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Final Report to the Humphrey Institute – Redistricting

January 2009

Introduction

As part of a Humphrey Institute project to reform redistricting in Minnesota, the Citizens League has organized and executed a complementary citizen-directed effort aimed at improving and reforming the procedures for redistricting. This work was completed under our Minnesota Anniversary Project (MAP 150) work during 2007 and 2008. The Citizens League and its MAP 150 project operate according to the following principles:

- People impacted by a problem should have a role in defining the problem.
- Every project must advance the state-of-the-art in citizen engagement.
- Education takes place through engagement, not as an “entry price.”
- Only involve citizens if they have a meaningful opportunity to shape outcomes, not just to market an idea or a foregone conclusion

The redistricting work itself had three main goals, and three corresponding project objectives.

Goals

- To involve Minnesotans in a discussion about redistricting reform, demonstrating that if involvement opportunities are meaningful and engaging, citizens will participate in important policy subjects that may be otherwise not gain much attention.
- To educate and raise awareness of Minnesotans on the fundamental questions, impact and options in this redistricting issue.
- To move the ideas and input of these citizens into the formal policy discussion.

Project Objectives

1. Raise awareness about the importance and implications of redistricting procedures for democracy
2. Provide a platform for citizens to weigh in on how redistricting should be done and/or the values and outcomes that should be given priority in redistricting
3. Foster the creation of a citizen-backed view of redistricting that can help influence reform proposals

This report outlines the findings from this citizens outreach work and completes the terms of the contract.

Activities

Our research suggests that Minnesotans have never been asked what their priorities are for redistricting. Yet, the process and principles by which redistricting is done ultimately affects everyone, and is critical in crafting legislation to govern this process that truly reflects the will of the public. In effort to educate Minnesotans about the issue and more fully understand their priorities, we employed an array of different activities.

Video of Policy-Makers

During the winter and spring of 2008, we conducted brief video-taped interviews with some of the major policy-makers in Minnesota's redistricting process. These interviews were conducted with:

- Elizabeth Brama, counsel to the 2002 judicial panel charged with redistricting
- Joan Grove, former Secretary of State
- Roger Moe, former Senate Majority Leader
- Al Quie, former Governor

These interviews revealed that even those who are most involved with the redistricting process are not clear on Minnesotan's priorities. Elizabeth Brama stressed the helpfulness of public input when drawing the map in 2002, yet there is not a set process for their involvement. These interviews illustrated the complexity of the process and underscored the need for meaningful public involvement during the next redistricting cycle. A copy of this professionally-edited video is included with this report packet.

Interactive In-Person Meetings

Using interactive audience response devices, the Citizens League developed a presentation to present the issues of redistricting to the public and to solicit their input. The presentation outlined the importance and relevancy of redistricting, and walked audience members through all of the major principles of redistricting, and possible processes for doing it. Throughout the presentation audience members use their individual response device to "vote" on questions like "which 3 principles should guide how legislative districts are drawn?". Answers are immediately displayed, so the presentations can be tailored to the group's priorities. A copy of this presentation is included on a CD with this report.

The Citizens League conducted 10 in-person meetings, and used other outreach tools to fulfill its requirement of 12 meetings, as agreed upon in a meeting with Humphrey staff on June 16th, 2008. The in-person meetings included:

1. October 2007 – Citizens League annual meeting
2. February 2008 – Citizens League Policy Open House – session 1
3. February 2008 – Citizens League Policy Open House – session 2
4. March 2008 – Goodwill Easter Seals
5. April 2008 – League of Women Voters State of Democracy Conference

6. May 2008 – Americorps Vista volunteers conference
7. September 2008 – Metro State University
8. December 2008 – Blue Cross Blue Shield of Minnesota
9. December 2008 – General Mills
10. December 2008 – Target

In total, nearly 600 people were reached through the in-person meetings. More information on demographics can be found in the “findings” section.

State Fair

The Citizens League hosted a booth at the 2008 state fair in the special Sesquicentennial tent. Citizens League staff and volunteers talked to fairgoers about the issue of redistricting, and provided an online survey the public could take. Just fewer than 30 fully-completed surveys were received.

Online Survey

Because the people who show up to public meetings on redistricting are somewhat self-selecting, the Citizens League also offered a version of the interactive presentation as an online survey. As of the close of 2008, just fewer 150 responses had been received.

Website

The Citizens League set up a dedicated page for its redistricting work on its Minnesota Anniversary Project website, www.map150.org. Here, visitors could learn more about redistricting, take the online survey, and explore other redistricting tools, like the Redistricting Game and Common Census.

