their voices and opinions were heard by the MICRC.
- Some MICRC members **also questioned the fairness that large, organized groups' voices were heard louder** and expressed concern they drowned out the voices of lone citizens who provided valuable input.
- Frustration also was expressed by outside experts and some MICRC members **that the public comments submitted during the map-making process were not adequately taken into consideration by the MICRC** using a data-driven method.
- The commission received public comments in many forms while mapping. After the approval and advancement of final proposed maps to the 45-day public comment period by Nov. 4.
- The commission received comments via public meetings ("In-Person Comments"), via the online public comment portal ("Portal Comments"), and via comments placed directly on the maps themselves on the Mapping Page ("Mapping Comments").

The Voters Not Politicians (VNP) contribution to MICRC's Lessons Learned report, based on VNP interviews with the leaders of 10 Community of Interest partner groups (COIs) across Michigan that VNP worked closely with during this redistricting cycle, offered several recommendations on future public engagement planning.

The VNP's feedback includes:

- COIs reported **participant engagement was much more likely and more effective when the public had draft maps to respond to** and comment on.
- MICRC **should release draft maps** as early as possible.
- Each map should be **accompanied by a description** of why the commission drew these particular lines and rejected other options, with specific questions to elicit meaningful responses from the public.
- COIs reported some features, such as the public comment portal and website, for the map-making process **were slow to launch and challenging to use**.
- COIs and other stakeholders **urged a future commission to decide on its map-drawing process and pick its software** (i.e., Districtr during this cycle) **much earlier**.
- COIs observed the commission was left with too little time and restricted options for southeastern Michigan because they began districting in the more rural north.
- MICRC should budget mapping time on a per-capita basis or start in populous areas.
- COIs report feeling that digital submissions were not considered by commissioners.
- MICRC should quickly develop a system of analyzing online comments and maps, perhaps through a consulting service accustomed to analyzing textual "big data."

“Our group submitted public comment in several ways: in writing through the public comment portal; in person at the hearings held in Detroit in October and December; and virtually over Zoom following in-person public comments in October and December. The process of submitting written comments via the portal and giving in-person and/or Zoom comments at public hearings was not difficult and the instructions for participants were clear.

“However, the commission kept changing the dates for in-person meetings in the fall, making it difficult to plan for a group. Also, the allotted time for speaking — either one minute or 30 seconds — made it difficult to get important points across during the in-person comments. Finally, at the public hearings, some members of the commission seemed to be disengaged. They were looking at computers, their cell phones, etc., instead of paying attention to the comments from the speakers, many of whom represented communities of interest.”

– **Judy Davis, Southfield**

“A robust system of cataloging public comments for later use, providing answers to questions not addressed in formal meetings, and documenting the scope of the work to all stakeholders is essential to a commission of this sort. It will minimize confusion, provide attribution for future discourse on the issues and add to the level of trust stakeholders have for the work being done.”

– **Keith Cooley, Detroit**

Communication & Outreach Strategies

The MICRC adopted and revised a Communications and Outreach Plan regularly. The core goals were to:

- 1. Ensure fairness in the redistricting process**
- 2. Heighten awareness of the redistricting process**
- 3. Model transparency in the redistricting process**
- 4. Increase engagement in the redistricting process**

In order to meet those goals, the MICRC utilized the following communication and outreach methods:

- Ads
- Direct Mail
- Editorials
- Events
- Fact Sheets
- Infographics
- Mail
- Press
- Twitter
- Website
- Billboards
- Emails
- Facebook
- Frequently Asked Questions
- Instagram
- Presentations
- Text Alerts
- Videos
- YouTube

The full Communications and Outreach Plan is in the Appendix on page XX

During the first phase of outreach, MICRC hosted 16 meetings in all regions of the state. The meetings began at 6 p.m. and were tentatively scheduled to end at 9 p.m., though the hearings continued until every person who signed up to speak was given the chance to do so. Time was allotted from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. to give presentations on the redistricting commission's work for people who couldn't attend the evening public hearings.

To support this initial phase of the public outreach and awareness campaign, MICRC hired public relations firms McConnell Communications and Van Dyke Horn.

