

WASHINGTON

Washington ranks 19th among the states in number of local governments, with 1,845 as of October 2007.

COUNTY GOVERNMENTS (39)

There are no areas in Washington lacking county government. A county's governing body is known as the board of county commissioners except for home-rule counties, which are governed by the county council. Although consolidated city-county governments are authorized by state statutes, none currently exist.

SUBCOUNTY GENERAL PURPOSE GOVERNMENTS (281)

Municipal Governments (281)

Municipal governments in Washington are the cities and towns. Municipalities are divided into classes according to population size, as follows:

- First class—10,000 inhabitants or more and a home-rule charter
- Second class—1,500 or more inhabitants and no home-rule charter
- Towns—Fewer than 1,500 inhabitants and no home-rule charter

Change from one class to another occurs only after voter approval. Cities with a population of 10,000 or more may adopt a home-rule charter with voter approval. In addition, since 1969, all municipalities may acquire statutory home rule by becoming a noncharter code municipality. Two cities, Union Gap and Waitsburg, operate under charters granted prior to 1889 by the former Washington territory.

The minimum population requirement for incorporation is 300; however, if the proposed incorporation is within 5 air miles of a city of 15,000 population or more, the minimum population requirement is 3,000.

For provisions governing "metropolitan municipal corporations," see "Special District

Governments," below.

Township Governments (0)

Authorizing legislation for townships was repealed in 1997. Townships were last reported in operation for the 1972 Census of Governments.

PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEMS (296)

School District Governments (296)

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

- First class school districts—2,000 or more pupils
- Second class school districts—fewer than 2,000 pupils

A school district may include territory in more than one county. Such districts are called joint (intercounty) school districts. Also, school districts are divided into high school and nonhigh school districts. An elected board of directors administers each school district. A school district may levy a special tax for maintenance and operation or may issue bonds for capital construction after voter approval.

Dependent Public School Systems (0)

Washington has no dependent public school systems.

Other Educational Activities

Educational services districts consist of one or more counties or portions of counties. They provide regional administration of local school districts. These districts are classified, for census reporting, as joint educational service agencies of the participating school districts and are not counted as separate governments.

The community colleges and technical colleges in Washington are classified for census purposes as state institutions and are not counted as separate governments. A board of

trustees appointed by the Governor governs each college.

In addition, school districts may jointly establish and operate vocational skills programs by means of cooperative agreements. The vocational skills programs are classified as joint educational service agencies of the participating school districts and are not counted as separate governments.

SPECIAL DISTRICT GOVERNMENTS (1,229)

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

Agencies Created Under the Interlocal Cooperation Act

This act was passed in 1967. Local government units may agree to exercise any of their powers jointly. Such an agreement may establish a separate agency that may or may not be counted as a government for census purposes. The functions to be performed by such an agency are specified in the agreement. Agencies established under this law may have a wide variety of names.

Air Pollution Control Authorities

A 1967 general law establishes air pollution control authorities in counties with a population of 125,000 or more and permits the creation of air pollution control authorities in other counties. In these latter counties, authorities may be established by the board of county commissioners on its own initiative or upon petition of property owners, after public hearing. Multicounty authorities may be established by contiguous counties. A board of directors, appointed by the governing bodies of the establishing county or counties and municipalities within each county, governs each authority. The authorities apportion their fiscal needs to the underlying governments according to population and/or assessed valuation. Air pollution control authorities may levy property taxes with voter approval.

Cemetery Districts

Cemetery districts may be established by the board of county commissioners after petition, hearing, and voter approval. An elected board of commissioners governs each district. The districts may levy ad valorem taxes.

County Airport Districts

County airport districts are established by the county governing body after voter petition and referendum. Voters may also petition for an elected district board of commissioners. A district may levy ad valorem taxes if approved by the voters, fix charges and revenues, and issue revenue bonds.

A county airport district administered by the county governing body is not counted as a separate government. See “Subordinate Agencies and Areas,” below.

Cultural Arts, Stadium, and Convention Districts

The creation of these districts may be initiated by petition of voters, by resolution of a county, by resolution of two or more cities in the same county, or by joint resolution of two or more counties. A public hearing and referendum are held. The district governing body consists of ex officio representatives of the participating governments, as specified in the resolution creating the district. The districts may receive the proceeds of county hotel-motel tax levies, issue revenue bonds, and, after voter approval, may levy ad valorem taxes and issue general obligation bonds.

