

# Local Government CECH-UP

## OVERVIEW

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### A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF MISSOURI LOCAL GOVERNMENT

#### Unit One: County Government

Counties are one of the oldest forms of local government in America. The first counties in Missouri were established in 1812, even before Missouri achieved statehood in 1821. There are 115 counties in Missouri, counting the city of St. Louis (see map - page xxxi). Each county has a **county seat**, where county business is transacted.

Today, counties operate under state authority, according to the state constitution and statutes passed by the General Assembly. The constitution and laws allow local governments to exist if they follow state rules and provide public services to people and businesses residing within their borders.

Counties are **general-purpose governments**, meaning that they are responsible for a broad range of activities. Some of these activities include keeping track of who owns property, law enforcement, and road maintenance within their borders.

The day-to-day operations of counties fall under six general headings.

1. **Law Enforcement** (example: operating court and county jails)
2. **Road Building and Maintenance** (example: snow removal)
3. **Land Use** (example: planning and zoning) NOTE:
4. **Public Health** (example: county-provided hospitals and clinics)
5. **Parks and Recreation** (example: skating rinks, swimming pools, summer camps)
6. **Administrative** (tax collection and distribution)

Note: Many counties do not include Land Use or Parks and Recreation.

The Missouri State Constitution divides counties into **four classes** based on the assessed value of all property in the county. **Assessed value** is a dollar amount that a county official called an assessor determines a property to be worth by calculating a percentage of the real market value.

The classification system determines how many county officials can be elected or appointed and how much they can be paid. Generally, all counties within the same class have the same powers and responsibilities under state law.

First class counties can design their own governmental structure under a **home-rule charter**, which allows some of the powers of the state to be transferred to counties. In return, county governments must meet rules established by the state, such as which services they must provide. The state offers home rule only to the largest counties.

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The benefit of a home-rule charter is that it allows a county and its citizens to have more flexibility in structuring county government and in making taxation and spending decisions. The idea behind this is that counties with large populations, such as those with large urban areas, have special needs for additional public goods and services as they grow. There are two common organizational models of county government in Missouri, the **County Commission Model** and the **County Executive Model**.

### 1. County Commission Model

Most counties in Missouri have a County Commission composed of three elected officials. The presiding commissioner is elected county-wide and serves four years. Two associate commissioners represent half-county districts and also serve four-year terms. When counties were established in Missouri, they were governed by three county judges. These judges had judicial responsibilities as well as executive responsibilities. Over the years, these judges relinquished their judicial duties and took on executive and legislative functions. In 1985, the judges were renamed commissioners in order to reflect their modern roles.

### 2. County Executive Model

The less common Charter Counties, including St. Louis County, divide the legislative and executive functions to form the County Executive Model. Legislative affairs are dealt with by county council members, who are typically elected from districts within the county. The County Executive Plan in use in Kansas City provides for election of county legislators both county-wide and by district. The head administrative official is the county executive, who is elected by citizens in the whole county.

Unit One also explores the wide variety of other positions, both elected and appointed, that are necessary to run a county government. These include Presiding Commissioner, County Executive, Associate Commissioners, Collector of Revenue, Surveyor, Public Administrator, County Council Member, County Clerk, Assessor, Treasurer, Auditor, Recorder of Deeds, Sheriff, Circuit Clerk, Prosecuting Attorney, and Coroner.

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#### Unit Two: Municipal Government

There are over 930 cities in Missouri. This is an extraordinary number of municipalities for our relatively small population. When compared to all states, Missouri ranks sixth in the number of cities and 17th in population.

Municipal governments are **incorporated**, meaning they have followed procedures established by the state to become a legally recognized local government. Two of every three people in Missouri live in an incorporated city or village.

Cities, like counties, are **general-purpose governments**. While counties typically provide a limited array of services, including law enforcement and road maintenance, city governments generally provide for a broad range of services that may include police and fire protection, street lighting and sidewalks, water and sewage service, and other amenities.

Cities, like counties, are grouped by class. While counties are classified according to their assessed valuations, cities are classified according to their population. As there are four classes of counties, originally, there were also four classes of cities. However, the cities large enough to be first- or second-class cities adopted **home-rule charters** leaving “empty” classes. Eventually, provisions for first and second-class cities were repealed, leaving provisions for home-rule charter cities, third- and fourth-class cities, and villages which are also referred to as “towns.”

