

Vermont

Vermont ranks 35th among the states in number of local governments, with 733 as of June 2002.

COUNTY GOVERNMENTS (14)

There are no county areas in Vermont lacking county government. However, the county governments perform very limited functions—chiefly maintaining the courthouse and county jail. The principal administrative officers of the county are two assistant or “side” judges.

SUBCOUNTY GENERAL PURPOSE GOVERNMENTS (284)

Subcounty general purpose governments in Vermont include municipal (city and village) governments and town governments. These two types of governments are distinguished primarily by the historical circumstances surrounding their incorporation. In Vermont, city, village, and town governments have similar powers and perform similar functions.

Municipal Governments (47)

The term “municipality” as defined by The Census of Governments applies to the cities and incorporated villages in Vermont. Towns, to which the term “municipalities” is applied by Vermont statutes, are counted for census purposes as townships rather than municipal governments (see below). Unlike cities, which exist outside the area of any town, villages are included within town areas.

Town or Township Governments (237)

Although towns do not legally differ much from cities and villages in Vermont, the U.S. Census Bureau enumerates them separately within government data. Towns perform many of the same duties commonly associated with county and municipal governments. The governing body of a town is known as the board of selectmen.

Although town governments exist in each county, they do not cover the entire area of each county within the state. Cities, gores, grants, and unorganized towns exist outside the area of any town with an organized government. Unorganized towns, gores, and grants in Vermont are geographic areas only, and are governed by state appointed supervisors. The only exception to this observation exists in Essex County, where the county clerk serves as the supervisor. Unorganized towns are not counted as governments by census.

PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEMS (283)

School District Governments (283)¹

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

City school districts
Incorporated school districts
Interstate school districts
Town school districts
Union school districts

City and town school districts are governed by boards of directors. Board members are elected at the school district meeting. Similar provisions also apply to interstate school districts.

Incorporated districts are created by special acts of the legislature, but with substantially uniform provisions. Officers of each district are elected at the annual district meeting.

Union school districts are established by vote of the establishing school districts. Their boards are chosen by and from the participating districts. Fiscal requirements for a union school district are apportioned among the participating school districts. Provision is also made for interstate school districts in Vermont.

Dependent Public School Systems (0)

Vermont has no dependent public school systems.

Other Educational Activities

Supervisory units, also called supervisory unions or supervisory districts, are entities intended for the supervision of school affairs in two or more school districts. These agencies are classified as joint educational service agencies of their participating districts and are not counted as separate governments for census purposes. In 2002, 54 supervisory unions and 12 supervisory districts were in operation.

Schools in unorganized towns and gores are operated by officers representing the state government and are classified for census purposes as state activities. They are not counted as separate governments.

¹Vermont laws also provide for various types of local areas for election purposes, administration of justice, and zoning.

Independent high schools (formerly private high schools) exist in designated towns that do not offer high school curriculums, but instead choose to send students to a private high school. Independent high schools are classified as private entities and are not included in census reporting.

SPECIAL DISTRICT GOVERNMENTS (152)

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

Consolidated Water Districts

Consolidated water districts are established when voters approve the merger of the water facilities located in two or more contiguous cities or towns. An elected board of water commissioners governs each district. The district may fix water rates and levy ad valorem taxes. The district may issue revenue bonds and general obligation bonds. General obligation bonds require voter approval. Wholesale consolidated water districts operate under the same provisions, but sell water to cities and towns on a wholesale basis rather than directly to customers. The International Water District, involving Canada, was created by special act. It operates under similar provisions. All bond issues require voter approval.

Emergency Medical Service (EMS) Districts²

EMS districts are created to foster and coordinate emergency medical services within the district boundaries they serve. Boundaries of these districts are established by the State Department of Health. Other duties include monitoring and making provisions for emergency medical services, provide EMS training leading to certification (which is a major source of revenue for these districts), and cooperate with physicians to establish medical control within a district.

Each district board is comprised of representatives that are appointed by each public and private medical facility, ambulance service, and first responder service (EMS squads) operating within district boundaries. Only one representative from each squad may be appointed to the district board.

Fire Districts

Fire districts provide fire protection, public parks, water works, sewers, sidewalks, and street lighting, and sprinkling or oiling streets. They are established by the town selectmen after a petition is submitted by landowners

within the proposed service area. An elected prudential committee governs each district. The districts may, upon voter approval, levy ad valorem taxes.

These districts are to be distinguished from town fire districts, which are governed by the town selectmen. Such districts are not counted as separate governments for census purposes. See "Subordinate Agencies and Areas," below.

Housing Authorities

Housing authorities are established by resolution of Vermont cities, villages, or towns. Creation of the districts may be carried out based on the city, village, or town's own initiative, or by petition of residents. A board of commissioners, appointed by the mayor, governs each authority. Housing authorities may issue bonds and fix rates and rentals. Joint housing authorities may be formed by resolution of two or more cities, villages, or towns.

Natural Resources Conservation Districts

Natural resource conservation districts, formerly known as soil and water conservation districts, are created by the State Natural Resources Conservation Council. Organization of these districts is accomplished through petition of at least 25 landowners within the proposed district region, and after referendum. Districts are governed by a board consisting of five members. Two members are appointed by the State Natural Resources Conservation Council. The other three members are elected by the landowners. Districts may require contributions from benefited landowners and may accept federal and state aid.