Districts governed by the commissioners of a single county ex officio are not counted as separate governments. See “Subordinate Agencies and Areas,” below.

Diking and Drainage Districts

Washington statutes authorize the following types of diking and drainage districts:

Diking districts—1895 law
Drainage districts—1895 law

Intercounty diking and drainage districts—1909 law

Diking districts or drainage districts may be established by the board of county commissioners after petition of landowners, hearing, and voter approval under two separate 1895 laws. Intercounty diking and drainage districts are established by a joint meeting of the commissioner of public lands and the participating county boards after petition of landowners, subject to voter approval.

Elected boards of commissioners govern all three types of districts. The districts may impose special benefit assessments and issue bonds. Participating counties and cities may appropriate funds for the district. In addition, cities within diking and drainage districts may levy an assessment on property. A general law authorizing the establishment of ditch districts has been repealed, but some districts remain in existence. Districts created under the diking and drainage district law may be known as “flood control districts.”

Drainage and diking districts may reorganize as improvement districts. Improvement districts for drainage, diking, or sewerage (organized under a 1913 law) are not counted as separate governments. See “Subordinate Agencies and Areas,” below.

Fire Protection Districts

Fire protection districts may be established in unincorporated areas upon petition of voters filed with the county auditor and after a hearing and election called by the board of county commissioners. An elected board of commissioners governs each district. The districts may issue bonds and levy ad valorem taxes; these powers may require voter approval. With voter approval, the districts may levy benefit charges. Districts providing emergency medical services may set fees.

Local improvement districts may be created within fire protection districts. These districts have the power to levy special benefit assessments but are subordinate areas of the

fire protection districts. Local improvement districts are not counted as separate governments.

Flood Control Districts—1937 Act

Under a 1937 general law, these districts may be established upon petition of property owners or upon resolution of the governing body of the county or the municipality to be served, after a public hearing and voter approval. An elected board of directors governs each district. The districts may levy assessments and issue bonds.

Flood control districts established under a 1935 law are not counted as separate governments. See “Subordinate Agencies and Areas,” below.

Health Districts

Health districts may be created by interlocal agreements pursuant to general law to serve multiple local governments. The districts may serve any combination of counties, cities, and towns. The boards are established per the agreement. These boards receive contributions from the participating governments per the creating agreements.

Health districts created by one or two counties are not counted as separate governments. See “Subordinate Agencies and Areas,” below.

Housing Authorities

The governing body of any county, city, or town may create a housing authority by resolution. Joint city-county housing authorities are created by agreement between the city and county governing bodies. County housing authority boards are appointed by the county governing body. City or town housing authority boards are appointed by the mayor. Housing authorities may fix rentals and charges and issue bonds.

The Columbia Gorge Housing Authority, a joint housing authority established with the state of Oregon, is located in and counted in Oregon.

Hydroelectric Resources Authorities

Authorities to build, operate, and maintain hydroelectric facilities are created by agreement between one or more irrigation districts and any combination of cities, towns, or public utility districts. The composition of the authority governing body is specified in the agreement creating each authority. The authorities may fix rates, tolls, and charges and may issue revenue bonds.

Irrigation Districts

These districts are created by the county board of commissioners after petition of landowners and after voter approval. Such districts may also provide drainage, domestic water supply, and electric power facilities as well as irrigation. An elected board of directors governs each district. The districts may fix rates and charges, levy special benefit assessments, and, with voter approval, issue bonds. These districts also may be known as “reclamation districts.”

Irrigation and rehabilitation districts are formed from irrigation districts under special conditions and possess the same type of organization and powers.

Utility local improvement districts may be established by irrigation districts. They are classified as dependent activities of the irrigation districts for census purposes and are not counted as separate governments.

Irrigation Districts—Joint Control

Irrigation districts under joint control may be established upon petition of landowners to the county, followed by county resolution, public hearing, and referendum. These districts administer water works, main and branch canals and water lines, and the water facilities of two or more irrigation districts. The district is governed by a board of directors consisting of a president appointed by the county board and the resident owner of each tract of land involved. The districts levy special assessments and charges upon each member irrigation district.

Joint Operating Agencies for Electric Power

These agencies may be established by any combination of two cities or public utility districts to develop and sell electric power. The system board of directors consists of one representative from each of the participating governments. The system may fix rates and charges for the sale of power and may issue revenue bonds. The Conservation and Renewable Energy System and Energy Northwest were established under this legislation.