About three dozen cities have home-rule charters. As with a county home-rule charter, a city home-rule charter provides a form of government for the city, describes the powers of the city, and sets out a schedule for elections. A home-rule city generally has more power than a non-home-rule or “statutory” city. State law specifies the form of government and powers of statutory cities. To become a third-class, a city must have a population of 3,000 up to 29,999. To become fourth-class, a city must have a population of 500 up to 2,999. An area with fewer than 500 people may incorporate as a village. Confusingly, however, a city’s population may not indicate its class. A city may originally incorporate while small. Over time, the population may grow sufficiently to qualify the city for a new class. However, there is no requirement that the city make the change. The city may, if it wishes, continue to operate under the rules of the smaller class. Thus, for example, it is quite possible to have a fourth-class city with a population far in excess of 2,999. In contrast, when a county’s assessed valuation increases sufficiently to qualify the county for a new class and stays at the higher level for five years, class change is mandatory

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Not all municipal governments are structured in the same way. Three models of municipal government are outlined below. (For additional information, see organizational charts at the end of Unit Two, pp. 46, 47, & 48).

### 1. Mayor/Council Form

This "traditional" model of municipal government is the most commonly used structure in Missouri. The mayor represents the executive branch, and the council represents the legislative branch. The council members may be called aldermen or alderwomen. They are elected from the different neighborhoods they represent. The mayor is elected by all voting city residents.

A city can use either a strong-mayor or a weak-mayor model. In the **strong-mayor model**, the mayor has broad authority to appoint and remove most department heads and to prepare the city's budget. In the **weak-mayor model**, the mayor shares administrative and budgetary authority with the council and with independently elected executive officials. The distinction between strong-mayor and weak-mayor is not really clear-cut, but most experts agree that there are no true examples of the strong-mayor model in Missouri.

### 2. Council/Manager Form

This model of municipal government represents a "reformed" approach to governing. Council members are elected for a term that ranges from two to four years, depending on the city. The mayor is chosen from among the council members and serves a term of one year. He runs the council meetings but has no special administrative or veto powers. Cities using this structure elect council members who make policy and then appoint a professional city manager to carry out the policy. The city manager works for the city council and has a great deal of control over local government decisions. The manager can appoint and remove all city department heads. The manager prepares the city budget for the council and then carries out the budget plan after the council has approved it.

### 3. City Administrator Form

This is a more recent governmental structure, representing a "compromise" between the mayor/council and council/manager forms described above. Under this model, a council is elected, as in the other modes. However, there are some differences. The mayor's executive authority is in part delegated to a city administrator, who could have the wide range of powers that a city manager has or very limited powers and simply serve as the mayor's administrative assistant. This "compromise" model has been adopted in more than 100 Missouri cities.

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About seven in ten Missourians live in a **metropolitan area**, which consists of a big city and its surrounding suburbs. In more precise terms, a metropolitan area contains a central city of 50,000 or more people and the counties containing the suburbs around the city. A metropolitan area is not a unit of government, but is a term used by social scientists and journalists to describe an economic region. The largest metropolitan area in the state is located in and around St. Louis. The St. Louis metropolitan area actually takes in portions of both Missouri and Illinois and has more than 2.6 million people. On the Missouri side, the St. Louis metropolitan area includes St. Louis city and the counties of Franklin, Jefferson, Lincoln, St. Charles, St. Louis, and Warren, which together have a population of about 2.0 million people. The Kansas City metropolitan area also spills over into an adjacent state (Kansas) and has about 1.7 million people (about 1.1 million on the Missouri side). Missouri's other metropolitan areas are in and around the cities of Springfield, Joplin, and Columbia (see the map at the end of this section).

**Infrastructure** refers to basic facilities and equipment needed for a community to function. Stable bridges, modern water, sewage, streets, and efficient mass transit are examples. Businesses rely on these things for production and transportation.

**Amenities** are special public goods and services that increase the attractiveness of an area and the quality of life for area residents.

Amenities and infrastructure must be paid for. Cities establish taxes to pay for these special public goods and services. **Taxes** are mandatory payments people must make to pay for goods and services offered by government.

This unit also explores the wide variety of administrative positions, which are necessary to run a city government, and their functions. These positions include Manager, Administrator, City Attorney, City Clerk, Finance Director, City Planner, Parks and Recreation Director, Fire Chief and Police Chief.

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#### Unit Three: Special Purpose Governments

Unlike general-purpose governments, **special-purpose governments** serve a limited purpose. There are two general categories of special purpose governments: **school districts and special districts.**

##### A. School Districts

Public education is often regarded as one of the most important functions of government because it benefits both individuals and the society as a whole. For the individual, a good education is the ticket to a well-paying job. The more well-educated individuals there are in the society, the more enterprising and productive is the whole economy. In other words, education contributes to a growing economy, which translates into better incomes and more goods and services for all of us to enjoy. At the same time, a productive economy makes it easier for governments to raise revenues (through taxes) to provide better governmental services, including education. Aside from the economic benefits of education, it is important to recognize that democracy depends on an educated electorate, or potential pool of voters.

