

Oklahoma

Oklahoma ranks 18th among the states in number of local governments, with 1,798 as of June 2002.

COUNTY GOVERNMENTS (77)

There are no areas in Oklahoma lacking county government. The county governing body is called the board of county commissioners.

SUBCOUNTY GENERAL PURPOSE GOVERNMENTS (590)

Municipal Governments (590)

Municipal governments in Oklahoma are the cities (incorporated places with more than 1,000 inhabitants) and towns (incorporated places with fewer than 1,000 inhabitants). This classification is not automatic; a referendum is required for a municipality to change class. Unincorporated communities are called villages and are not counted as governments.

Township Governments (0)

Oklahoma has no township governments.

PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEMS (571)

School District Governments (571)

The following types of school districts in Oklahoma are counted as separate governments for census purposes:

- “Independent” school districts
- Elementary school districts
- Technology center school districts¹
- Community junior college districts

“Independent” school districts are supervised and administered by elected boards of education. Elementary school districts, formerly called “dependent” school districts, are administered by elected boards of education and offer elementary grades only. Both “independent” and elementary school districts may levy local school taxes and issue bonds.

Technology center school districts also are administered by elected boards of education. They have financing powers similar to the school districts above. Community junior college districts in Oklahoma are governed by elected

boards of trustees. These districts may levy local school taxes and issue bonds. Upon approval by the board of trustees, these districts may choose to become technology center school districts.

Dependent Public School Systems (0)

Oklahoma has no dependent public school systems as defined for census reporting.

Other Educational Activities

Boards of education may provide junior college classes as an extension of school district services.

The state department of education has at least 20 regional education service centers throughout the state. These centers provide screening and evaluation services for students that may be in need of special educational services.

Interlocal cooperatives are established by agreement between two or more school districts to facilitate shared services, including special education.

College technology center school districts may be established by resolution of junior college district boards of regents. The laws applicable to area vocational technical school district funding also apply to the college area vocational technical school districts. They are governed by the board of the junior college district, ex officio, and are not counted as separate governments.

SPECIAL DISTRICT GOVERNMENTS (560)

Oklahoma statutes authorize the creation of a variety of special districts or authorities that are counted as governments. These are discussed in detail below.

Conservancy Districts

Conservancy districts and master conservancy districts provide flood control, irrigation, and water supply. Both types may be established by the District Court on petition of landowners and after public hearing. A board of directors appointed by the judge of the district court administers each district. In some cases, the directors are appointed by the governing bodies of the member governments. The board may levy benefit assessments, collect rates and charges, and issue bonds with voter approval. Conservancy districts that are administered by the state are not counted for census purposes.

¹Formerly known as area vocational-technical school districts.

Subdistricts of a conservancy district are classified as dependent agencies of the conservancy district, and are not counted as separate governments.

Conservation Districts

Conservation districts, formerly known as soil and water conservation districts, are formed by the Oklahoma Conservation Commission. The governing body is a board of directors consisting of three elected directors and two appointed by the state commission. The districts may require contributions from benefited landowners and accept state and county funds.

Emergency Medical Service Districts

Districts to provide emergency medical services are created by petition to, or resolution of, the governing bodies of one or more counties, cities, or towns, after voter approval. A board of trustees, appointed by the participating governments, governs each district. The districts may fix fees, and, after voter approval, may levy ad valorem taxes and issue bonds.

Enterprise District Management Authorities

Authorities to finance business development in blighted areas are created by resolution of the governing bodies of contiguous county, city, or town governments in state-designated enterprise zones. A board consisting of members appointed by the member governments governs each authority. The authority may fix charges in connection with its loans, receive contributions from member governments, and bonds may be issued by the member governments after voter approval.

Fire Protection Districts

These districts may be established by the board of county commissioners on petition of landowners and after hearing and referendum. An elected board of directors governs each fire protection district. The district may issue bonds upon voter approval and may levy annual assessments.