Findings

Overall, we received responses from about 750 Minnesotans. Women account for 56%, and men for the remaining 44%. The majority of respondents – 48% – are aged 19 – 35, 22% are 26 – 50 years old, 23% are 51 – 65, 6% are over 65, and 1% are under 18. The sample was diverse, relative to Minnesota’s population, with 15% of respondents reporting being persons of color. Seven percent of respondents were from outstate Minnesota, with suburban and exurban residents (45%), and urban core residents (48%) making up the balance.

The first phase of the work focused on identifying Minnesotans values and priorities for redistricting. Which principles or rules should be used to guide redistricting? Who should be tasked with the job? What outcomes do Minnesotans want in their district plan?

Prior to asking citizens what they want to see in their future districts, we asked which principle they feel guided their current districts. A full 30% believed that their districts are currently drawn to be compact, 27% feel they’re draw to be safe for one party or another, and 24% think their districts respect a community of interest.

As we talked with Minnesotans, we quickly learned that they feel somewhat differently about their legislative and congressional districts, and the rules they want applied to each. For instance, they reported that respecting communities of interest is slightly more important for legislative districts than congressional ones. The results are as follows:

Which principles should guide...	legislative districts?	congressional districts?
Compactness	24%	25%
Competitiveness	30%	32%
Safety	6%	4%
Minority Representation	14%	16%
Communities of Interest	26%	22%

The Citizens League annual meeting in October 2007 posed a slightly different set of questions; one specifically focused on competitiveness. Of the 350 respondents, 68% said that they wanted to be in a competitive district, 8% wanted to be in a safe one, and nearly a quarter – 24% – said that competitiveness was not an important issue for them.

We also walked citizens through the major possibilities for bodies to carryout redistricting. This combined processes already used somewhere in the country – Iowa plan, Citizen Commission – Minnesota’s current process(es) – legislature, and realistically, the sitting court – along with the new ideas of a panel of retired judges and a shadow commission. Respondents reported on who they most trusted to carry out the rules for redistricting.

Legislature	9%
Courts (sitting)	12%
Panel of retired judges	18%
Iowa Plan / Panel of nonpartisan legislative staffers	28%
Citizen Commission	21%
Shadow Commission	12%

While from these responses it is not clear who Minnesotans want to draw their district map, it is clear that they do not trust the legislature to do it. These results do, however, illustrate some priorities Minnesotans have for the body that is ultimately responsible: the group should be nonpartisan or equally bi-partisan, and should include members of the public. It is also worth noting that the concept of the Shadow Commission was not introduced and offered as an option until approximately 2/3 of the outreach had already been completed. Its strong showing at 12% of the total results bodes well for its viability as an option for Minnesota’s redistricting. Since any shadow commission would likely include citizens, combining this with the citizen commission answer could potentially be a good solution for

Minnesota’s next redistricting round. The make-up of the body to do redistricting will be key to gaining support and trust from citizens.

As the principles and process Minnesotans want became clearer, we sought to better understand how Minnesotans defined their communities. Respecting “communities of interest” has been an integral part of each redistricting plan, and around a quarter of respondents identified it as the primary rule for how lines should be drawn. When asked “how much does the geography of your district – that is, which communities are included and where they lines are drawn – influence your feelings of how well you are represented by your elected officials?”, a sizeable 73% of respondents indicated that it influenced it a lot or some, and only 9% said it didn’t influence it at all.

How do Minnesotans define their communities? We posed two questions – one about their bond with particular communities, and another on how they self-identified.

With which communities do you feel the strongest bond?	
Church	9%
School	10%
Race, ethnicity or culture	4%
Geographic proximity	15%
Profession / colleagues	15%
Family	18%
Peers in the same age group	16%
Friends from childhood	7%
Recreational (like from a club or team)	6%

How do you most closely identify yourself? By...	
Where in the state you live	12%
The kind of community you live in (urban, rural, etc.)	42%
Your race, ethnicity or culture	6%
Your profession	21%
Your religion	5%
Your age	10%
Your gender or sexual orientation	5%

True to our suspicions, different demographics of people identify in different ways. For instance, on the community bond question, persons of color reported a much higher bond with communities of the same race, ethnicity or culture, 10%, versus 2% for white respondents. Communities of color also reported a stronger bond with family (21%) and friends from childhood (12%) than white participants did (15% and 2%, respectfully). Persons of color were more likely to identify by their race, ethnicity or culture, 18%

versus 2%, and where in the state they live, 21% versus 10%. Conversely, white respondents identify most closely by the kind of community they live in (47% versus 35%), their profession (18% versus 9%), and their age, (15% versus 3%).