Although the state and federal governments provide significant resources for education and establish guidelines under which public schools must operate, the principal policy-making authority and, in many cases, the majority of financial support lies within local school districts. School districts are empowered with the authority to carry out a variety of activities with the *sole purpose* of providing free public education for all persons living in the district. This purpose typically is divided into the following tasks or functions:

1. **School Personnel Administration**
2. **School Financial Administration**
3. **Building Maintenance**
4. **Curriculum Establishment**

School districts are administered by elected bodies called school boards. In Missouri, most school boards have seven members, who are elected for three-year terms. St. Louis represents an exception, with a twelve-member board elected for a six-year term.

The **superintendent** is a key figure in school administration. It is the superintendent, not the board, who is responsible for day-to-day management.

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### B. Special Districts

Special districts are the least known form of local government, but are often the only way to provide a necessary service. Fire protection for rural residents provides a good example. While cities are authorized to provide fire protection to urban residents, the county, which traditionally serves rural residents, does not have that same authority. The solution is to create a special fire protection district with taxing authority sufficient to provide only that service.

Special districts are created by state legislation, which provides the district taxing authority to support its activities. There are over 50 different types of special districts in Missouri, providing services such as:

- fire protection
- ambulance services
- libraries
- sewers
- roads
- parks
- water

Each special district has a **governing board**, which may be elected or appointed, to make decisions regarding the operation of the district.

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### A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF MISSOURI LOCAL GOVERNMENT

#### Unit Four: Financing Local Government

Local governments collect revenue to pay for public goods and services in five ways:

1. **Property Tax**
2. **Sales Tax**
3. **Local Personal and Federal Income Taxes**
4. **Charges and User Fees**
5. **Payments from Other Governments**

Three of these methods--**property tax, sales tax, and local personal income tax**--are direct taxes.

The **property tax** is a significant source of revenue for most local governments. It is a tax on people's real and personal property. **Real property** consists of land and buildings, including manufactured homes (built somewhere else and then assembled on a person's land). **Personal property** includes tangible property, other than real estate, money, household furniture, or wearing apparel owned by an individual. Examples of personal property are cars, trucks, boats, motorcycles and airplanes. Note: Mobile homes may be either real or personal property depending on whether the homeowner owns or rents the land.

Property receives an assessment, meaning that a local official, the assessor, determines a property to be worth by calculating a percentage of the real market value. The people in the assessor's office try to be consistent by placing similar values on similar properties. For instance, they find the price that similar houses have sold for recently. They also look at special features a house may have, like the number of bathrooms or room additions. After determining the market value, the assessor's office calculates the taxable value at only a percentage of the market value. The state can specify the percentage for a particular category of property. Land with a building on it that is used for housing is termed residential, and only 19 percent of its market value is taxed. Agricultural land is assessed at 12 percent of its productive capability and vacant land is assessed at only 12 percent of its value. Other land classified as neither agricultural nor residential has a 32 percent tax valuation.

The county collects property taxes for itself and other local governments, including school districts and some municipalities, in the county.

The **sales tax** is also a major source of revenue for local governments. It is a tax on certain retail goods sold in a community. It is collected by the store. The retailer sends all sales tax collected to the Missouri Department of Revenue which distributes



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a portion of the tax to the state and a portion to the local government, keeping one percent as a collection fee. The sales tax is an important source of revenue for municipalities, especially for the large cities. By using a sales tax to raise revenue, residents of cities don't carry the entire tax burden. The city also gets revenue from visitors to the city. Local sales taxes are popular in Missouri, which is second only to Texas in the number of local governments using this type of tax. Missouri has a **state** sales tax rate of 4.225 percent. This 4.225 percent is added to the local levies which can boost the total tax rates to amounts approaching 10 percent.

The **local personal income tax** is a tax on money a person receives as income. It is primarily a supplementary revenue source for large cities.

The **federal income tax** provides the United States government with a large source of revenue. States usually don't allow a local government to use both a sales tax and an income tax.

In Missouri, only Kansas City and St. Louis are allowed to charge both types of tax. In all of the United States, only seven cities are allowed by their states to charge both taxes.

A local income tax can be collected in different ways and go by several different names. In St. Louis, for instance, it is known as the city earnings tax. Anyone who works in the city of St. Louis or who lives in the city of St. Louis must pay a percentage of their income as income tax. The tax is deducted from their salaries and wages.

