

**2021  
Reprecincting and Redistricting  
Instructions for Counties**

Prepared by the Office of the Iowa Secretary of State



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## Overview

Reprecincting and redistricting take place after every federal census. Each governing body has individual requirements which impact other governing bodies.

### County Responsibilities

After a federal decennial census, each county must review its precinct boundaries and supervisor district boundaries (if applicable) to see whether the existing boundaries comply with current laws. Use the *Iowa Code* to determine whether changes are necessary. Applicable code sections are listed throughout these instructions.

**Each county must file the following information** with the Secretary of State's Office (SOS), **even if the county does not make changes** to its precinct or supervisor district boundaries:

- Precinct Map(s) as GIS shapefile or block equivalency file
- County Reprecincting Worksheet
- Certification of the populations of each precinct (included as part of the Worksheet)
- Ordinance describing precinct boundaries
- Agreements with cities (if any)

[\[§49.7\]](#)

Upon receipt of a county's submission, the SOS will review it for compliance and contact the Point of Contact designated by each county to communicate approval or changes required. SOS also will forward Plan Three precinct maps to the Iowa Legislative Services Agency (LSA) for drawing of supervisor district boundaries.

**Throughout the reprecincting and redistricting timeline, please email your questions and assistance requests to [precinct.plan@sos.iowa.gov](mailto:precinct.plan@sos.iowa.gov). The entire Elections Team watches that inbox, so your questions will be answered timely.**

The SOS has purchased the Esri Redistricting Solution and is providing it at no cost to counties and cities. If your county is using it:

- The Point of Contact (POC) you provided will be assigned a username and password.
- Your county may have as many user assignments as you desire.
- The POC will receive an initial email from [redistricting@esri.com](mailto:redistricting@esri.com) telling them to reset their password.
- Users will access this Solution at <https://redistricting.iowa.gov/redistricting/>.
- Your county will be set up as a separate group.
- Training will be provided live online by Esri. Dates are being determined, and you will be contacted with options. Additional training materials also will be provided

## **Census Data**

If you are using the Redistricting Solution provided by SOS, you do not need to worry about loading census block data. 2020 census block data already has been loaded into the Solution.

If you are using another mapping solution and need to load census block data, the TIGER files can be obtained at [www.census.gov](http://www.census.gov).

1. On the website, under “Browse By Topic” select “Geography”. Click on “TIGER/Line Shapefiles”.
2. Under “Download” choose “Web Interface”.
3. Under “Select a layer type” choose “Blocks” then select “Submit”.
4. From the “Block (2020)” drop-down menu, choose “Iowa” as the “State”, then select “Download”.

## **Resources**

The following websites have information that will be useful in this process:

- Secretary of State <https://sos.iowa.gov/elections/redistrictreprecinct/index.html>
- U.S. Census Bureau [www.census.gov](http://www.census.gov) <https://data.census.gov/cedsci/>
- State Data Center of Iowa [www.iowadatacenter.org](http://www.iowadatacenter.org)
- Legislative Services Agency <https://www.legis.iowa.gov/legislators/redistricting>

# Drawing Precinct Boundaries

## Precinct Requirements

Each county has adopted a board of supervisors representation plan. The plan determines who will draw the county's precinct boundaries.

### Plan One

In Plan One counties, the board of supervisors is elected at-large without residency requirements. The supervisors draw the precinct boundaries. There are no supervisor districts, so no supervisor district boundaries are drawn. For more information, see page 6.

### Plan Two

In Plan Two counties, the board of supervisors is elected at-large but supervisors must live in supervisor districts. The supervisors draw the precinct boundaries. The supervisors must establish a temporary redistricting commission to draw the supervisor district boundaries. For more information, see page 8.

### Plan Three

In Plan Three counties, the board of supervisors is elected by supervisor district and the supervisors must live in supervisor districts. The supervisors must establish a temporary redistricting commission which will draw the precinct boundaries. LSA will draw the supervisor district boundaries. For more information, see page 8.