Housing Authorities

A housing authority may be established by resolution of the governing body of a city, town, or county on its own motion or upon petition of voters to the governing body. In either case a referendum is required, except in cities and counties of more than 200,000 population. A board of commissioners appointed by the mayor with the consent of the city or town governing body (in the case of a city or town housing authority) or by the board of county commissioners (in the case of a county housing authority) governs each authority. One board member must be a tenant from a housing project. An authority may charge rentals, accept gifts, grants, or donations, and issue revenue bonds. Rural electric cooperative housing authorities are

governed under provisions similar to those above. Commissioners of such authorities are appointed by the chief executive officer of the rural electric cooperative served.

Irrigation Districts

Irrigation districts may be established by the Oklahoma Water Resources Board on petition of the landowners and after referendum. An elected board of directors governs each district. The districts may levy both annual ad valorem taxes and special assessments, fix tolls and charges, and issue bonds.

Port Authorities

These authorities may be established by one or more county or municipal governments, or any combination thereof, by ordinance or resolution. A board appointed by the governing bodies of the establishing governments governs each authority. The authority may fix rentals and charges for the use of facilities, receive grants and contributions, and issue revenue bonds. The city of Tulsa-Rogers County Port Authority (Port of Catoosa) was established under this law.

Public Library Systems

Public library systems are established upon resolution of the governing bodies of two or more counties or cities and towns. Each governing body consists of at least five members appointed by the board of county commissioners. The systems receive appropriations from city, town, and county general funds, state and federal grants-in-aid, and other public and private funds. The systems may collect fees and charges and borrow money. The systems may receive the proceeds of special tax levies upon voter approval.

Regional Solid Waste Management Districts

These districts were repealed by law in 1998.

Regional Water Distribution Districts

Regional water distribution districts are created by two or more counties through interlocal agreement. A board of directors governs the district, and its composition is specified in the interlocal agreement. The board may fix fees and charges, accept gifts and grants, and issue bonds with the approval of the Attorney General. No regional water distribution districts were reported to be in existence as of June 2002.

Rural Road Improvement Districts

These districts are established upon petition of landowners, followed by a public hearing and referendum. A board of nine directors elected by the property owners governs each district. The districts may levy ad valorem property taxes and, with voter approval, issue general obligation bonds.

Rural Water, Sewer, Gas, and Solid Waste Management Districts

These districts are created by the county commissioners on petition of landowners, after public hearing. An elected board of directors governs each district. The district may collect rates and fees, may collect charges based on benefits received, and may issue revenue bonds.

If a district of this type is located entirely within a city with 10,000 or fewer inhabitants, it is administered by the municipal governing body, and is not counted as a separate government (see “Subordinate Agencies and Areas,” below).

Sewer Improvement Districts

These districts are created by the board of county commissioners on petition of landowners and after a hearing and referendum. A board of directors appointed by the county commissioners governs each district. The districts may issue bonds upon voter approval, levy special assessments, and fix tolls and charges.

SUBORDINATE AGENCIES AND AREAS

Shown below are various governmental designations in Oklahoma that have certain characteristics of governmental units but that are classified in census statistics as subordinate agencies of the state or local governments and are not counted as separate governments. Legal provisions for some of the larger of these are discussed below (see “Public School Systems,” above, regarding educational agencies of this nature).

Grand River Dam Authority (state). This authority was established by a special act. Its seven-member board of directors is appointed by the governor, from a list of nominees supplied by the board of directors nominating committee, with the consent of the senate. The authority may collect charges for the sale of water and electricity and may issue revenue bonds.

Oklahoma Capital Improvement Authority (state).

This authority was established by a special act. The authority board consists of the governor, the state treasurer, the lieutenant governor, the director of public affairs, the director of human services, the director of central services, the vice chairperson of the Oklahoma Tax Commission, and the director of the department of tourism and recreation. The authority may issue bonds, collect rentals, and accept grants from the federal government and other sources.

Oklahoma Industrial Finance Authority (state). This authority was created by a special act after referendum. The authority board of directors consists of the director of the state department of commerce and six members

appointed by the governor with the consent of the senate. The authority receives state appropriations, rental fees for projects, and interest fees from loans, and may issue revenue bonds.

