

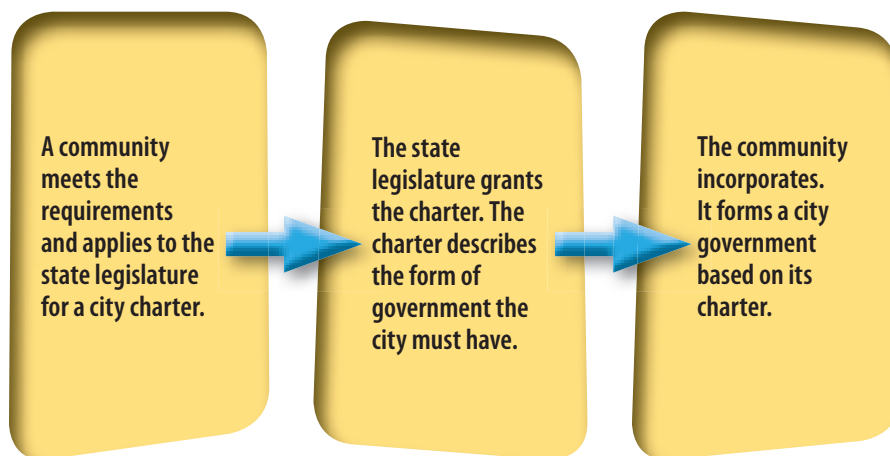
How City Governments Are Created

About three out of four Americans live in cities or urban areas. City governments play a big role in people’s daily lives. They provide local services, such as police and fire protection, water and sewer service, schools, public transportation, and libraries. Local governments are not independent, though. Their powers and duties come from their state constitutions.

New cities are created when communities **incorporate**. That term describes a local area with an organized government that gives services to the people who live there. An area incorporates when the people ask the state for a **city charter**. A city charter is a plan for city government. The charter gives power to a local government. Communities must meet certain conditions to get a city charter. Sometimes a certain number of people have to live there. Like a constitution, a city charter describes the city’s type of government, how it will be set up, and its powers. An incorporated city is also known as a municipality.

Sometimes a state legislature gives a city **home rule**. This lets cities write their own charters. These cities choose their own form of government. They run their own affairs. However, they still have to follow state laws.

How do local governments pay for the services they provide? Much of the money comes from federal and state grants. Money also comes from taxes. The rest comes from fees and fines for things like dog licenses and traffic tickets.



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Think Critically

1. Summarize How do local governments pay for the services they provide?

Show Your Skill

2. Interpret Charts How are city governments created?

Take the Challenge

3. In a small group, think of an original city name, and then write a city charter for it.

Mark the Text



4. Underline the term that serves as the basis for the mayor-council form of city government.

Think Critically

5. **Analyze** Use the term *reluctant* in a sentence using the same context as the text.

Show Your Skill

6. **Draw Conclusions** Why would successful government be less likely under a weak-mayor plan?

The Mayor-Council Form

Most American towns and cities use one of three forms of government. They are:

- the mayor-council form
- ◆ the council-manager form
- ◆ the commission form.

The mayor-council form is the oldest type of city government. Most of the nation's biggest cities use it. This form is based on a separation of powers. The mayor is the chief executive. He or she oversees city departments such as police and fire. The mayor often appoints people to head the departments. The council has legislative power. It passes city laws called **ordinances**. It approves the city's budget.

The voters elect the mayor and members of the council. In some cities, each voting district elects a representative to the city council. Other cities hold **at-large elections** for council members. This means they are elected by the whole city, not individual districts.

There are two types of mayor-council government. One is the strong-mayor system. This system gives the mayor strong powers. The mayor can veto, or cancel, laws passed by city council, appoint department heads, and write the budget. Strong mayors tend to dominate, or control, a city government.

Under the weak-mayor system, the mayor's power is limited. The council appoints department heads and makes the key decisions. Under this plan, many people share responsibility. The mayor usually directs council meetings but will only vote if there is a tie. Success in this system depends on how well the

mayor and the council work together. The weak-mayor system dates back to colonial days when people were reluctant to give any official too much power.



Broward County has a mayor-council form of government. Here, mayor Kristin Jacobs speaks to reporters about Hurricane Katrina in 2005.

PHOTO: Richard Sheinwald/Bloomberg via Getty Images

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Council-Manager and Commission Governments

The council-manager form of government began in the early 1900s. It was seen as a way to make city government more honest and well organized. Under this plan, an elected city council hires a city manager. The manager oversees city departments and suggests a budget. The city council can fire the manager by a majority vote. Most city managers have special training in areas like managing money and planning.

The commission form of government also began in the 1900s. It does not separate legislative and executive powers. Instead, the government is divided into departments, such as fire, police, and health. The heads of these departments are called commissioners. The people elect them. As department heads, they have executive power, or they run the day-to-day activities of the departments they lead. The commissioners meet regularly as a body called a commission, and one of the commissioners serves as mayor. The commission meets to pass city laws.

This system has some problems. No one person is in charge of a commission. Without clear leadership, a commission has trouble setting and meeting goals. Commissioners will usually focus on their own individual departments. They may compete for resources like money. So, they don't think about what is best for the city as a whole. Only a few cities still use this form of government.

Think Critically

7. Explain Why has the council-manager form of city government replaced the mayor-council form in many cities?

8. Infer What is the main drawback to a commission form of government?

Mark the Text



9. Diagram Fill in the diagram to show who has executive and legislative powers in both forms of city government.

Council-Manager Government

Executive

Legislative

Commission Government

Executive

Legislative

Think Critically

10. Analyze Why do you think that special districts are created?

Mark the Text



11. Circle the words that define a metropolitan area.

Two other types of local government are the special district and the metropolitan area. A **special district** is a unit of government formed to handle one task. This might be water supply, education, or transportation. A special district is run by a board or a commission. Its members may be elected or appointed. Local school districts are the most common example of a special district.