[\[§331.206, 331.208, 331.209, 331.210, 331.210A\]](#)

## All precincts in all counties must meet the following standards:

- Precinct population cannot exceed 3,500

Find the population by adding together the census population data for the census blocks or other geographic units included in each precinct.

[\[§49.3\(1\)\]](#)

**Important Note:** Precinct boundaries can be changed for a limited number of reasons. Population growth is not one of them. If there are areas in your county where substantial growth is anticipated in the next ten years, you may wish to establish precincts with populations less than the 3,500 maximum allowed by law.

- Precinct must lie within one legislative district

Each precinct must be contained in a single legislative district unless this would cause the creation of a precinct containing the residences of fewer than 50 registered voters.

[\[§49.3\(1\)\(b\)\(1\)\]](#)

- Composed of contiguous territory

Precincts must be composed of contiguous territory within a single county.

[\[§49.3\(1\)\(b\)\(2\)\]](#)

- Follow census block boundaries

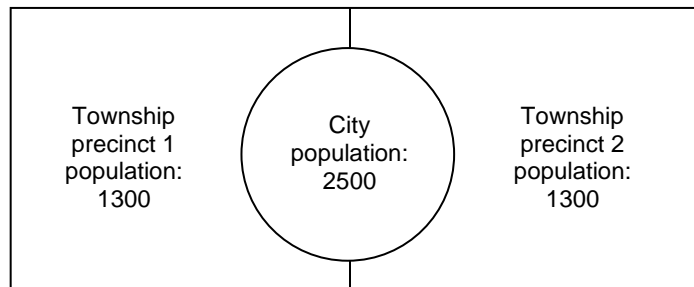
Precinct boundaries must follow census block boundaries even if they are different from actual geography.

[\[§49.3\(1\)\(c\)\]](#)

- Townships as precincts

The following will be considered precincts unless the board of supervisors or temporary redistricting commission takes action to determine otherwise:

- Each township that does not include any part of a city with a population over 2,000
- The unincorporated portion of any township, containing a city with a population over 2,000, lying outside that city. See the example below with a total unincorporated township population of 2,600.



If townships are divided into more than one precinct, the sections must be reasonably equal in population except where division into more than one precinct is necessary to comply with [§49.3\(1\)\(c\)](#).

[\[§49.4\]](#)

- Exclude city annexed territory

If a city annexed territory after January 1, 2020, subtract the annexed territory population as certified by city to the State Treasurer from the population of the surrounding unincorporated territory. The population of such annexed territory should be added to the population of the incorporated territory to which it was annexed.

[\[IAC 721—21.30\]](#)

### **Joint City and County Precincts**

To establish a precinct composed of both incorporated and unincorporated territory, the city and the county must adopt a mutually satisfactory agreement. Copies of agreements between the county and the city council of each city affected must be enclosed with the materials submitted to SOS. The deadline for cities to file their precinct boundaries with SOS is September 1, 2021, or 60 days after the legislature passes a redistricting plan, whichever is later.

This requirement does not apply when the total population of the city is fewer than 2,000.

[\[§49.6, 49.7\(2\)\(a\)\]](#)



## **Public Hearing**

The board of supervisors or temporary redistricting commission must hold a public hearing before final action is taken to adopt new precinct boundaries. Notice of the date, time and location of the hearing must be given in accordance with [Iowa Code Chapter 21](#).

[§49.4, 331.210A(2)]

## **Adopted by Ordinance**

The precinct boundaries must be defined by ordinance, so ensure that the ordinance description matches the precinct plan. The ordinance must include the date it was adopted. Descriptions of the precinct boundaries should name specific landmarks, such as roads and city or county boundaries. The ordinance also must include the precinct names or numbers. Do not use township range and section number of housing subdivision names in the descriptions.

[§49.4, 49.7(5), 49.11(1)]

## **Precinct Population Certification**

Complete the precinct population certification on the County Reapportioning Worksheet after the precinct boundaries have been drawn. The certification must be signed by the chairperson of the board of supervisors. **Send the original with wet ink signature to SOS.** For more information on what must be submitted to SOS, see page 6 for Plan One counties and page 12 for Plan Two and Plan Three counties.

