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LEGISLATIVE REDISTRICTING STAFF

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This report examines how state legislatures responsible for redistricting obtain staff support. For this report, we looked at staffing arrangements they used during the 2011 redistricting cycle.

SUMMARY

Twenty-eight legislatures were primarily responsible for re-drawing legislative and congressional district lines for the 2011 redistricting cycle. The National Conference of State Legislatures surveyed them in March 2013, asking if a staff office (1) was the principal source for redistricting assistance and (2) decided how to deploy assigned staff.

Fourteen states responded: Colorado, Georgia, Idaho, Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, Maryland, Mississippi, New Jersey, North Dakota, Rhode Island, Texas, Utah, and Vermont. Ten (all except Georgia, Indiana, Mississippi, and Rhode Island) indicated that their redistricting support staffs included employees, primarily researchers or attorneys, who normally worked at other jobs in non-partisan legislative offices. The support staff was either reassigned to redistricting or required to provide redistricting services in addition to their regular job duties.

In several states, including Idaho, New Jersey, Utah, and Vermont, the reassigned staff regularly provided legislative IT support that appears to have required the same skills as the redistricting project.

Two states (Georgia and Indiana) used staff permanently assigned to their standing redistricting committees. Mississippi used a combination of dedicated and nonpartisan legislative staff and contractors to provide redistricting services. And the Rhode Island legislature hired a contractor to perform all of its redistricting work.

Respondents from Idaho, North Dakota, and Utah indicated that nonpartisan staff members were also primarily responsible for planning and tracking the project's progress. We were unable to determine if other states made similar arrangements.

STATES THAT USED NON-PARTISAN OFFICE STAFF

The following 11 states used non-partisan office staff to perform some or all of their legislative redistricting functions.

Colorado

In Colorado, the Office of Legislative Legal Services (LLS) and the Legislative Counsel provided redistricting support. (The former is the legislature's non-partisan, in-house counsel; the latter is part of the governor's administration.)

LLS employees' regular job duties include (1) answering legal questions posed by legislators or committees and (2) writing laws, producing statutes, and reviewing agency regulations.

Idaho

Idaho's Legislative Services Office (LSO) temporarily assigned two staff members to work as quasi-project managers putting together a redistricting plan and identifying resources needed to carry it out. Later, two additional LSO staff members were assigned to the project. The office also temporarily hired an administrative assistant and GIS specialist for redistricting support.

LSO staffs' regular job duties include (1) analyzing budget and policy options; (2) providing IT services, (3) auditing state agencies, (4) conducting research for legislators, and (5) drafting legislation.

Illinois

In Illinois, staff attorneys from the legislature's non-partisan Legislative Research Unit (LRU) staffed redistricting hearings, drew maps, and made redistricting-related presentations. The unit's regular job

duties include researching and reporting on a broad range of topics, reviewing agency regulations, and issuing publications on legislative-related topics.

In addition to the LRU staff, the legislature hired several temporary employees to work on redistricting during the peak time and retained outside counsel to handle some court-related work.

Kansas

The Kansas Legislative Research Department (KLRD), with assistance from three temporary employees, was the primary source of redistricting staff assistance. The department maintained and distributed computer equipment, staffed the legislative committees assigned redistricting-related functions, generated maps for legislative debate, and drew up the final maps.

KLRD employees' regular job duties include committee staffing and providing committees and individual legislators policy and fiscal analyses.

Maryland

The Maryland legislature had four primary staffers working on its redistricting project. Two were reassigned from the Department of Legislative Services (DLS), its central, non-partisan staffing office. The third worked for the Senate President and the fourth for the House Speaker. Two other state agencies, the State Data Center and Maryland Department of Planning, provided technical support.

The regular job duties of DLS staff include providing the legislature legal and fiscal research and auditing, administrative, and IT support. During 2011, it had a staff of approximately 350.

Mississippi

Mississippi used a staff member permanently assigned to the legislature's reapportionment committee and the general counsel and temporary GIS chief from its Performance, Evaluation, Expenditure and Review (PEER) Committee to provide redistricting services. PEER employees' regular duties include investigating and evaluating state and local agencies' performance, record-keeping practices, and compliance with state laws.

The Mississippi Automated Research Information Service, part of the state's Institutions of Higher Education system, provided substantial staff support and technical assistance. The legislature also hired (1) several contractors to assist in developing plans and (2) private counsel to hire experts and provide legal assistance if litigation ensued.

New Jersey

New Jersey's Office of Legislative Services (OLS) staff assisted the legislature's two redistricting commissions (one of which re-drew congressional lines; the other did the same for legislative districts). Its director and a colleague provided primary redistricting assistance, and other OLS staffers performed secretarial, public information, and data management tasks.

OLS' regular job duties include general, legal, and fiscal research and analysis; bill drafting; community staffing; preparing fiscal notes; and managing the legislature's computer data bases.

North Dakota

Two of North Dakota's Legislative Council (LC) attorneys were assigned primary responsibility for redistricting and were assisted by the council's regular support staff. The council's regular responsibilities include conducting legislative studies, providing legal and auditing advice to legislators and committees, and providing computer services.

Texas

Texas Legislative Council employees were the primary staffers for that state's redistricting project. The council's regular job duties include bill drafting, research, and publishing and distributing legislative documents.

Utah

Utah used existing staff from its Office of Legislative Research and General Counsel to provide redistricting services. The assigned staff, primarily researchers, worked longer hours and performed redistricting-related tasks in addition to their normal job duties. Some of the office's regular, lower-priority tasks went undone.

Regular job duties performed by its staff include providing legal and policy reviews of current law and proposed bills, serving as legislative liaison to other government agencies, and coordinating the legislature's website development and management.

Vermont

The Vermont General Assembly's Legislative Council, its nonpartisan legal office, provided staff support for the legislature's redistricting project. The council's regular legislative responsibilities include conducting legal research and bill drafting, committee staffing, IT support, and web publication.

LEGISLATURE USED ONLY DEDICATED REDISTRICTING STAFF

Georgia

Permanent staff assigned to the Georgia General Assembly's Legislative and Congressional Reapportionment Office provided all redistricting assistance. In addition to mapping the new state and congressional districts, staff's regular job duties include drawing county commission, school board, and city council lines and providing the legislature with other maps and data on request.

Indiana

Indiana's legislature created the Office of Census Data (OCD) within its non-partisan Legislative Services Agency to assist it in carrying out its 2001 redistricting function and assigned it the same functions in the 2011 cycle. OCD had two full-time employees (co-managers, selected by the four legislative leaders) who acted as technical consultants to their parties' respective caucuses.

Among other things, OCD provided the redistricters technical support and assistance and proofread drafts of redistricting bills as they moved through the legislative process. OCD produced the new maps and carried out related tasks after the new district lines were finalized.

OCD is also required by law to establish and maintain a GIS system containing boundaries of precincts and legislative and congressional districts.

LEGISLATURE HIRED CONTRACTORS

Rhode Island

Rhode Island's legislature hired a contractor to provide all staffing and technical support for its redistricting project. In addition to building the database, the contractor assigned one employee to work at the legislature for a year running the operation and another to handle public hearings and commission meetings.

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