Frequently Asked Questions
About Communities of Interest

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

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

Do people that are more distributed across a wide area count as a COI?
It depends. The key is whether they share common concerns that relate to where they live. One way to think about this is that communities on a map should include residential areas. Districtr’s Important Places can be used to mark the shared interests.

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

Why do you say to avoid exclusively describing a COI by race or political party?
Although a few states have definitions of COIs that include race and political party (e.g., Alabama), case law has suggested that COIs described primarily as such would be considered racial or partisan gerrymanders.

Don’t Census places and neighborhood maps show you all of the communities?
Community mapping research has shown that official data don’t often line up with what people actually consider their communities. However, official data are still useful in planning and as “seeds” to start conversations and maps at community meetings.

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