Both agencies provided extensive media relations, community outreach, new and traditional media services and communication/staffing services.

Those services included:

- Staffing news conferences and distributing news releases for public hearings.
- Making ongoing media pitches and securing television and radio talk show appearances.
- Creating custom graphics for social media.



- Managing social media posting/online advertising.
- Designing and revising two flyers, convention hall banners and updating the grassroots toolkit.
- Attending weekly virtual meetings.
- Providing media outreach for news conferences as well as for each public hearing; securing talk show presentations and media coverage.
- Reviewing several hours of video footage; locating and advising on pull quotes from videos recorded during public hearings.
- Converting video clip snippets for use on social media.
- Drafting newsletter articles for use in community newsletters.
- Making outreach to dozens of groups and organizations to request opportunities to present; arranging presentations.
- Staffing both virtual and in-person public presentations.

The MICRC partnered with Michigan Area Agencies on Aging; the Disability Network Eastern Michigan (DNEM), formerly known as the Center for Independent Living for Oakland and Macomb Counties; and many other partner organizations with regard to participation of people who couldn't attend the evening hearings.

"We commend the MICRC for its efforts to be inclusive and accessible for all Michigan residents," said Chip Werner, associate director – Thumb Region of the Disability Network Eastern Michigan.

"We specifically thank the MICRC for hearing our voices during in-person gatherings and providing an open platform to share recommendations, which created an equitable environment for people with disabilities," Werner said.

"DNEM also appreciates the actions taken by all MICRC committee members to enhance accessibility of digital media, social media campaigns and written testimony submissions. The inclusion efforts of the MICRC supported the mission of DNEM by breaking down barriers and opening paths towards independence and personal choice," Werner said.

After the first round of public hearings, the MICRC intentionally increased awareness and engagement in 34 rural counties and 15 municipalities in the Downriver Detroit community through a direct mail campaign to bridge the digital divide.

The MICRC also engaged a Flint consultant to foster community engagement because of government distrust due to the city's historic water crisis. Finally, it purchased table banners, tablecloths with the commission logo and promotional materials for county fairs and neighborhood meetings to increase engagement in rural and urban areas.

As mentioned previously, the MICRC's grassroots efforts were supported by dozens of local, regional and statewide organizations, such as the **Michigan Nonprofit Association (MNA)**, that represent a range of interests, including but not limited to labor, business and minority populations. In 2021, MNA worked with nonprofit organizations in and around Detroit, Flint and Grand Rapids to provide people of color, immigrant communities, and low-income populations information about redistricting, highlighting its importance and demonstrating how to successfully participate in the process.

The MNA's full redistricting campaign report is in the Appendix on page XX.

From the kickoff to the first round of public hearings to the approval of the maps, the commission made 195 presentations, 42 scheduled interviews and eight outreach activities. This does not include media interviews before or after events, press forums and other promotional opportunities.

In the campaign's second phase to inform the public about MICRC's work, the MICRC tasked GÜD Marketing with promoting a series of five statewide public hearings in Detroit, Lansing, Grand Rapids, Gaylord and Flint. Part of the promotion was television ads encouraging members of the public to attend the public hearings or provide comment online.

MICRC held a virtual kickoff press conference Oct. 18, 2021, in advance of the Detroit hearing. The online news event attracted more than 35 TV, print and radio reporters from every media market in the state — which represents **one of the highest turnouts by news media** for a state government news conference not involving Michigan Gov. Gretchen Whitmer since virtual news conferences became common in 2020 due to COVID-19.

The MICRC also generated extensive pre- and post-news media coverage surrounding the five hearings both in the respective regional market where events were held as well as statewide and national coverage. Highlights include:

- From Oct. 18 to Dec. 31, 2021, news coverage of the kickoff news conference and following public hearings and subsequent press conferences **reached an estimated 139.2 million people** (calculated by the number of unique IP addresses that visit a news article within a given time, as well as television viewers during a newscast) with over 500 articles and newscasts that mentioned Michigan redistricting or the MICRC.

Communications & Outreach Strategies: Lessons Learned & Recommendations

By and large, the MICRC members interviewed for this report felt its outreach and engagement strategies were robust and overwhelmingly successful.