**Charges and User Fees** are payments for voluntarily purchased, publicly provided services that benefit specific individuals in a community. Examples are the admission price for the community swimming pool or recreation center, fees for holding a family reunion in a public park, parking fees at local government buildings, and charges for water or sewer service.

Local governments also receive **state and federal aid**. For instance, the federal government and the state give money to counties for highways. They give money to school districts to provide education. The federal government also provides money directly to communities. Generally, communities must ask for federal money. They ask by writing a proposal telling the federal government that the community has a special need. This special need might be a new bridge, a mass transit system, or a special area of the community where new businesses can start up. If the proposal meets the qualifications and the federal government approves the proposal, it issues a grant to the community.

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Two tables in the Handbook (pp. 81-82) provide useful perspectives on where Missouri local governments receive their revenue and how they spend their money. Special districts that are not school districts receive the greatest percentage of their revenue from charges; school districts from state and federal aid; municipalities and counties from the sales tax.

Special districts spend the greatest percentage of their revenue on environment, parks, and sewage; school districts on schools and libraries; municipalities on police, fire protection, and jails; counties on social services, hospitals, and health services.

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### A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF MISSOURI LOCAL GOVERNMENT

#### Unit Five: Planning and Zoning

Many cities and counties engage in planning and zoning. A **plan** is a blueprint or guide for the orderly growth of a community. **Planning** is a method used to create a community that is a good place for its residents to live, work, go to school, and play.

Cities may be responsible for some parts of the plan, such as building streets or laying water lines. Much of the plan, however, is carried out by individuals and businesses that buy property and build houses and stores and factories. The plan is intended to guide the land use decisions of individual property owners in order to promote the general well-being of the community.

A city tries to make sure that land use decisions are guided by the plan. The city does this by **zoning**. **Zoning** refers to the city's laws or ordinances that tell how land can be used in various parts of the community.

There are three main kinds of zoning districts: (1) residential; (2) commercial; and (3) industrial. Residential zoning designates where housing is located and which kind of housing may be built. For instance, a city may not allow apartments to be built in an area zoned for single-family homes.

Commercial zoning is very much like residential zoning. Commercial businesses are retail establishments, meaning that goods and services are offered directly to consumers. Just as there are different types of residential buildings, there are different types of commercial businesses.

There are small business offices with few customers, such as dentists' and attorneys' offices. These businesses create few traffic or noise problems. There are larger businesses, such as grocery stores, restaurants, and gas stations, which have a greater impact on neighborhoods and generate lots of traffic, noise, and trash. These businesses are placed well apart from residential areas. Finally, there are very large businesses such as movie theaters and shopping malls. These businesses are seldom placed near residential areas.

There are different types of industrial businesses having different types of effects on the community. Some industrial businesses, like warehouses and truck depots, increase traffic and noise, but cause little other harm. However, some industrial businesses create smoke and fumes that irritate surrounding neighbors. In order to do this, city and county planners consider a planning technique called **buffering**. **Buffering** is the practice of providing certain barriers between residential, commercial, and industrial zones. A city or county may also have **setback requirements** which state that a building can only be

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built a number of feet from the property line. A business falling under the heading of **conditional use** has to apply for a conditional use permit. Conditional uses are those types of uses which tend to be problematic or have characteristics which may impact public health, safety, or welfare; but can be approved if such uses meet certain criteria. The city's planning and zoning commission holds a meeting or a "public hearing" at which anyone can speak for or against the business's proposal for a conditional use. After the hearing, the commission recommends to the city council either that the permit be granted or denied. In carrying out zoning and land use policy, city and county officials must weigh the interests of the property owner against the interests of the entire community.

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## **A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF MISSOURI LOCAL GOVERNMENT**

### **Unit Six: Exploring Your Community**

Students are encouraged to attend local civic meetings, read local newspapers, and view local cable TV to learn about their community and how it operates. They will brainstorm ideas and will compile information into a "Community Resource Guide." The guide can be published and distributed through the Chamber of Commerce, other local civic organizations, or with the help of local government. This activity will encourage partnerships among businesses, governmental agencies, civic organizations, and the school. Such collaborative projects serve to remind everyone that the community's future well-being depends on how well it prepares students to assume the mantle of leadership and civic responsibility when they become adults.

### **Unit Seven: Discovering Community History**

Having an understanding of their community's history can provide students with the background necessary to interpret its current decisions. Being familiar with the people, places, and things that have contributed to their community in the past can help students as they analyze present civic, economic, social, and educational policies.

This unit challenges students to investigate the background of their community, building on the brief history that was part of their brochure in Unit Six. By using community resources to research the past and by compiling the oral histories of senior citizens, students will build on their understanding of how people in the past evaluated costs and benefits as they made decisions that have had lasting impacts.

