

Rhode Island

Rhode Island ranks 49th among the states in the number of local governments, with 118 as of June 2002.

COUNTY GOVERNMENTS (0)

In Rhode Island, counties are geographic subdivisions for the judicial administration of the state. They have no associated governmental structure and are not counted as governments for census purposes.

SUBCOUNTY GENERAL PURPOSE GOVERNMENTS (39)

The 39 subcounty general purpose governments in Rhode Island comprise eight municipal (city) governments and 31 town governments. These two types of governments are distinguished primarily by the historical circumstances surrounding their incorporation. In Rhode Island, cities and towns have similar powers and perform similar functions.

Municipal Governments (8)

The term "municipality," as defined for census statistics on governments, applies only to the cities in Rhode Island. Towns, which are treated as municipalities in Rhode Island statutes, are counted for census purposes as town rather than municipal governments (see below). Cities in Rhode Island are established by special act and exist outside the area of any town. In addition to the usual city functions, Rhode Island cities also provide services commonly assigned in other states to county governments.

Town or Township Governments (31)

Although not differing in legally authorized powers from cities, units in Rhode Island designated as "towns" are counted in census statistics as a separate type of government.

The entire area of the state is encompassed by town government except for areas within the boundaries of cities. Rhode Island towns perform services that in other states are commonly associated with county and city governments. Town governing bodies are known as town councils. All taxes must be approved by the town meetings.

PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEMS (36)

School District Governments (4)

Only the regional school districts in Rhode Island are counted as governments in census statistics. The selection

of the governing bodies for these school districts is determined by a meeting of the participating cities and towns. A regional school district may issue bonds and determine its own fiscal requirements, which are met by the constituent cities and towns.

Dependent Public School Systems (32)

Rhode Island statutes provide for the following types of dependent public school systems:

Systems dependent on the state government (1):
Central Falls School District

Systems dependent on municipal governments (7):
City school systems

Systems dependent on town governments (24):
Town school systems

A 1991 law authorized the state to take control of the financially troubled Central Falls School System. The district is governed by a review commission composed primarily of state officials.

The seven city and 24 town school systems in Rhode Island are not counted as separate governments in census statistics, but are classified as dependent agencies of the city and town governments. While these school systems are administered by elected boards, their fiscal requirements are determined and met by the sponsoring cities or towns. School "districts" within the city of Providence are geographical subdivisions of the city for the purpose of electing members of the Providence School Committee.

Other Educational Activities

Collaborative programs are created by special acts of the legislature to provide special education, and other services to member school systems. They are governed by boards composed of representatives derived from the participating school systems. Activities associated with these programs are classified as dependent activities of the administering school systems, and are not counted as separate governments for census purposes.

SPECIAL DISTRICT GOVERNMENTS (75)

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

Conservation Districts

Soil and water conservation districts are established by the state conservation committee by petition of the land owners. A board, consisting of three members appointed by the state conservation committee and two members elected by landowners, governs each district. Contributions to the district may be required of the land owners within a district. Contributions from state government, federal government, and from private contributors may be accepted as well.

Fire, Water, Sewer, Road, and Lighting Districts

These districts, which furnish fire protection, electric power, sewerage, road maintenance, and water supply to residents, are established by special acts with substantially uniform provisions. The governing board is elected at an annual meeting of the voters. The district may issue bonds, fix charges for the sale of water and electricity, and levy taxes with voter approval.

Housing Authorities

Housing authorities are instituted by the city or town council on petition of residents and after hearing. A board of commissioners appointed by the mayor or town council governs each district. Housing authorities may issue bonds, accept grants, and fix rents and charges for their housing projects.

Pawtuxet River Authority

This authority was authorized by special act to provide sewerage and waste disposal facilities. A board of 15 members appointed by the mayors or the presidents of the town councils of the cities and towns served, governs the authority. The authority may fix rates and charges for services it provides.

Water Authorities (Special Acts)

The Bristol County Water Authority was authorized by a special act subject to local referendum. The governing body consists of three members each from the towns of Barrington, Bristol, and Warren. Board members are appointed by the member town councils. The authority may fix and collect charges and issue revenue bonds.

The Kent County Water Authority was created by a special act. The governing body consists of one member each from the towns of East Greenwich, West Warwick, and Coventry, and the city of Warwick, appointed by the town or city council. An additional member is selected from the town or city having the greatest number of water users within the district. The authority may issue bonds and establish charges for the sale of water.

SUBORDINATE AGENCIES AND AREAS

Shown below are various governmental designations in Rhode Island 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).