Recommendations for improvement include:

- Several MICRC members, staff, outside experts and the news media expressed some level of frustration with the delays experienced uploading meeting minutes, transcripts and draft maps for public review. Emphasis should go toward **posting minutes and maps on the MICRC website as quickly as possible.**
- Furthermore, a number of MICRC commissioners believe it's worth exploration by future MICRC panels whether to **hire its own IT staff and develop its own website** to improve timeliness of distributing information to the public, rather than relying on the Michigan Department of State to provide that service.
- MICRC should **prioritize providing more education to the public** on key facets of its map-making criteria, such as what defines a Community of Interest.
- The overwhelming majority of MICRC members interviewed for this report were satisfied the number of public forums and locations in every region of the state met or surpassed the requirements of the state constitution.
- Agreement among MICRC members was not unanimous, however, with at least one commissioner recommending more outreach and engagement activities should be directed toward Northern Michigan and the Upper Peninsula in the future.

Outside experts interviewed for this report cited examples of how MICRC’s communication and outreach efforts could be improved moving forward.

For example, the VNP’s contribution to MICRC’s Lessons Learned report identified barriers to attending MICRC meetings, including technology, language, inconvenient times and inadequate notice.

VNP’s recommendations include:

- The online attendance option was helpful. **Meetings should occur both online and in-person** even outside the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- MICRC should **publish a meeting calendar at least two weeks in advance** and should **publish meeting agendas at least 72 hours prior** to the day of the meeting.
- The calendar and agendas should be easy to find on the landing page of the MICRC’s website.
- Meeting **materials should be translated into Michigan’s most common languages** (English, Arabic, Spanish and Bengali).
- **Meetings should be held on different days and different times of day** to accommodate participants’ varying work schedules.
- At least 25% of public meetings and public comment opportunities should be scheduled outside of standard 9-to-5, Monday-Friday business hours.

Furthermore, a number of MICRC commissioners believe it’s worth exploring by future MICRC panels whether to hire its own IT staff and develop its own website to improve timeliness of distributing information to the public.

“The Commission had PDF files on the Michigan.gov/MICRC website which explained the redistricting criteria. It laid out the seven criteria in order of priority with definitions and explanations. However, in our experience, you had to know this information was on the website and then go to the website and find it. However, there were so many PDF files and pieces of information on the website that the sheer amount of information was rather overwhelming.”

— **Judy Davis, Southfield**

“The commission should find convenient meeting/hearing times **AHEAD OF THE EVENTS**, publish them to the public and scrupulously abide by them. Changing times for discussion and input contributed significantly to residents’ lack of and loss of trust with the commission.

“Web/hyperlinks for future meetings must be posted in a timely fashion. At least 72 hours in advance should be the target and 48 hours in advance should be the minimum time allowed. Anything less drives the suspicions among those offering comment that the commission doesn’t really want their input.”

— **Keith Cooley, Detroit**

“The commission should be much clearer with meeting times and updating information in a timely manner and stick to them without last-minute changes. The result of this was that people began to distrust the process and disengage because they thought there was a lack of transparency and conspiracy to disenfranchise them.”

— **Joel Arnold, Flint**

Budget

An annual budget of \$3.1 million was allocated for MICRC work from the state's General Fund by the Michigan Legislature beginning in FY2020, based on the constitutional mandate that requires the MICRC to receive funding equivalent to at least 25% of the Secretary of State's general fund/general purpose budget.

By comparison, the State of California funded its 2021 redistricting commission with \$20.3 million, which is about twice as much as its previous independent redistricting commission received a decade ago. One reason for the California commission's bigger 2021 budget is that it started its work four months earlier — like Michigan's experience — and had to extend it due to the delay in U.S. Census data.

Also similar to Michigan's experience, having to conduct public outreach virtually over the summer of 2021 due to COVID-19 also drove up California's costs — audio and video, translation, captions and interpretation, Fredy Ceja, director of communications for the commission, told online news outlet CalMATTER for a [story published Dec. 15, 2021](#). It says it had received more than 27,000 public input entries by then.