[§49.7(3)]

**Important Note:** The total population of all precincts plus the populations of any cities not included in your certification must be the same as the population of the county as listed by the U.S. Census Bureau.

## Board of Supervisors – Plan One

### Plan Description

In Plan One counties, the supervisors are elected at-large without residency requirements.

[\[§331.206\]](#)

### Submission Deadline

Finalized precinct boundary plans must be submitted electronically to SOS no later than 90 days after legislative districts have become law or by October 15, 2021, whichever is later. Each precinct boundary map must be submitted as either a GIS shapefile or block equivalency file.

[\[§49.7\(2\)\(b\)\]](#)

### SOS Review

SOS will make every effort to review plans within two weeks after submission. Counties are encouraged to submit plans early, allowing time to make corrections if necessary. Any plans that are not approved by the submission deadline that are determined to need corrections will be corrected by SOS, and counties will be assessed the costs of making those corrections.

[\[§49.7\(4\)\]](#)

### What to Send

**All counties must send the following to SOS even if precinct boundaries did not change:**

- A map showing the precinct boundaries

The map must be submitted as a GIS shapefile or block equivalency file.

- Original County Reprecincting Worksheet

This includes the precinct population certification which must be signed by the chairperson of the board of supervisors. Do not include precinct changes made by city councils. Changes in city precincts must be filed by the appropriate city council.

- Ordinance describing the precinct boundaries

The ordinance must include the date it was adopted and the precinct names or numbers. Descriptions of the precinct boundaries should name specific landmarks, such as roads and city or county boundaries. Do not use township range and section numbers of housing subdivision names in the descriptions.

[\[§49.4, 49.7, 49.11\(1\)\]](#)

- Any agreements with cities

Include any copies of agreements with cities regarding precincts composed of both incorporated and unincorporated territory. This requirement does not apply if the city has a population fewer than 2,000.

[\[§49.6\]](#)

**Best Practice:** Retain a copy of the materials you submit to SOS for your own records.

## **Publication Requirements**

After the plans have been approved by SOS, the board of supervisors must publish notice of the changes in precinct boundaries in a newspaper of general circulation once a week for three consecutive weeks. The last publication must occur at 30 days before the next general election. That date is Sunday, October 9, 2022. If no changes were made, publication is not required.

[\[§49.11\(2\)\]](#)

## **Where to Send**

### **Maps**

Precinct boundary maps must be submitted electronically as a GIS shapefile or block equivalency file.

- If you are using the Redistricting Solution provided by SOS, you'll submit your maps through that application. Follow naming convention included in Esri written instructions provided by SOS.
- If you are using other mapping software, email map files to [precinct.plan@sos.iowa.gov](mailto:precinct.plan@sos.iowa.gov). In the subject header, include "County", your county name, and which file(s) are being sent. Example: County\_Sioux\_Precinct Map

### **County Reapportioning Worksheet**

Since the original population certification for precincts with your supervisor chair's wet ink signature must be submitted, mail the County Reapportioning Worksheet to:

Elections Division—Reapportioning  
Iowa Secretary of State  
Lucas Building, First Floor  
321 E. 12<sup>th</sup> Street  
Des Moines, IA 50319

### **Ordinances & Agreements**

The remaining required documents may be emailed to [precinct.plan@sos.iowa.gov](mailto:precinct.plan@sos.iowa.gov). Alternatively, you may mail them with the County Reapportioning Worksheet to the above address if you prefer.

## Board of Supervisors – Plan Two and Plan Three

### Plan Descriptions

In **Plan Two** counties, the supervisors are elected at-large but must live in a supervisor district.

In **Plan Three** counties, the supervisors are elected by supervisor district and must live in the supervisor district.

[\[§331.206\]](#)

**Important Note:** Notify the cities in your county of which supervisor plan the county uses as soon as possible. In Plan Three counties, the supervisor district boundaries must follow political subdivision boundaries (cities and townships) as much as possible. Because of this, the county should work with cities to draw city precinct boundaries. City precinct boundary plans are due 30 days before county plans.