### **Unit Eight: Analyzing Issues in Your Community**

This unit introduces students to a variety of public policy issues that can impact a community. By using tools for community analysis and by carefully analyzing costs and benefits, students are encouraged to evaluate alternatives and make informed decisions.

This unit is divided into two parts. Part One introduces students to the importance of weighing the costs and benefits of policy decisions. Part Two develops strategies students can use as they collect information.

The culminating activity challenges students to prepare a written and oral public policy statement regarding an issue of interest in the community. Using the tools for analysis they learn in this unit, the students will summarize information they have gained through their research and surveys.

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### SIX APPROACHES TO INVOLVING STUDENTS IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT

In thinking about how to use various sections of the Handbook, you may wish to focus on a particular aspect of local government or a particular perspective. Here are six suggestions:

#### I. Who Runs My City? The Government Structure Model

Ask your students what they know about the municipality they live in.

- How did the city get its name?
- When was the city founded or incorporated?
- How is the city governed?
- Does the city have a charter?
- What are the principal services performed by the city?
- What is the most important issue now confronting the city?

To answer these questions, the students should be encouraged to visit city hall, to ask for a copy of the city charter and/or organizational chart, and to attend a meeting of the city council or board of aldermen. The students can invite the mayor, members of the council, and the city manager to talk to the class about their roles and about challenges facing the city. The students should keep a journal on their findings and prepare a report and display for the spring Projects Fair.

#### II. What Does It Mean to Manage a City? The Public Administrator Model

What does it mean to manage a city? How is managing a city like running a business? Have your students study the role of manager or administrator in their city.

- Who is the manager?
- What kind of training has the manager had?
- What are the principal duties of the manager?
- What are the most difficult problems a manager faces?
- Why would someone want to be a manager?

Invite the city manager to the class to talk about his or her duties. See if your students can observe the manager on duty, say, at a council meeting or staff meeting. Have the students develop a profile of the manager and assistant manager for the spring Projects Fair.

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### SIX APPROACHES TO INVOLVING STUDENTS IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT

#### III. How Do I Get This Fixed? The Citizen Activist Model

Have your students identify a problem in the neighborhood around the school or near their homes. The problems might range from a broken sidewalk to an unlighted street to a need for more policing.

- Is there an obvious solution to the problem?
- Who (what government) is responsible for dealing with the problem?
- How do you find out who is responsible?
- What kind of information do you need before contacting the responsible agency?
- How do you contact the responsible agency (e.g., write a letter, make a phone call, invite an official to the school to talk about the problem)?

Have your students develop a journal of the steps they take in finding out whom to contact, what actions they take, and what responses they get. Have the students report on their experiences at the spring Projects Fair.

#### IV. This Service Is Too Much for One Town: The Regional Model

Ask your students to consider a service that is enjoyed by citizens throughout a metropolitan region, such as a Zoo, an Art Museum, or a Mass Transportation System. Since these are services that benefit residents of many cities, who is responsible for providing them? Have your students study the history of a regional service, such as a zoo, in order to find out:

- why a service might be offered at the regional level, as opposed to the city level.
- when the service was created.
- how it is funded.
- how it is governed.
- what benefits are associated with regional services.
- what drawbacks are tied to regional services.

Have the students develop organizational charts and maps for various services. Invite representatives of the services to speak to the class and talk about issues of administration and funding. Have the students report their findings at the spring Projects Fair.

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### SIX APPROACHES TO INVOLVING STUDENTS IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT

#### V. Getting the Word Out: The Journalism Model

How do citizens find out about what local governments are doing? Have your students compile a list of information sources, with sample materials, on the local governments in their area. These would include government publications and newsletters, newspaper coverage, television news, and cable television coverage. Invite several reporters to the class to talk about reporting on local government. Invite local council members to class to explain how they communicate with their constituents. Have your students develop and write their own information packet on local government in their community, with a brief profile of the city government and school district and a review of major recent actions. Have the students present their "newspaper" at the spring Projects Fair.

#### VI. How Did We Get Here? The Community History Model

Have your students consider the following questions:

- How old is their community? When was it founded?
- What is the oldest building in the community?
- What did the community look like 50 years ago? What about 20 years ago?
- Has the community added people, lost people, or stayed the same?
- What are the principal businesses, churches, and parks in the community?

Ask your students where they might go to find such information and help them compile the answers to these questions. As they begin to put together the portrait of a changing community, ask them to consider why the community has changed. Have them prepare a set of exhibits on community change for the spring Projects Fair.