The State of Arizona Independent Redistricting Commission was appropriated \$7.9 million for its efforts in the FY2022 budget approved by the Legislature. And, in Colorado, state lawmakers allocated a combined total of \$3.95 million toward its redistricting campaign during FY2021 and FY2022, according to data provided by Jessika Shipley, staff director of the Colorado Independent Redistricting Commissions.

At the time when the MICRC's budget was approved by the Legislature, [Secretary of State Jocelyn Benson told the news media](#):

"We believe, based on evaluations from outside experts, (the budget) is only about a third of the cost of what they'll need to complete their job," Benson said.

Her assessment of the budget allocation proved prophetic.

Projections show a shortfall after April 2022 of nearly \$1.2 million through the fiscal year that ends Sept. 30, 2022. The MICRC attributes legal fees related to state and federal lawsuits for driving its costs much higher than budgeted, which news media reports confirmed as accurate.

"If you look at budget year-to-year, there is virtually no difference," MICRC Executive Director Suann Hammersmith told reporters during a March 24 media availability. "Some areas have gone down significantly. So, really, the only expense that makes this budget have a shortfall would be the litigation in defending the maps, which is active at this point in time."

Letters from the MICRC asking the Michigan Legislature for more funding were sent to the legislative appropriations committee chairs. The MICRC's budget requests were ultimately approved by the Michigan Legislature.

It's worth noting MICRC [received a clean audit report with no findings](#) from the Office of Auditor General (OAG) for Fiscal Year 2021 and Fiscal Year 2022 through March 31, based on an MICRC request to ensure openness and transparency as stewards of taxpayer funds.

The commission hopes this audit report supports its Fiscal Year 2023 budget request before the Michigan Legislature to defend its drawing of fair maps through citizen input.

Budget: Lessons Learned & Recommendations

The MICRC recommends future commissions better define the role of the Michigan Legislature in funding the entire scope of the MICRC's work, including costs associated with lawsuits.

The state constitution is not specifically clear when it comes to identifying what say, if any, the Legislature would have in funding the commission's legal defense. It reads, "The legislature shall appropriate funds sufficient to compensate the commissioners and to enable the commission to carry out its functions, operations and activities."

But it doesn't describe in detail what should happen if lawmakers disagree about how much would be sufficient, saying only that the state should indemnify the commission if the Legislature doesn't cover costs.

Commissioner Relationships

MICRC members interviewed for this report stressed the importance of developing relationships with their colleagues, particularly by attending meetings in person whenever possible instead of joining online.

Commissioners who chose to attend MICRC meetings online expressed frustration at times about feeling disconnected from other commissioners and final decisions.

Because of the COVID-19 pandemic that existed during the MICRC's work, members had the option of attending meetings electronically. The majority of commissioners chose to attend public hearings in person, which they said proved extremely valuable as opportunities to bond and develop team-building camaraderie in what was often an extremely stressful work environment. Outside experts interviewed for this report also emphasized that, while a hybrid model is fine for meeting attendance, the importance of gathering in person to help build trust and foster a positive working culture cannot be underestimated.

Some news media attention that focused on MICRC members' attendance was critical of the number of absences by some commissioners. Those members who were unable to attend either online or in person attributed their absence to health problems, inclement weather that made travel prohibitive, or cited scheduling conflicts with their full-time jobs.

Commissioner Relationships: Lessons Learned & Recommendations

Much discussion in the development of this report centered on whether future MICRC panels should establish a mandatory attendance policy that sets limits on absences and would require a minimum number of in-person attendance at public meetings.

Proposals that were suggested included changing the MICRC application language to require 100% attendance at meetings (either virtually or in person except for health reasons or family/work emergencies).

However, no consensus emerged on this issue other than commissioners agreed it should be addressed by the Michigan Department of State in creating the application for the 2030 panel and by future MICRC members in establishing by-laws.

"Expecting commissioners to be physically present at the majority of the meetings is so important. I attended several of the MICRC meetings and was so impressed with the camaraderie and respect that grew throughout their time together. This developed from them traveling together, sharing meals and talking."

– **Susan Demeuse, Caledonia**

"I do appreciate the way the team created the maps. I forgot who was what political affiliation at times. I loved that you took turns to create the maps. Good, fair work. I loved the way the maps were evaluated according to set standards in the same way for each map. Very good plan.