[\[§42.4\(2\), 49.3\(2\), 49.7\]](#)

### Temporary Redistricting Commissions

By May 15, 2021, a temporary redistricting commission must be established in Plan Two and Plan Three counties.

[\[§331.210A\(1\)\(a\)\]](#)

### Membership

- The board of supervisors determines if the commission will consist of three, five, or seven members. The members must be eligible electors of the county when appointed.
- The majority of the supervisors affiliated with the same political party appoint the minimum number of commission members constituting a majority of the commission. For example, if the commission consisted of five members, the majority supervisors would appoint three commission members.
- The minority party supervisors appoint the remaining commissioner members.
- If all supervisors are affiliated with the same political party, the supervisors appoint the minimum number of commissioner members constituting a majority of the commission. The remaining members are appointed by the chairperson of the county central committee for the other political party.
- A county supervisor may be appointed to the commission.
- The board of supervisors and county political party chairperson (if applicable) must certify the names of the commission appointee(s) to the county auditor.
- The terms of the commission members expire 20 days after SOS has approved the county's precinct plan and supervisor district plan. If a vacancy occurs on the commission, it must be filled by the initial selecting authority within 15 days after the vacancy occurs.

[\[§331.210A\]](#)

## Responsibilities

In **Plan Two** counties, the commission draws the supervisor district boundaries, pending the approval of the board of supervisors. The board of supervisors draws the precinct boundaries.

In **Plan Three** counties, the commission draws the precinct boundaries. LSA draws the supervisor district boundaries.

The commission should use the County Reapportioning Worksheet and census population data to assist with drawing districts and precinct boundaries (if necessary).

**Important Note:** The commission must follow all open meeting and public record requirements as set forth in [Iowa Code Chapters 21 and 22](#).

[§331.210A(2)(a)]

## Supervisor District Requirements

Supervisor districts must meet the following requirements:

- Follow census block boundaries

District boundaries must follow census block boundaries even if they are different from actual geography.

[§49.3(1)(c)]

- Follow political subdivision boundaries

District boundaries must follow political subdivision (cities and townships) boundaries as much as possible. Cities cannot be divided into two or more supervisor districts unless the city's population is greater than the ideal size of supervisor districts. Where division is necessary, cities must be divided into the smallest possible number of supervisor districts.

[§42.4(2), 49.3(2)(e)]

- Follow precinct boundaries (**Plan Three counties only**)

[§49.3(2)(a), 331.210]

- Composed of contiguous territory

Districts must be composed of contiguous territory

[§42.4(3), 49.3(1)(c)]

- Composed of compact territory

Districts must be as compact as possible. Detailed standards for compactness are found in [§42.4\(4\)](#).

[§42.4(4), 49.3(2)(c)]

- Exclude city annexed territory

If a city annexed territory after January 1, 2020, subtract the annexed territory population as certified by the city to the State Treasurer from the population of the surrounding unincorporated territory. The population of such annexed territory should be added to the population of the incorporated territory to which it was annexed.

[IAC 721—21.30]

- Ideal District Population

District populations must be as close as possible to the ideal population unless it is necessary to deviate in order to comply with other standards in [§42.4](#).

Divide population of the county by the number of supervisor districts in the county.

- Maximum Allowable Variation

The Maximum Allowable Variation is the largest variation allowed between the population of actual supervisor districts and the Ideal District Population.

Multiply the Ideal District Population by 0.01.

**Important Note:** If the variation of any district is greater than the Maximum Allowable Variation, the board of supervisors must publish the justification for the variation in one or more official newspapers within 10 days after the plan is adopted. The publication must be included in the materials sent to SOS.

- Overall Variation

Add together the variations for all the supervisor districts.

- Average Variation

Divide the Overall Variation by the number of supervisor districts.

**Important Note:** If the Average Variation is greater than the Maximum Allowable Variation, the plan does not meet the standards set forth in *Iowa Code* and must be rejected.

- District Size Comparison

Divide the population of largest district by the population of smallest district. This number must be 1.05 or less. If it is greater than 1.05, the plan must be rejected.