Library Districts

Washington statutes authorize the following types of library districts that are counted as governments for census purposes:

Island library districts are established in counties with fewer than 25,000 in population and consisting solely of islands (San Juan) upon petition of voters to the county commission and after voter approval. A board of trustees appointed by the county commissioners governs each district. The districts may levy ad valorem taxes and issue bonds.

Regional libraries are formed by action of the governing bodies of any two or more local governments. The intergovernmental agreement establishing the regional library specifies the membership of the library board. Expenses of the regional library are apportioned among the participating governments as provided in the agreement.

Rural library districts are established in unincorporated areas by the county commissioners after petition of voters and voter approval. A board of library trustees, appointed by the county commissioners, governs each district. The districts may levy ad valorem taxes and issue bonds.

Intercounty rural library districts are formed by identical resolutions of the boards of two or more county commissioners or by majority vote of the county commissioners in joint session, after voter petition and approval. The district

board of trustees is appointed jointly by the participating county boards. District finances and powers are the same as for rural library districts.

Metropolitan Municipal Corporations

General law provides that any area containing two or more cities, one of which is a city of 10,000 or more, may organize as a metropolitan municipal corporation for one or more of the following metropolitan functions: sewage disposal, water supply, public transportation, garbage disposal, parks and parkways, and planning. Establishment is by approval of the voters at an election that has been called either by:

- resolution of the council of a central city,
- resolution of the councils of two or more component cities other than a central city,
- resolution of the board of commissioners of a central county, or
- petition of the voters of the metropolitan area.

A metropolitan council consisting of elected officials of the component counties and cities governs each corporation. Metropolitan municipal corporations may fix fees and charges, issue revenue bonds, and, with voter approval, issue general obligation bonds. They may also levy a retail sales and use tax and a motor vehicle excise tax for public transportation purposes upon voter approval. A 1-year property tax may only be submitted for voter approval at the establishing election. If income is insufficient, participating towns and cities make supplemental payments to the corporation. No metropolitan municipal corporations were reported in operation as of October 2007.

Local improvement districts or utility local improvement districts may be established by the metropolitan municipal corporations. They are classified as dependent activities of the metropolitan municipal corporations for census purposes and are not counted as separate governments.

Metropolitan Park Districts

A city of 5,000 or more in population plus contiguous area may establish a metropolitan park district by an election that has been called either by petition of the voters or by the city council on its own initiative. An elected board of park commissioners governs each district. The district may levy ad valorem taxes and issue bonds. Voter approval is necessary for bond issues that exceed a specified percentage of the assessed value of the property in the district.

Mosquito Control Districts

Mosquito control districts may be established upon petition of voters to the county commissioners or by resolution of intent by the board of county commissioners, followed by hearing and voter approval. A board of trustees, appointed by the governing bodies of the participating counties and cities, governs each district. The districts may, with voter approval, issue general obligation bonds and levy ad valorem taxes.

Park and Recreation Districts

General law authorizes the formation of park and recreation districts upon petition of voters after hearing and voter approval. An elected board of commissioners governs each district. The districts may fix rates and charges and issue bonds. Upon voter approval, the districts may levy ad valorem taxes.

Park districts may create local improvement districts; the local improvement districts are classified as dependent activities of the park and recreation districts and are not counted as separate governments.

Port Districts

Port districts are established by an election that is called by the board of county commissioners upon petition of voters or on its own initiative. Port districts furnish airport or port facilities and promote the use of such facilities. An elected port commission governs each district. The districts may fix rates and charges, levy ad

valorem taxes, and issue bonds. Port districts may enter into agreements with local governments for the purpose of exercising the powers of a community renewal agency.

Industrial development districts as well as local improvement districts may be established by and within a port district as a dependent activity of the port district. Industrial development districts and local improvement districts are not counted as separate governments.

Public Facilities Districts - 1988 law

Under the 1988 law, public facilities districts may be created by county resolution. Each district is governed by a board of directors appointed by the governing body of the county, the governing body of the largest city in the county, and/or by the Governor based on population requirements. The districts may set fees and issue revenue bonds. With voter approval, districts may levy lodging taxes and ad valorem taxes and may issue general obligation bonds.