"The group process is tough and annoying when you are in the thick of it. I always felt that I would just rather do it myself. That is not the group process. The group process is messy and full of compromise to get the work done. You did this. I watched you."

– **Joyce Kowatch, Grand Rapids**

"I really thought it would be an impossible task for inexperienced citizens to learn what was needed and then design fair maps. I didn't think an independent citizen would be able to handle the public scrutiny, criticism from partisans, emotional opinions, accusations against their character ... This is tough stuff, and that's a lot to ask of a citizen. You rose to the occasion. You stormed, you normed, and you formed. You behaved like humans, sometimes bickering but more times solving things by listening and compromising. You did it with extraordinary transparency. I can't thank you enough for

making this work. I think it's good for Michigan and good for democracy. And it even gives me a little more hope that our country can come together to ensure that all citizens have a voice. Ladies and gentlemen, you done us proud!"

– **Donna Mullins, East Lansing**

Transparency

With one exception, the MICRC earned overwhelmingly high praise for ensuring the map-drawing process was clear, open and transparent to the public. This was especially true when outside experts interviewed for this report compared the MICRC's transparency efforts to past map-drawing activities by the Michigan Legislature.

The exception to the commission's transparency efforts drew heavy criticism and prompted a legal challenge on Dec. 7, 2021, when three news outlets and the Michigan Press Association filed suit in the Michigan Supreme Court to force the MICRC to release records they said should be public. The emergency complaint from The Detroit News, Bridge Magazine and Detroit Free Press sought recordings from an Oct. 27, 2021, closed-door session and several confidential memos submitted to the commission on the basis that the state constitution requires the commission to conduct all business in public and to publish "all data and supporting materials" used while preparing the redistricting plans.

On Dec. 20, 2021, the Michigan Supreme Court ruled the MICRC violated the state constitution by meeting in closed session and keeping some legal memos from the public. In a 4-3 decision, the high court ruled the commission is required to conduct all of its business at open meetings and should have published seven of 10 legal memos that constituted "supporting materials" for map drawing under the Michigan Constitution. The four-justice majority ordered recordings of the meeting be released along with the seven legal memos.

The public release of the recorded meeting minutes and related materials from the Oct. 27, 2021, meeting shows the MICRC members discussed two memos titled "Voting Rights Act" and "The History of Discrimination in the State of Michigan and Its Influence on Voting."

Upon the release, no further controversies or lawsuits emerged surrounding the MICRC's efforts to promote transparency.

Even Tony Daunt, executive director of FAIR Maps Michigan and a staunch critic of the MICRC's creation, said he was impressed by the MICRC's overall commitment to transparency during a Jan. 26, 2022, video luncheon forum hosted by Bridge Magazine,

"I was pleasantly surprised that they were able to get all three maps voted on in a way that we all understood who was voting for what, and it was transparent. I will give them credit for that," Daunt said. The video is [here](#).

One of the best methods to ensure transparency and build public confidence about the MICRC's work was by having the news media shine a light on its deliberations.

The MICRC and its staff devoted much energy to keeping the news media apprised with consistent advance notifications of MICRC events and activities, ongoing outreach to schedule interviews or answer any questions reporters may have had about the process. That included scheduling strategically timed press conferences with Q&As afterward where the news media routinely submitted inquiries to MICRC members and staff. The press conferences were a combination of live events and/or virtual on Zoom (due to COVID-19 restrictions), but the virtual events allowed reporters from around the state to cover the press conferences and ask questions without having to travel to Lansing to attend in person, which helped produce more coverage

It should be noted that, by any measure, the MICRC's constitutionally mandated second phase of five public hearings scheduled around the state in late 2021 proved to be an overwhelming success from a transparency and earned media perspective.

One of the unforeseen benefits from the COVID-19 pandemic is that it spurred the implementation of new and innovative technologies to communicate with each other through virtual meetings (as opposed to traditional in-person conversations). Holding public meetings publicly as well as remotely allowed Michiganders to make their voice heard about the redistricting process from the comfort of their home or office, rather than having to attend a meeting at a brick-and-mortar building.