[\[§42.4\(1\)\(a\), 49.3\(2\)\(b\), 331.209\(1\), 331.210, 331.210A\(2\)\(a\)\]](#)

**Best Practice:** Use the County Redistricting Worksheet to calculate all of the numbers above.

The following items **cannot** be taken into consideration when drawing district boundaries:

- Addresses of incumbents
- Political affiliations of registered voters
- Past election results
- Other demographic information beyond census head counts

[\[§42.4\(5\), 49.3\(2\)\(d\)\]](#)

## **Inform Public**

Once the preliminary precinct plan and district plan (if applicable) are completed, the commission must make the plan(s) available to the public by including the following:

- Copies of the legal description of the plans
- Maps of the plans
- Summaries of the standards set by *Iowa Code* used to develop the plans
- A statement of each district's population, including the deviation of each district's population from the Ideal District Population
- A statement of each precinct's population (if applicable)

[\[§331.210A\(2\)\(b\)\]](#)

The commission must hold at least one public hearing on the proposed plan as soon as possible after preliminary plans are completed. At the hearing the public may present alternative plans. After the hearing(s), the commission must prepare a report summarizing the information and testimony received in the course of the hearings. The report must be available to the public.

[\[§331.210A\(2\)\(c\)\]](#)

## **Adoption and Submission of Plan**

Following the completion of the hearing(s) and report, the commission must adopt the precinct plan and/or supervisor district plan and submit them to the board of supervisors for approval.

## **Board of Supervisor Approval**

The board of supervisors will review the commission's plan and either approve or reject it. The board cannot amend the first plan submitted. If rejected, the board must provide written reasons why the plan was rejected and direct the commission to develop a second plan.

The board may amend the commission's second plan. Any amendment must include a written statement explaining why the amendment is necessary to comply with *Iowa Code*.

[\[§42.4, §331.210A\(2\)\(d\)\(2\)\]](#)

## **Submission Deadline**

Finalized precinct and supervisor district plans must be submitted electronically to SOS no later than 90 days after legislative districts have become law or by October 15, whichever is later.

[\[§49.7\]](#)

## **SOS Review**

SOS will make every effort to review plans within two weeks after submission. Counties are encouraged to submit plans early, allowing time to make corrections if necessary. Any plans that are not approved by the submission deadline that are determined to need corrections will be corrected by SOS, and counties will be assessed the costs of making those corrections.

[\[§49.7, 331.209\(4\), 331.210\]](#)

## What to Send

**All counties must send the following to SOS even if precinct boundaries did not change:**

- A map showing the precinct boundaries  
The map must be submitted as a GIS shapefile or block equivalency file.
- Original County Reprecincting Worksheet  
This includes the precinct population certification which must be signed by the chairperson of the board of supervisors. Do not include precinct changes made by city councils. Changes in city precincts must be filed by the appropriate city council.
- Ordinance describing the precinct boundaries  
The ordinance must include the date it was adopted and the precinct names or numbers. Descriptions of the precinct boundaries should name specific landmarks, such as roads and city or county boundaries. Do not use township range and section numbers of housing subdivision names in the descriptions. [\[§49.4, 49.7, 49.11\(1\)\]](#)
- Any agreements with cities  
Include any copies of agreements with cities regarding precincts composed of both incorporated and unincorporated territory. This requirement does not apply if the city has a population fewer than 2,000. [\[§49.6\]](#)

**Plan Two and Plan Three counties also must include the following:**

- A map showing the boundaries of the supervisor districts  
The map must be submitted as a GIS shapefile or block equivalency file.
- Original County Redistricting Worksheet  
This includes the supervisor district population certification. The certification must be signed by the chairperson of the board of supervisors.
- Proof of publication regarding District Population Variation  
If the variation of any district is greater than the Maximum Allowable Variation, the board of supervisors must publish the justification of the variation in one or more official newspapers within 10 days after the plan is adopted. [\[§331.209, 331.210\]](#)

**Best Practice:** Retain a copy of the materials you submit to SOS for your own records.



## **Publication Requirements**

After the plans have been approved by SOS, the board of supervisors must publish notice of the changes in precinct boundaries in a newspaper of general circulation once a week for three consecutive weeks. The last publication must occur no later than 30 days before the next general election. This date is Sunday, October 9, 2022. If no changes were made, publication is not required.