Building authorities and corporations (state). The Rhode Island Health and Educational Building Corporation and the Rhode Island Industrial-Recreational Building Authority were created by special acts to provide buildings for the purposes outlined by state statutes. Similar legal provisions apply to each agency. Their governing bodies are appointed by the Governor. These authorities may fix rentals and charges for facilities, accept loans and grants, and issue revenue bonds.

Redevelopment agencies (city and town). These agencies are created by the legislative body of a city or town, and virtually exist in each community. A board, appointed by the mayor or the president of the town council, governs each agency. A redevelopment agency receives appropriations from the sponsoring city or town, may charge rentals, accept federal or state financial assistance, and issue bonds. The sponsoring government may issue bonds for redevelopment purposes.

Rhode Island Airport Corporation (state). This entity, formed by executive order in December of 1992, is a semiautonomous subsidiary of the Rhode Island Port Authority and Economic Development Corporation. It was created to operate and maintain the state airport at Warwick and any other airports constructed or operated by the state. Powers of the corporation are vested in a board of seven members, six of whom are appointed by the governor, and one who is appointed by the mayor of the city of Warwick. The corporation may fix rates and charges. The State Economic Development Corporation may issue bonds on behalf of the corporation.

Rhode Island Housing and Mortgage Finance Corporation (state). This corporation was created by special act to provide mortgage credit for low and moderate income housing and for health care facilities. The corporation board consists of seven commissioners, four of whom are appointed by the Governor with the consent of the senate, plus the director of business regulation, the director of community affairs, and the state treasurer, who serve in an ex officio capacity. The corporation may receive grants and contributions, fix rates and charges, and issue revenue bonds.

Rhode Island Industrial Facilities Corporation (state). This corporation was established by special act to finance industrial and pollution control facilities. A board of directors appointed by the Governor governs the corporation. The state director of economic development, ex officio, serves as chief executive officer of the corporation. The corporation may charge rentals in connection with its projects and may issue revenue bonds.

Rhode Island Port Authority and Economic Development Corporation (state). This corporation was established by special act to finance the construction of industrial, commercial, and port facilities. A board of directors, consisting of the members of the State Economic Development Council, governs the corporation. The corporation may receive appropriations; fix rents, fees, tolls, and charges; and issue revenue bonds.

Rhode Island Public Transit Authority (state). This authority was established by special act to operate transit systems in the state. The authority board consists of seven members, one a member of the senate appointed by the majority leader of the senate, one a member of the house of representatives appointed by the speaker of the house, four appointed by the Governor with the advice and consent of the senate, and the director of the department of transportation. The authority may accept grants, fix fares and charges, and issue revenue bonds.

Rhode Island Turnpike and Bridge Authority (state). This corporation was created by special act. Its functions are performed by the director of the department of transportation. The authority may issue revenue bonds and fix and collect tolls.

Rhode Island Resource Recovery Corporation (state). This corporation, formerly named Rhode Island Solid Waste Management Corporation, was created by act of the General Assembly to finance solid waste disposal and resource recovery facilities. A board of nine commissioners, including five appointed by the Governor, two by the Speaker of the House of Representatives, one by the senate majority leader, and the director of administration, governs the corporation. The corporation may fix rates and fees, receive grants and contributions, and issue revenue bonds.

Other examples include:

State

Convention Center Authority
Mount Hope Bridge Authority
Narragansett Bay Water Quality Management District

Newport County Convention and Visitors Bureau
Rhode Island Clean Water Protection Finance Authority
Rhode Island Higher Education Assistance Authority
Rhode Island Public Telecommunications Authority
Rhode Island Student Loan Authority
Rhode Island Water Resources Board
Rhode Island Public Rail Corporation
Tobacco Settlement Financing Corporation

Municipal

Central Falls Detention Corporation
Conservation commissions
District management authorities (Providence)
Drainage districts
Forest and park commissions
Highway districts
Mosquito abatement districts
Municipal land trusts
Municipal public buildings authorities
Parking commissions
Providence Civic Center Authority
Special development districts
Wastewater management districts
Water authorities

Town

Block Island Housing Board
Bristol Harbor Development Commission
Conservation commissions
Drainage districts
Forest and park commissions
Highway districts
Jamestown Water Front Authority
Land trusts
Middletown Water Front and Water Resources Authority
Mosquito abatement districts
Municipal public buildings authorities
Portsmouth Sewer Authority
Waste water management districts
Water authorities
Westerly Downtown Center Special Services District

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