

Name _____



Other Local Governments

By Phyllis Naegeli

The United States has nearly 90,000 local governments. Of these, about 19,500 are municipal governments where four-fifths of the population lives. The remaining types of government include metropolitan governments, towns and townships, counties, and special districts. Most of the people living within metropolitan areas and municipalities also live within counties or special districts. Counties and special districts also include the people who live in towns and townships.

A few areas of the United States have combined the responsibilities of counties and municipalities to form a metropolitan government. People who agree with this process feel that combining the governments of cities and suburbs will enable more services to be available in a more efficient manner. Suburban areas can be affected by air and water pollution created in a city. Suburban communities believe that one government should provide regulations for these problems. People who live within a city feel that taxes collected from suburban areas would help to pay for city services used by those who live in the suburbs. Those who disagree with forming a metropolitan government do not believe that consolidating governments makes services more efficient. They believe that maintaining different governments throughout the metropolitan area maintains a healthy competition between local communities. Individual governments must provide different services in order to attract residents. This causes governments to be more alert to the needs of its community members. Two governments that have consolidated in the past century are Davidson County with Nashville, Tennessee, and Richmond County with Atlanta, Georgia.

Less than half of the states in the U.S. have smaller, organized areas called townships or towns. Towns and townships usually provide only basic services (roads, schools, and welfare assistance) to their community members. In Mid-Atlantic states such as New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and New York, townships bring many rural areas together under an organized government. Some towns in New England make use of the purest form of democracy in the United States. Town meetings are held on an annual basis, and the people of

the town gather to discuss and vote on current issues affecting the town. This can be a long process as people talk about the best way to solve these concerns. Today, some small towns are turning to representative town meetings. When this happens, the voters in a town choose people to represent their views at a town meeting. This helps to make the town meeting more efficient. Both towns and townships have elected officers to handle legislative duties such as collecting taxes, making and administering town laws, and providing for schools and welfare programs.

Within each of these types of governments are other organized areas that have separate responsibilities. Each state in the U.S. has subdivisions within their borders called counties. Elected boards and officials called commissioners run counties. In some states, mainly in the Northeast, counties serve as a judicial district. In the Midwest, counties may serve as the local government for many rural areas. In most states, counties are responsible for maintaining jails, recording deeds and other legal documents, overseeing elections, constructing bridges, maintaining public roads, and running family and probate courts.

Each state also has special districts run by commissions that have very specific purposes. These districts include water supply districts, sewage disposal districts, and transportation districts. The most well-known type of district is the school district. Voters in each district elect people to serve on a special board to oversee each type of district. These districts may include portions of very large cities, one large city, two or three smaller cities, or many small towns.

A delicate balance of power between federal, state, and local governments exists today.

The federal government leads the country as a whole; state governments watch over the affairs of a whole state. This leaves the local governments to provide services that would be impossible for the state or federal government to handle. The Constitution grants the rights not given to the federal government "to the states or to the people." Today, local governments maintain the closest contact with the people in America.

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Questions

- _____ 1. Four-fifths of the population of the United States live in _____.
- A. rural areas
 - B. counties
 - C. school districts
 - D. municipalities
- _____ 2. More than half of the states in the U.S. have small organized areas called townships or towns.
- A. false
 - B. true
- _____ 3. In what part of the country do towns hold annual meetings for the people of the town to vote on current issues?
- A. the Mid-Atlantic
 - B. the South
 - C. the Midwest
 - D. New England
- _____ 4. What is the most well-known type of district?
- A. school district
 - B. water district
 - C. sewer district
 - D. judicial district
- _____ 5. People who agree with consolidating governments in a metropolitan area believe that it will allow government to provide services that are more efficient.
- A. false
 - B. true

6. What other type of government do people living within municipalities, towns, and townships also reside within?

- _____ 7. Why do some people disagree with creating a metropolitan government?
- A. Maintaining separate governments would help collect taxes for city services from suburban areas.
 - B. Maintaining separate governments would provide services in a more efficient manner.
 - C. Maintaining separate governments would maintain a healthy diversity in suburban communities.
 - D. Maintaining separate governments would help regulate air and water pollution.