[§49.11(2)]

## **Where to Send**

### **Maps**

Precinct and supervisor district boundary maps must be submitted as a GIS shapefile or block equivalency file.

- If you are using the Redistricting Solution provided by SOS, you'll submit your maps through that application. Follow naming convention included in Esri written instructions provided by SOS.
- If you are using other mapping software, email map files to [precinct.plan@sos.iowa.gov](mailto:precinct.plan@sos.iowa.gov). In the subject header, include "County", your county name, and which file(s) are being sent. Example: County\_Sioux\_Precinct Map

### **County Reapportioning & Redistricting Worksheets**

Since the original population certification for precincts and supervisor districts with your supervisor chair's wet ink signature must be submitted, mail the County Reapportioning Worksheet and County Redistricting Worksheet to:

Elections Division—Reapportioning  
Iowa Secretary of State  
Lucas Building, First Floor  
321 E. 12<sup>th</sup> Street  
Des Moines, IA 50319

### **Ordinances, Agreements, Proofs of Publication**

The remaining required documents may be emailed to [precinct.plan@sos.iowa.gov](mailto:precinct.plan@sos.iowa.gov). Alternatively, you may mail them with the County Reapportioning Worksheet and County Redistricting Worksheet to the above address.

## Important Dates

Date	Event	Code Cite
April 1, 2021	<b>Congressional and Legislative Redistricting Plan Delivered</b> Deadline for the Legislative Services Agency (LSA) to deliver its first plan for congressional and legislative redistricting to the secretary of the senate and chief clerk of the house.	<a href="#">§42.3(1)(a)</a>
May 15, 2021	<b>Temporary County Redistricting Commission Established</b> Deadline to establish a temporary county redistricting commission in counties with Plan Two or Plan Three supervisor representation plans.	<a href="#">§331.210A(1)(a)</a>
September 1, 2021	<b>City Precinct Boundary Changes Completed</b> City councils must complete any changes in precinct and ward boundaries no later than 60 days after legislative districts have become law or by September 1, whichever is later.	<a href="#">§49.7(2)(a)</a>
September 15, 2021	<b>Deadline to Pass Congressional and Legislative Boundaries</b> The General Assembly must pass plan establishing new congressional and legislative district boundaries by this day.	<a href="#">Iowa Constitution, Article III, Sec. 35</a>
October 15, 2021	<b>County Precinct and Supervisor District Boundary Changes Completed</b> County boards of supervisors or temporary county redistricting commissions must complete any changes in precinct and supervisor district boundaries no later than 90 days after legislative district have become law or by October 15, whichever is later.	<a href="#">§49.7(2)(b)</a>
January 15, 2022	<b>City and County Precinct Boundaries Effective</b> City and county precinct boundaries are effective for all elections held after this date.	<a href="#">§49.7(5)</a>
October 9, 2022	<b>Precinct Boundary Publication Deadline</b> Last day to publish the third in a series of notices of changes in precinct boundaries. Publication is not required if no changes were made.	<a href="#">§49.11(2)</a>
November 15, 2022	<b>Adoption of School Director District Plans Begins</b> First day the school board may adopt a resolution redrawing director district boundaries.	<a href="#">§275.23A(2)</a>
May 15, 2023	<b>Adoption Deadline for School Director District Plans</b> Deadline for the school board to adopt a resolution redrawing director district boundaries.	<a href="#">§275.23A(2)</a>
July 1, 2023	<b>School Director District Boundaries Effective</b> School director district boundaries are effective for all elections held after this date.	<a href="#">§275.23A(5)</a>
August 1, 2023	<b>Community College Director District Boundary Changes Completed</b> Community college board must complete any changes to director district boundaries no later than August 1.	<a href="#">§260C.13</a>