Public Facilities Districts - 1999 law

Under the 1999 law, public facilities districts may be created by county, city, or town governing bodies singly or jointly provided that the county or counties involved meet population requirements. Each district is governed by a board of directors appointed by the participating governments. The districts set fees, issue revenue bonds, and levy sales and use taxes and excise taxes. With voter approval, the districts may levy ad valorem taxes and may issue general obligation bonds.

Public Hospital Districts

Hospital districts are established upon resolution of or petition to the board of county commissioners, after voter approval. An elected board of commissioners governs each district. The districts may fix rates and issue general obligation and revenue bonds. With voter approval, the districts may set and levy ad valorem taxes.

Public Transportation Benefit Area Authorities

These authorities are created by resolution of the county commissioners upon recommendation of a transportation improvement conference (consisting of city council representatives and county commissioners) and public hearing. The authority board consists of elected officials selected by the governing bodies of component cities and counties. The authorities may fix rates and fares. Authorities providing ferry service may, with voter approval, levy a motor vehicle excise tax and a sales and use tax.

Unincorporated public transportation benefit areas are not counted as separate governments. See "Subordinate Agencies and Areas," below.

Public Utility Districts

Districts for the conservation and the supply of domestic and irrigation water and electric light and power are created by a resolution of or a petition to the board of county commissioners after voter approval. An elected board of public utility commissioners governs each district. The districts may set rates and fees, levy ad valorem taxes, and issue bonds.

Local utility districts with the power to levy benefit assessments may be established as dependent activities of the parent public utility district. They are not counted as separate governments.

Regional Fire Protection Authorities

Any two or more adjacent fire protection jurisdictions (fire district, city, town, port district, or Indian tribe) may create an authority and convene a planning committee. The planning committee submits a plan and a proposal for ad valorem taxes or benefit charges for voter approval. If the referendum passes, the participating governments appoint representatives to a governing board. The authorities may issue general obligation bonds in addition to levying ad valorem taxes or benefit charges. The authorities also may set

charges for ambulance service, if this is a function.

Regional Support Networks

Two or more counties may form a regional support network by interlocal agreement to serve a state designated area per contract with the state secretary of the department of social and health services. Tribal authorities may be included in the agreement. The networks contract with licensed mental health service providers and also may serve as a licensed service provider. The membership of each governing board is set by the creating agreement. The networks are funded by fees fixed by the state and funds from the federal government, state, and participating local governments.

Regional support networks created by a single county are not counted as separate governments. See “Subordinate Areas and Agencies,” below. In addition, private entities may serve as the regional support network; these are not counted.

Regional Transit Authorities

This law has special application to the Central Puget Sound area. Two or more contiguous counties each with a population of 400,000 or more may initiate the process of creating a regional transit authority. A joint regional policy committee creates a plan. The counties, upon accepting the plan, create the authority by resolution and appoint a board. Voter approval of the proposed taxes and, effectively, the plan is required. A failed referendum may be followed by repeat attempts for up to 2 years. If the tax proposition is not approved within 2 years, the authority may be recreated as a single-county body by its own resolution or may dissolve itself. Each authority is governed by a board consisting of county and municipal officials serving ex officio and appointed by the county executive with confirmation by the county governing body. The state secretary of transportation also serves on the board. The authorities may fix rates, tolls, fares, and charges. The authorities may issue general obligation bonds, special assessment bonds,

and revenue bonds. The authorities may create local improvement districts and impose special assessments within the districts. The voters may approve additional taxes to fund an authority. The Central Puget Sound Regional Transit Authority was created under this law.

Local improvement districts and commissions, public corporations, or authorities created by a regional transit authority are not counted as separate governments.

Water-Sewer Districts¹

Water-sewer districts, which may be known as water-sewer districts, water districts, or sewer districts, may include one or more counties, cities, towns, or other political subdivisions. They may provide water supply, sanitary sewer systems, fire protection, and street lighting. The districts are created upon petition of voters to the board of county commissioners, followed by a hearing and voter approval. An elected board of commissioners governs each district. The districts may levy special benefit assessments, fix rates and charges, issue bonds, and submit property tax levies to the voters. Water-sewer districts may merge into irrigation districts.

Local improvement districts or utility local improvement districts may be created within a water-sewer district as dependent activities of the parent water-sewer district. They are not counted as separate governments.

