

Chapter Summary

Local Government

Lesson 1 *City Governments*

- A city or municipality is an area with an organized government that provides services to its residents.
- A state grants a city a charter. Like a constitution, a city charter describes the type of city government, its structure, and its powers.
- The two main forms of city government are the mayor-council form and the council-manager form.
- In a mayor-council form of government, the mayor has executive power and appoints people to run city departments. The city council has legislative power and approves the budget.
- Some cities elect council members based on voting districts or wards, while others hold citywide elections for all members.
- The city charter determines whether a mayor is weak or strong. Strong mayors write city budgets, veto laws, and appoint city officials.
- In the council-manager form of government, the city manager draws up a budget and oversees departments. The city council can hire and fire the city manager.
- The commission form of government is no longer very common. It divides executive power among commissioners who head city departments and meet to pass ordinances.
- A special district is a unit of government formed to carry out a specific task, such as education or transportation.
- Metropolitan areas include cities and the communities or suburbs near or around cities.

Lesson 2 *County Governments*

- Counties vary in size and population but they are usually a state's largest territorial and political units.
- Boards of commissioners or supervisors run most counties. Board members usually serve four-year terms, pass ordinances, set the budget, and levy taxes.

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Lesson 2 *County Governments, Cont.*

- In one model of county government, the board of commissioners serves executive and legislative roles.
- In a second model of county government, the board serves as the legislature and names a county manager as the executive.
- In a third model of county government, the board operates as a legislature and the people elect a county executive.
- County sheriffs enforce the law.
- District attorneys investigate, charge, and prosecute people accused of crimes.
- The county assessor estimates the value of property on which property taxes are based.
- The treasurer is in charge of the county's funds.
- The auditor makes sure county money is spent properly.
- The county clerk keeps official government records.
- The coroner helps the police investigate suspicious deaths.

Lesson 3 *Towns, Townships, and Villages*

- Counties are often divided into smaller political units. In New England they are called towns. Towns handle most of the day-to-day duties of government while counties oversee the local judicial system.
- In the Midwest these smaller political units are called townships. Townships can include several small communities and often share power with county government.
- County government is more important in the South and the West where there may be no townships.
- In early New England town meetings, citizens, not elected representatives, made the important decisions. This form of direct democracy is no longer practical for day-to-day governing.

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Lesson 3 *Towns, Townships, and Villages, Cont.*

- Today, many New England towns still hold yearly town meetings, but they also elect officials to run the daily business of local government.
- Villages are the smallest units of local government. Because their populations are small they may not need their own government and instead rely on county or township government to serve them.