As we strive to define “communities of interest” this kind of information can be helpful to understand how different communities in Minnesota define their communities. Better understanding how Minnesotans define their communities will help us to draw a map that is more reflective of true “communities of interest” in the state.

Recommendations

- 1) **Convene a group of civic and community leaders to determine the makeup of the commission, and create a collaborative process for the plan’s adoption.** Many groups and organizations are interested in working on redistricting, and even more have a stake in the process. The group’s work should be twofold. First, it should create the specific policy proposal for redistricting reform, including the principles by which redistricting should be done, as well as the makeup of a commission. Second, groups should work together to create and enact a comprehensive plan to ensure adoption of the policy proposal. The proposal should include grassroots outreach and organizing, advocacy and lobbying efforts at the legislature, and PR and media activities.
- 2) **Conduct further public input activities to gain further clarity on Minnesotan’s priorities for redistricting.** In order to formulate a policy proposal that is truly the will of the people, more work needs to be done to understand what principles redistricting should be done by, and whom should be in charge of drawing the lines. In this framework of aiming to create a policy proposal for adoption at the legislature, citizens could respond to more specific questions about who should be on the commission, and under which circumstances which rules should be applied. The groundwork has been laid and the responses are informative, but there is further information to ascertain.
- 3) **Formulate a policy proposal for redistricting that tasks a commission to do redistricting.** It is clear that citizens do not trust the legislature to carry out redistricting. This is likely due to the combination of 1) seeing the process of legislators picking their own voters as a conflict of interest, and 2) the legislature’s historic inability to actually create a viable plan. While the makeup of this new commission needs to be determined, it should:
 - *Be politically-balanced.* The number one characteristic that citizens reported a redistricting commission should have is partisan balance. Citizens don’t trust the power-play of parties to make unbiased decisions on redistricting without checks and balances.
 - *Include experts.* The second feature that citizens want is for the commission to include experts, or those with experience redistricting in the past. While it is not necessary for them to make up the entire commission, historical knowledge and technical expertise in the area is important to ensuring an efficient process.

- *Include citizens.* Nearly a quarter of respondents reported wanting redistricting to be done by a citizen commission. After all, voters should be able to choose their representatives, rather than asking representatives to select their voters. Members of communities are their own best experts on their communities, lending powerful knowledge to grappling with the “communities of interest” principle. Populating some of the commission spots with ordinary citizens would allow this to happen, and ensure that true citizen and community concerns, and not just political concerns, would be addressed.
 - *Be open and transparent.* Redistricting currently takes place largely behind closed doors, without providing a meaningful role for the public. In this model, the public only learns of the outcomes and impact of redistricting after the fact. Holding meetings open to the public, publishing regular updates on the progress on a dedicated website or webpage, and providing the same information (data, legislative testimony, etc.) in an open access manor would help to make the process more transparent. This would help to foster greater trust in the process, and therefore understanding and support of the resulting plan.
 - *Involve citizens meaningfully.* Elizabeth Brama, counsel to the judicial panel responsible for creating the redistricting plan in 2002 after the legislature’s failure to do so, reported that the most helpful information when drawing the map were the letters and testimony from citizens about their communities. While many “ordinary” citizens provided input, the majority of the comments were made by “super citizens”, like city planners and other highly civically involved citizens. Providing their input on their communities was invaluable to drawing the lines, but didn’t afford them a meaningful stake or role in the process. Citizens could be given access to the tools to draw their own redistricting plans for review, or could be collaborated with to hold community meetings on where lines should be drawn in their area.
- 4) **Run the policy proposal under the auspices of a shadow commission should the proposal not prevail in the legislature.** The success of redistricting reform cannot be entirely dependent upon the legislature’s adoption of a new plan. The challenges around this are obvious; the legislature will not easily and voluntarily strip themselves of their power to control redistricting. However, Minnesotans need a plan that is reflective of their wishes. Should the proposal not prevail in the legislature, the group should run their commission as a shadow to the legislature, and use media, PR, and intense lobbying pressure to ensure adoption of their plan. After the 2012 round, the group could use an evaluation of their process and lessons from their experience to formulate another policy proposal. This cycle would benefit from 1) a track record of results and lessons learned, and 2) a large cushion of time before legislators need to be concerned with the impact of a new redistricting process.

Conclusion

Minnesotans want to have a stake in the processes happening around them, including procedural issues like redistricting. With nearly 750 responses collected, it is clear that citizens view redistricting as an

important issue. At the end of each in-person presentation, the question was asked “how much of an impact do you think redistricting makes on your representation?”. An impressive 84% reported that it made a substantial impact. This, combined with the public’s desire to have citizens included in the process, speaks to their interest in and understanding of this topic.