Regional Transit Authorities and Districts

Two types of regional transit agencies are authorized by Vermont statutes:

Regional transit authorities
Regional transit districts

Two or more cities, towns, or villages may form a regional transit authority, after voter approval, to provide transit service directly or by contract. A board of commissioners consisting of two appointees from each member government governs each authority. The authority may fix fares and assess participating governments on the basis of weekly miles of service. The authority may accept gifts, grants, or loans and may issue bonds with voter approval. The Chittenden County Transportation Authority was established by a special act that outlined provisions that are similar to the general law authorizing regional transit authorities.

Regional transit districts are formed by an agreement between two or more cities, towns, or villages after approval of the State Transportation Board and the voters. A board consisting of one or more representatives of each

²EMS districts were classified as state dependent agencies in 1997.

participating city, town, or village governs each district. The districts may fix fares, rates, and charges, and request contributions from participating governments.

Solid Waste Management Districts

Solid waste management districts are established under special acts or intergovernmental agreements (to include interstate compacts creating a district like the Southern Windsor-Windham County Solid Waste Management District) with similar provisions. The number of district board members representing each participating municipality is specified in the special act or intergovernmental agreement. These districts may apportion the share of the district budget to be met by appropriations from each participating municipality, except for the Rutland County Solid Waste District, which may levy ad valorem taxes and receive revenues from the sale of steam. These districts may issue bonds (after voter approval in the case of the Rutland County Solid Waste District). Solid waste management districts may also be created as union municipal districts.

Union Municipal Districts

These districts are created upon approval of the attorney general and the voters of two or more member cities, towns, or villages. The districts promote more efficient and economical operation of any local government service, such as solid waste management, highways, or parks and recreation. The districts are governed by a joint municipal survey committee consisting of three representatives designated by the legislative branch of each participating city, town, or village. Also, if there is a local planning commission, one of the three representatives shall be a commission member. If the municipality is served by a regional planning commission, one member shall be an ex officio representative. The districts may issue bonds upon voter approval and accept funds, grants, and services from any public or private source. Cities, towns, and villages which are party to the district contract may appropriate funds for the district and levy taxes and issue special purpose bonds for payment of the appropriation.

Some union municipal districts may be classified as subordinate agencies based on the provisions of the interlocal agreement. See "Subordinate Agencies and Areas," below.

Vermont Public Power Supply Authority

This authority was created by special act from the Vermont Public Power Supply System Inc. The authority governing body is a board of directors appointed by the governing bodies of participating cities, towns, villages, and electric cooperatives. The authority may collect rates and fees and may issue revenue bonds.

SUBORDINATE AGENCIES AND AREAS

Listed below are various governmental designations in Vermont that have certain characteristics of governmental

units, but are classified in census statistics as subordinate agencies of the state or local governments. These agencies are not counted as separate governments. Legal provisions for some of the larger organizations are discussed below (see "Public School Systems," above, regarding educational agencies of this nature).

Vermont Economic Development Authority (state).

This authority was established by special act to finance the construction of industrial facilities and administer family farm assistance and a job start program. The authority board consists of 12 members, nine of whom are appointed by the Governor with the consent of the senate, and the commissioner of agriculture, food and markets, the secretary of development and community affairs and the state treasurer who serve in an ex officio capacity. The authority may make mortgage loans, fix charges and issue state revenue bonds upon approval by the Governor and the state treasurer. Towns, cities, and villages may issue bonds for industrial facility projects with approval from the authority.

Vermont Educational and Health Buildings Finance Agency (state).

This authority was established by a special act to finance education and health related building projects. The agency board consists of seven members appointed by the Governor, two additional members appointed by the aforementioned seven, plus the commissioner of education, the secretary of human services, the state treasurer, and the secretary of administration who serve ex officio. The authority may fix rentals and charges collected for use of authority facilities and may issue revenue bonds.

Vermont Housing Finance Agency (state). This agency was formed to provide mortgage credit for low and moderate income housing. The governing body is a board of seven commissioners, including four commissioners appointed by the Governor, and the commissioner of banking, insurance and securities, the state treasurer, and the secretary of development and community affairs or their designees, who serve in an ex officio capacity. The agency may fix charges in connection with its loans, accept gifts, receive state and federal grants, and issue revenue bonds.

Vermont Municipal Bond Bank (state). This agency was established by special act to make funds available at reduced rates to governmental units in the state for financing public improvements. The bank governing board consists of the state treasurer, ex officio and four directors appointed by the Governor with the consent of the senate. The bank may fix fees and charges for its services, receive state or federal appropriations, and issue revenue bonds.

Vermont State Housing Authority (state). This authority was established by special act to provide assisted housing. A seven member commission appointed by the

Governor with consent of the senate governs the authority. The authority may issue revenue bonds and fix and collect charges for its services.

Other examples include:

State³

Highway Districts
Vermont District Environmental Commission and Environmental Districts
Vermont Environmental Board
Vermont Health Care Authority
Vermont Home Mortgage Guarantee Board
Vermont Housing and Conservation Board
Vermont Independent School Finance Authority
Vermont Natural Resources Agency
Vermont Natural Resources Conservation Council

³The Vermont Whey Pollution Abatement Authority (Repealed 1966).

Vermont Qualifying Facility Contract Mitigation Authority
Vermont State Colleges, Inc.
Vermont Student Assistance Corporation
Vermont Transportation Authority
Vermont Water Resources Board

Municipal

Cemetery commissions
Conservation commissions
Local health districts
Union municipal districts (see also special districts)
Urban renewal agencies

Town

Cemetery commissions
Conservation commissions
Fire districts governed by town selectmen
Local health districts
Union municipal districts (see also special districts)
Urban renewal agencies