As a result, Michiganders had unprecedented access to the 2021 redistricting effort. All commission meetings were livestreamed and recorded on YouTube — delivering a transparent process where all people could watch the MICRC discuss and draw each new district. Live and recorded videos of the MICRC meetings were viewed more than 50,000 times with the public watching nearly 30,000 hours of MICRC at work.

Highlights include:

- The average watch duration totaled 29 minutes per video.
- On average, the MICRC videos had 2,782 impressions, meaning that 21% of individuals who saw the thumbnail of the video clicked and watched for an average of 29 minutes.
- These metrics include both hours-long meetings and press events posted to the MICRC YouTube page.
- These metrics also include both subscribers and non-subscribers of the MICRC YouTube Page.

Transparency: Lessons Learned & Recommendations

In retrospect, all of the MICRC members interviewed for this report said they should not have closed the Oct. 27, 2021, meeting, but attributed the decision to following the advice of their legal counsel. They would advise future MICRC panels to take great pains to avoid going into closed meetings again unless it's a private personnel or lawsuit-related matter.

In addition, the MICRC would suggest future commissions follow the inaugural approach implemented by MICRC staff to media relations and using online platforms (Zoom, Facebook, etc.) that encourages news media participation in press events without having to attend in person. This strategy produced enormous dividends in the amount of coverage the MICRC's work received compared to taking a more traditional approach with respect to press conferences and public hearings.

“Moreover, explanation concerning application of the tools that the commission used to assess the seven criteria was unclear to us. It seemed that the commission had access to consultants who were advising them on the tools and how to use and/or interpret them. But this information seemed to be beyond the reach of those of us in the citizens interest groups.”

– **Judy Davis, Southfield**

Results & Outcomes

Leaders of the Michigan Independent Citizens Redistricting Committee (MICRC) held a news conference Tuesday, Dec. 28, 2021, to speak on the officially adopted congressional [maps](#) for the state of Michigan.

[See a story about the press conference published by Bridge Magazine here.](#)

MICRC [adopted](#) the [Chestnut Congressional](#) map, [Linden state Senate](#) map and [Hickory state House](#) map. The approved maps will be in place until the next redistricting cycle in 2031. The Chestnut map — which removes the state’s two majority-Black congressional districts — was [backed](#) by eight commissioners and gives Democrats a 7-6 advantage in the next election. The Linden map was backed by nine commissioners and [leans](#) 21-17 Democrat, a move that shifts the control away from Republicans in the state Senate for the first time since the early 1980s. The Hickory map was backed by 11 commissioners and leans 56-54 Republican.

MICRC Chairperson Rebecca Szetela said during the news conference that the most exciting aspect of this redistricting process was the citizen participation.

“This has been an exciting and invigorating process, and I am so proud to have been a part of it,” Szetela said. “This is the first time that we have had citizens throughout the state have the ability to comment, participate and assist in the drafting of congressional districts, state House districts and state Senate districts, and that is a fantastic testament to Michigan and a fantastic testament to this commission that we were able to do it.”

Commissioner Brittni Kellom agreed, saying she appreciated the ways in which the commission was able to work together.

“We live in a society where voting and trust and being a caring brother or sister to your fellow citizen isn’t always the value, and I think we had an opportunity to re-instill that in Michigan,” Kellom said. “I think that that above all is a testament to what true democracy looks like. It’s a testament to what it looks like to work together and build community no matter what your race is, no matter what you believe in, no matter what you do in your personal life, so that has been the beauty of the commission.”

A lack of time was the biggest challenge for the MICRC leading up to the vote, Szetela asserted during the press conference.

“Unfortunately, we happen to have this inaugural commission come into play during a pandemic, which created all sorts of challenges both with the ability for us to meet in person and with the ability to get data from the Census Bureau that assisted us in drawing the maps,” she said. “So despite that extraordinary challenge, we rose to the occasion, we worked really hard, and we managed to get these maps done in a timely manner.”

Commissioner Douglas J. Clark said during the news conference he is proud of these maps, and the commission worked hard to represent all communities as best they could.