SUBORDINATE AGENCIES AND AREAS

Shown below are various governmental designations in Washington 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).

Among the subordinate agencies and areas listed below, some represent “special taxing areas” within the territory of an established

government. This method of financing additional services in limited areas by property taxation, while also used by some municipal and township governments in a few states, is more widely utilized by county governments. In the listing below of authorized county-related agencies, a bullet (*) appears for each entity of this kind—i.e., any that may individually serve a portion rather than all of a county and for which a tax may be levied against the assessed value of the property in the area served.

Conservation districts (county). These districts are established to provide soil and water conservation services upon petition of landowners to the state conservation commission after public hearing and voter approval. A board of supervisors, three elected and two appointed by the state conservation commission, governs each district. A conservation district has no independent revenue raising powers, but it may accept contributions, receive special assessments collected by the county, and manage and lease property.

Public stadium authorities (state). These authorities may be created upon resolution of any county with a letter of intent with a team affiliate. Each authority is governed by a board of directors appointed by the Governor. The authorities may set fees and charges. The state may issue bonds on behalf of the authority with voter approval. The Washington State Public Stadium Authority was created under this act.

Washington Health Care Facilities Authority (state). This authority was established by state law to assist and encourage the building and maintenance of modern health care facilities. The authority governing body consists of the Governor, the lieutenant governor, the insurance commissioner, the secretary of health, and a public member appointed by the Governor. The authority may set fees and charges for services and may issue revenue bonds.

Washington State Housing Finance Commission (state). This commission was

created by act of the legislature to provide mortgage credit for low- and moderate-income housing. The commission consists of 11 members, nine of whom are appointed by the Governor, and the state treasurer and the director of community, trade, and economic development ex officio. The commission may fix fees and charges in connection with the provision of mortgage credit and may issue bonds.

Other examples include:

State

Economic Development Finance Authority
Home Care Quality Authority
Infestation control districts
Life Sciences Discovery Fund Authority
Pioneer Square-International District
Puget Sound Action Team and Puget Sound Council
Regional transportation investment districts
Tobacco Settlement Authority
Washington Higher Education Facilities Authority
Washington State Building Authority
Washington State Horse Park Authority

County²

Community councils (for unincorporated areas of island counties)
County airport districts governed by county commissioners
*County park and recreation service areas
County public transportation authorities
County rail districts
County road districts
County road improvement districts
Cultural arts, stadium, and convention districts (single county)
Drainage, diking, or sewerage improvement districts—1913 law
Emergency medical service districts
Emergency service communication districts
* Flood control districts—1935 act
Flood control zone districts
Health districts
Intercounty weed districts
Lake management districts
Library capital facility areas
Multipurpose community centers (county)
Parking and business improvement areas

(county)
Public corporations—1974 law (county)
Public corporations for economic development—1981 law (county)
Public waterway districts
Regional support networks
River and harbor improvement districts
Service districts (for bridge and road improvements)
Shellfish protection districts
Solid waste collection districts—1971 law
Solid waste disposal districts—1982 law
Television reception improvement districts
Transportation benefit districts—1987 law (county)
Unincorporated transportation benefit areas
Utility local improvement districts
Water conservancy boards
Weed control districts

Municipal³

Community preservation and development authorities
Community renewal agencies (formerly urban renewal agencies)
Flood control districts—1935 act
Lake management districts
Local improvement districts
Multipurpose community centers (municipal)
Parking and business improvement areas (municipal)
Parking commissions
Pike Place Market Preservation and Development Authority (Seattle)
Public corporations—1974 law (municipal)
Public corporations for economic

development—1981 law (municipal)
Transportation benefit districts—1987 law (municipal)
Urban emergency medical service districts
Utility local improvement districts

Other

Public corporations established by port districts are classified as dependent activities of the port districts and are not counted as separate governments. Washington laws also provide for various types of local areas for election purposes and administration of justice.

- 1 Originally created as a water or sewer district, state statutes hold that all of these districts are considered “water-sewer districts.”
- 2 The 1953 legislation authorizing flood control districts has been repealed, but existing districts may continue to operate.

Water conservancy boards, classified as state dependent agencies for the 2002 Census of Governments, are reclassified as county dependent agencies.

3. Corporations organized under the public corporation law may be created to receive and administer state and federal grants and to perform any lawful purpose. The Seattle Museum Development Authority is an example of an agency created under this law.