A **metropolitan area** is a city and the **suburbs** around it. A suburb is a community near or around a city. A metropolitan area can also include the small towns outside the suburbs. Suburbs have grown since the 1950s. As a result, more people live in some suburbs than the cities they surround. More people and more businesses can create additional problems. Some metropolitan areas are challenged in the areas of transportation, pollution, and land use and have formed councils to work on these issues.

PHOTO: Larry Mulvehill/Corbis



Tourism is an important part of Ft. Lauderdale's economy. The issues that the local government faces are related to the economic activity of the area.



NGSS Check Name the three forms of government used by cities and towns. Then list the duties performed by mayors in the strong-mayor form of government. **SS.7.C.3.14**

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COUNTY GOVERNMENTS



SS.7.C.3.9 Illustrate the law making process at the local, state, and federal levels.
 SS.7.C.3.14 Differentiate between local, state, and federal governments' obligations and services.

Essential Question

Why do people create, structure, and change governments?

Guiding Questions

1. How is county government organized?
2. What functions do county governments perform?

Terms to Know

county
 a land and political subdivision of a state

county seat
 the town where a county courthouse is located

It Matters Because

Like city governments, county governments affect people's everyday lives.

However, county governments provide different services and meet different needs.

What county do you live in?

How many communities do you think are in your county?

What Do You Know?

Directions: Choose any four of the words below and write a sentence or two about what services county governments provide or how they are organized. When you finish the lesson, write another sentence using four different words from the list.



- | | | |
|-------------------|---------|-----------------|
| police protection | public | members |
| commissioners | board | fire protection |
| transportation | elected | supervisors |
| laws | | road repair |

Think Critically

1. Compare In what way is a county seat like a capital?

Show Your Skill

2. Draw Conclusions What geographic factors influenced the location of county seats?

networks™ Read Chapter 14 Lesson 2 in your textbook or online.

How County Governments Are Organized

Most states are divided into smaller units of land called **counties**. There are more than 3,000 counties or county-like divisions in the nation. County government is another type of local government.

Each county is very different. One county might have millions of residents. Another county might have only a few dozen. Counties also range in size. Some counties in the West are bigger than whole states in the East. Two states do even not use the term *county*. In Alaska, counties are called boroughs. In Louisiana, they are known as parishes.

In the 1800s, the county courthouse was the center of county government. The town where the county courthouse was located became known as the **county seat**. Officials at that time wanted to be sure that all citizens could get to a county courthouse. It was where trials were held and legal records were kept. In the Midwest and South they thought most people should be able to get to the county seat and back home by horse and buggy in one day. This is why states in those areas have relatively small counties.

Each county in Florida has a courthouse. This is Florida's Supreme Court building in Tallahassee.



The Functions of County Government

Counties today play a different role than they once did. As cities have grown, many have taken over the services that counties once handled. However, in some places counties are more important than ever. Many have taken on the duties of city governments. These duties include sewer and water service, police and fire protection, road repairs, and public transportation.

Most counties are governed by a board of three to five elected members. The members are called commissioners or supervisors. The board acts as a legislature. It passes ordinances, or laws. It sets a yearly budget for the county, levies taxes, and oversees law enforcement.

The basic form of county government is the strong commission form. Two other forms are the commission-manager and commission-elected executive.

In the strong commission form, the county board has both legislative and executive powers. They pass and carry out the laws. They work with other county officials to do some executive work, and oversee people that they have placed in charge of other offices. People on county boards do not always have a lot of experience. Some states have started training programs for their board members.

As public needs have grown, many counties have changed the function of the county board. In these counties, the board only has legislative power. Executive power goes to either the commission-manager or commission-elected executive. In the commission-manager form, the board names a county manager. This person is a lot like a city manager. In the commission-elected executive form, counties create a new office and the voters elect the executive.

In both of these forms, the county manager or the executive manages the county government and carries out its laws. The county board works with this leader.

Commission-Manager

Commission-Elected Executive

Strong Commission

Show Your Skill

3. Identify the Main Idea

Name three ways that county government can be organized.

Mark the Text

4. Circle the unit of county government that levies taxes.

Think Critically

5. **Infer** Why might a county executive be more independent of the board than a county manager?

Mark the Text

6. **Diagram** In each box, write one or two sentences describing how that form of government is organized.

Think Critically

7. Explain How are county sheriffs and district attorneys chosen?

8. Summarize Use the term *estimate* in a sentence about county government.

Take the Challenge

9. Draw a county map of your county or for the state of Florida. Use references to help you. Label your town or city on the map.



A Manatee County sheriff patrol car makes a stop in Bradenton to check out an alleged crime.

Some important county officials are elected on their own to do very specific jobs. One of these is the county sheriff. He or she is in charge of law enforcement. The sheriff's department enforces court orders and runs the county jail.

Another is the district attorney (DA). The DA is the county's prosecutor. He or she looks into crimes and brings charges against people suspected of breaking the law. He or she tries to prove in court that they are guilty.

Other county officials may be appointed or elected:

- The county assessor decides how much land and buildings are worth. The county's property tax is based on his or her estimate, or general idea.
- The county treasurer is in charge of the county's money. The treasurer collects taxes and pays the bills.
- ◆ The auditor makes sure the county follows state and local laws when spending its money.
- ◆ A county clerk keeps official records for the government.
- ◆ A county coroner works with the police department. He or she tries to figure out the cause of death in unusual cases.



NGSS Check What services does county government provide for citizens? **SS.7.C.3.14**