“We just can’t meet everybody’s needs 100%, so we chose to move forward and do the best we could to get to that point, and we recognize there’s probably some things that some folks like and other things they don’t,” Clark said. “There’s conflicts in everything that we went forward to discuss. We made it where we thought it represented the largest part of the society, and I’m personally very proud of the products that we’ve produced.”

Voters Not Politicians’ Wang, speaking during the Bridge Michigan Jan. 26 video luncheon discussion about the MICRC’s work and outcomes, said the map-making process and final outcomes ultimately proved to be a “huge success.”

“Our election results are no longer preordained,” she said. “I think these maps – finally – breathe new life and fairness and some chance of voters to determine our political fate in this state, which is remarkable. It’s because of that that we are now a (redistricting) model for the rest of the nation.”

Acknowledgments

The MICRC partnered with Lansing-based Gūd Marketing to serve as its marketing and public relations agency of record for the second phase of promoting awareness about the MICRC’s proposed maps. As part of that work, Gud Marketing has helped the MICRC to develop this report to assess what worked well during the inaugural MICRC’s work process and identify potential improvements for the next iteration of the MICRC to consider.

On behalf of the MICRC, Gūd Marketing contacted dozens of individuals and organizations to respectfully ask for their help with one simple question:

Would they be willing to share their time and expertise with us in the development of a white paper that will provide guidance to the next members of the MICRC who will draw our state’s new legislative maps in 2031?

The response was overwhelmingly positive, with a few exceptions. Some organizations chose not to participate because they were in the process of developing their own research and analysis reports and did not want to comment until their assessments were complete. Others declined the MICRC’s invitation due to pending litigation in state or federal courts.

The goal of our conversations was to collect thoughts and recommendations from key experts who participated in Michigan’s redistricting process and to offer advice to the next generation of MICRC leaders.

We thank the following individuals and organizations for their invaluable contributions:

MICRC Commissioners

- Doug Clark
- Juanita Curry
- Anthony Eid
- Brittni Kellom
- Rhonda Lange
- Steven Lett
- Cynthis Orton
- M.C. Rothorn
- Rebecca Szetela
- Janice Vallette
- Erin Wagner
- Richard Weiss
- Dustin Witjes

Staff

- Executive Director Suann Hammersmith
- Communications and Outreach Director Edward Woods III (appointed executive director April 1, 2022)
- General Counsel Julianne Pastula
- Executive Assistant Sara Martinez

Statewide Organizations

- Arab Community Center for Economic and Social Services (ACCESS)

- AARP Michigan
- Asian & Pacific Islander (APIA) Vote Michigan
- Campus Election Engagement Project
- Campus Vote Project
- Commission of Middle Eastern American Affairs
- Common Cause
- Detroit Hispanic Development Corporation
- Disability Network Eastern Michigan
- Equality Michigan
- eMage Michigan
- Hispanic Latino Commission of Michigan
- Jewish Community Relations Council/American Jewish Committee
- League of Women Voters of Michigan
- Michigan 2-1-1
- Michigan AFL-CIO
- Michigan Association of Counties
- Michigan Association of School Boards
- Michigan Association of United Ways
- Michigan Community College Association
- Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) Aging & Adult Services
- Michigan Department of Civil Rights
- Michigan Farm Bureau
- Michigan League of Conservation Voters
- Michigan Library Association
- Michigan Municipal League
- Michigan Nonprofit Association
- Michigan Roundtable for Diversity and Inclusion
- Michigan Statewide Independent Living Council
- Michigan State University Extension Centers
- Michigan Township Association
- Michigan Voices
- NAACP Michigan
- Progress Michigan
- Rural Partners of Michigan
- Small Business Association of Michigan
- United Tribal Council
- Voters Not Politicians

Third-Party Organizations

- Bridge Magazine
- Council of Michigan Foundations
- Michigan Department of State (MDOS)
- Michigan Department of Technology, Management and Budget (DTMB)
- Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT)
- Miigwech Inc.
- Princeton Gerrymandering Project
- University of Michigan Gerald R. Ford School of Public Policy

Equally important, the MICRC thanks the Michiganders who provided valuable public feedback with nearly 30,000 comments on the redistricting and map-drawing processes. A selection of comments from the public are included throughout this report.

###