

How Are Local Governments Organized?

A. WHAT STUDENTS WILL LEARN IN UNIT TWO

Students will understand how government services are organized and delivered at the local level. Students will be able to:

- Differentiate among organizational charts of cities, counties and school districts, based on the types of services delivered.
- Identify special districts as the most common form of local government, describe the difference between dependent and independent types, and explain what an enterprise special district is.
- Identify the function of various districts, given a chart of special district types.
- Name the different types of school districts into which the state's more than 1,000 districts are divided.
- Identify the different structures of city and county government and describe the strengths of each type of organizational structure.

- Identify several of the major regional governments in California and what functions regional governments perform.
- Identify which local government organization has principal jurisdiction, given a list of services.

B. ADDITIONAL STUDENT ACTIVITIES

1. Have students research the history and development of the county in which your school is located. Have groups of students in the class take a portion of the state's 58 counties and prepare information as to the origin of the counties' names, industries, demographics and other pertinent information. Have students develop a color-coded map of counties, based on population.
2. Obtain from the city or county clerk organizational charts of the community in which your school is located. Have students compare the typical structure charts in the text to those in your com-

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- community. Invite city officials to explain the differences. The same could be done with the school district organizational chart. Invite a person from your school district's central office or board of education to explain any differences.
3. Invite a city or county finance department official to explain which special districts exist in your community, using the chart on page 24 of the student guide as a reference. Students should determine when and why these districts were formed, how they were formed, how they are financed, and how they are organized and operated.
 4. Invite an official of LAFCO (Local Agency Formation Commission) to your class. Have this person provide an overview of the local region, focusing on possible new cities to come, and also some of the history of existing cities. Student projects could re-design the region for more efficiency regarding economics, transportation, pollution control, public safety, etc.
 5. Inventory the local government agencies serving your community. After doing a local government inventory as found on page 30, select a problem and identify which agencies would deal with it. Contact staff or elected officials of those agencies for their input on the problem's solution. Have the students prepare a position paper to be shared with community leaders or the local press.
 6. Have students select one of a number of issues shown in Activity Two on page 31 of the student guide and prepare, individually or in groups, an action plan to be submitted to the city or county agency that has responsibility

for dealing with the issue. A copy of the action plan could be sent to the local newspaper.

7. Have students prepare a map of the local community, including the boundaries of the city, school district(s) and other special districts existing in the area. The map should be keyed, color-coded and to scale. A brief explanation of each special district might be included.

C. UNIT TWO DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. California's 58 counties range in population from several thousand, typical in extreme northern sections, to many millions in Los Angeles. Considering the county map on page 18, how would you redesign and reduce (or increase) the number of counties to be more service and cost efficient? Which groups might oppose your plan?

Possible student responses

- a. *While answers will vary, students should be aware that county consolidation has many advocates in California. If students reconfigure the map, they should be aware that while consolidation may save money, services may be more remote and citizens may have less contact and influence with the county government.*
- b. *Opposition could well come from current office holders and employees of existing counties, as well as citizen groups who may have less influence on county decision making. A move to incorporate more cities could be a natural result.*

Question 2. What are four reasons that people want to establish cities? If you reside in a city, or live in a county area

that plans to become a city, which of the four reasons is most important for your community and why?

Possible student responses

- a. *To: (1) preserve a community's identity and character, (2) provide better services, (3) plan for future development and land use decisions and (4) control public spending and taxes.*
- b. *Answers will vary by community. Rural areas might have a focus on future development; older areas on identity and character; newer communities on better services.*

Question 3. What are three types of school districts? What are the two principal types of city government design? In what major way is the governing of school districts similar to the governing of cities? What is your type of school district?

Possible student responses

- a. *Answers may include elementary, high school and unified.*
- b. *Mayor-council form and council-manager form.*
- c. *Council manager form of government is most common and is also the model for most school districts, with the school superintendent functioning much the same as a city manager.*
- d. *Answers will vary. Discussion might center on the efficiency of each type of school district, and their strengths and weaknesses.*

D. INTERDISCIPLINARY ACTIVITIES

Unit II presents the opportunity for:

- art classes to create poster-sized drawings of the state of California's county

divisions, or posters of counties in your immediate area.

- mechanical drawing or computer classes to create organizational charts appropriate for your area, both city, county and school districts.
- language arts or debate students to work on skills and techniques involved in doing the showcase debate for Unit II on page 32. In some instances, students with both classes could receive credit in each for working on the same debate project.

E. CHECK FOR UNDERSTANDING

Unit Two: How Are Local Governments Organized?

Answer Key to Questions on Page 33

1. How many counties are there in California?
58
2. What is the title of the officials elected to a county's legislative body?
Supervisor
3. How many counties operate under a charter?
12
4. What county was carved out of Los Angeles County?
Orange County
5. In what year was California's newest county formed?
1907
6. What is the name of the process of forming a new city?
Incorporation

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7. By 1994, California had how many cities?
470
8. What are the two legal types of cities in California today?
Charter and general law cities
9. How many charter cities are there?
85
10. Who has the power to change a city's charter?
The voters
11. Why are all new cities general law cities?
The authority to have a charter is extended only to an existing city.
12. Name the only city in California that is also a county.
San Francisco
13. What does the acronym LAFCO stand for?
Local Agency Formation Commission
14. Four members of the county LAFCO name the fifth; who does that fifth member represent?
The public at large
15. What percentage of voters must sign a petition to incorporate?
25 percent
16. What is the most common form of government in California?
A special district
17. What is the difference between "independent" and "dependent" special districts?
Independent districts have their own governing boards elected by their customers.
18. How does an "enterprise" district get its money?
It charges for its services.
19. As of 1994, how many school districts are there in California?
1,006
20. Which is the school district with the largest student enrollment in California?
Los Angeles Unified School District
21. Which grade levels are served by a "unified" school district?
Kindergarten through grade 12
22. What does the acronym SCAG stand for?
Southern California Association of Governments
23. What is the most important job a mayor does NOT do in a "weak mayor" system?
Appoint directors of departments
24. Which California city was the first to use the council-manager form of government?
Ukiah
25. Who hires and fires the city manager?
The city council