



State and Local Governments

Instructors of civic classes teach that the divisions of our legislative branches of government vary slightly around the nation. This document covers the basic definitions as well as how you can contact your state and local elected officials.

State government often reflects the federal government in structure. A governor and lieutenant governor, cabinet positions, state elected or appointed officers such as the attorney general, elected legislators and a variety of state agencies administer the state's services.

Local government is comprised of municipal government and county government. The names may differ, but the basic functions remain intact. Municipal government provides incorporated areas with city-related services such as law enforcement (city police) and city election services. County government provides unincorporated areas with similar services including law enforcement (sheriff's department) and statewide election services.

Almost all government entities possess taxing authority. Funds collected support the services and projects of each entity. The ultimate responsibility for any service or project falls under the entity with jurisdiction over its line item in the budget. For example, if the city is building a new airport and has increased city tax to finance it, then the airport is likely to be included in the budget of city government and not the state or county. Consequently, if such an issue were to be addressed (e.g., organizing an effort to fight an onerous tax), it would be crucial to approach the "correct" legislators utilizing suitable tactics.

How to find State and Local Government Information

State Government Information

State legislature websites provide the most information at your fingertips. To find your state legislature website go to <https://www.congress.gov/state-legislature-websites> and click on your state.

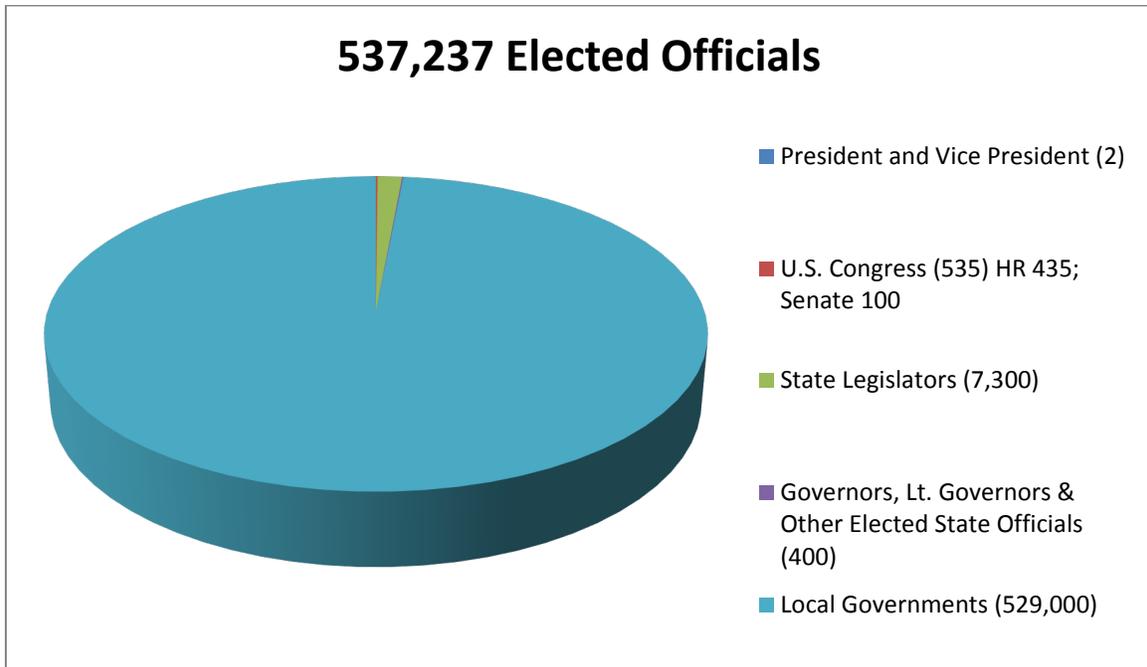
Local Government Information

To find your county government website go to <https://www.usa.gov/local-governments>. Here you will pick your state, then county.

For city government, search the "city" name you want to research and the word "government" (e.g. "Phoenix city government" and we find www.phoenix.gov).



The chart below shows that local government elected officials clearly outnumber state and federal officials.



More Web Tools

State Legislators – www.ncsl.org

The official site for the National Conference of State Legislatures. It provides public users access to many reports on issues, research, state and federal committee news, and is a gateway to state Legislative Websites (found in the Resources & Directories tab). Here you can search a “state” and “content” (e.g. Issue Reports, or Bills).

The United States Conference of Mayors – www.usmayors.org

The official site for the United States Conference of Mayors. It provides access to news, reports, best practices, issues research, and mayoral news. Under the Issues Tab, they have a variety of subsections of importance.

Vote-Smart – www.votesmart.org

Get the facts – not politics. This site is a non-partisan database that provides biographical information, voting records, position statements on issues, campaign finance and evaluations of public officials and candidates running for public office.