Oklahoma Transportation Authority (state).² This authority was established by act of the legislature. The authority board consists of one member from each congressional district in the state who is appointed by the governor with the consent of the senate, and the governor serves as an ex officio member. The authority may issue revenue bonds, collect tolls, and accept grants and contributions from any source.

Trusts (state, county, or municipal). Trusts are established by a legal instrument or will, upon approval of the governor (if the state is the beneficiary government) or upon approval of the governing body of a county or municipal government (if a county or a municipality is the beneficiary government). In most cases, a single government is the beneficiary of a particular trust, but a few trusts have two or more beneficiary governments.

Trusts are known by a wide variety of names.³ Their individual functions and powers are described in the legal instrument or will creating each trust. Trusts may receive contributions from participating governments and, if the legal instrument or will so provides, fix charges and issue revenue bonds.

Urban renewal authorities (municipal). An urban renewal authority may be established by resolution of the governing body in municipalities with a population more than 10,000. For municipalities with a population less than 10,000, voter approval is also needed. The board of directors consists of five members appointed by the mayor subject to the approval of the municipal governing body. The authority may accept gifts, loans, and grants

²Formerly known as the Oklahoma Turnpike Authority.

³Examples of large state agencies formed as public trusts include the Medical Technology and Research Authority of Oklahoma, the Oklahoma Development Finance Authority (formerly Oklahoma Development Authority), the Oklahoma Environmental Protection Authority, the Oklahoma Housing Finance Agency, the Oklahoma Municipal Power Authority, the Oklahoma Ordnance Works Authority, the Oklahoma Tourism and Recreation Commission, the Southern Oklahoma Memorial Hospital Authority, and the Southeastern Oklahoma Industries Authority. Examples of large county agencies formed as public trusts include the Canadian County Home Finance Authority, the Cleveland County Home Finance Authority, the Oklahoma County Home Finance Authority, the Oklahoma Industries Authority, the Tulsa County Home Finance Authority, and the jail trust authorities. Examples of large municipal agencies formed as public trusts include the Central Oklahoma Transportation and Parking Authority, the Metropolitan Tulsa Transit Authority, the Oklahoma City Airport Trust, the Oklahoma City Municipal Improvement Authority, the Oklahoma Psychiatric Foundation Authority, the Tulsa Industrial Authority, the Tulsa Municipal Airport Trust, and the Tulsa Public Facilities Authority. Classification for census purposes of a particular trust as a state, county, or municipal agency is determined by identifying the government that is the beneficiary of that trust.

from the federal government, and may issue revenue bonds financed solely from project income. Present law authorizing urban renewal authorities supersedes three separate prior laws.

Other examples include:

State

Boll Weevil Eradication Organization
Capitol-Medical Center Improvement and Zoning District
Conservancy districts administered by the state
Mining districts
Native American Cultural and Educational Authority
Oklahoma Center for the Advancement of Science and Technology
Oklahoma Conservation Commission
Oklahoma Educational Television Authority
Oklahoma Health Care Authority
Oklahoma Rural Medical Education Loan and Scholarship Fund
Oklahoma Space Industry Development Authority
Oklahoma State Land Office
Oklahoma Student Loan Authority
Oklahoma Water Resources Board
Oklahoma World Trade Development Authority⁴
Ottawa Reclamation Authority
University Hospitals Authority
Water Conservation Storage Commission
Water districts (state)

⁴Repealed by laws in 1992.

County

County Free Fair Associations (established under 1915, 1937, and 1947 laws)
County Cemetery Associations
Health districts (these districts serve two or more counties)
Joint airport boards
Oklahoma Free State Fair Association (also referred to as the Muskogee County Free Fair Association)⁵
Rural ambulance service districts

Municipal

City and town water districts
Improvement districts
Joint airport boards
Municipal parking station improvement districts
Rural water, sewer, gas, and solid waste management districts governed by city governing body
Sewer districts
Zoning districts

Joint County-Municipal

City-County Library Commissions
Metropolitan Library Commissions

Oklahoma laws also provide for various types of local areas for election purposes and administration of justice.

⁵Repealed by laws in 1999.