

Florida's Local Government

Florida's state government makes many important decisions for all Floridians. For example, decisions about state taxes and state laws are made by our state government in Tallahassee and apply to everyone in Florida.

Other decisions, however, are made by local governments in Florida. These decisions are made closer to the people than those made by the state or federal government and are very important to the people who live in that community. Local governments make decisions about things like schools, parks, libraries, and police protection.

Florida has three types of local government: counties, municipalities, and special districts.

County Government

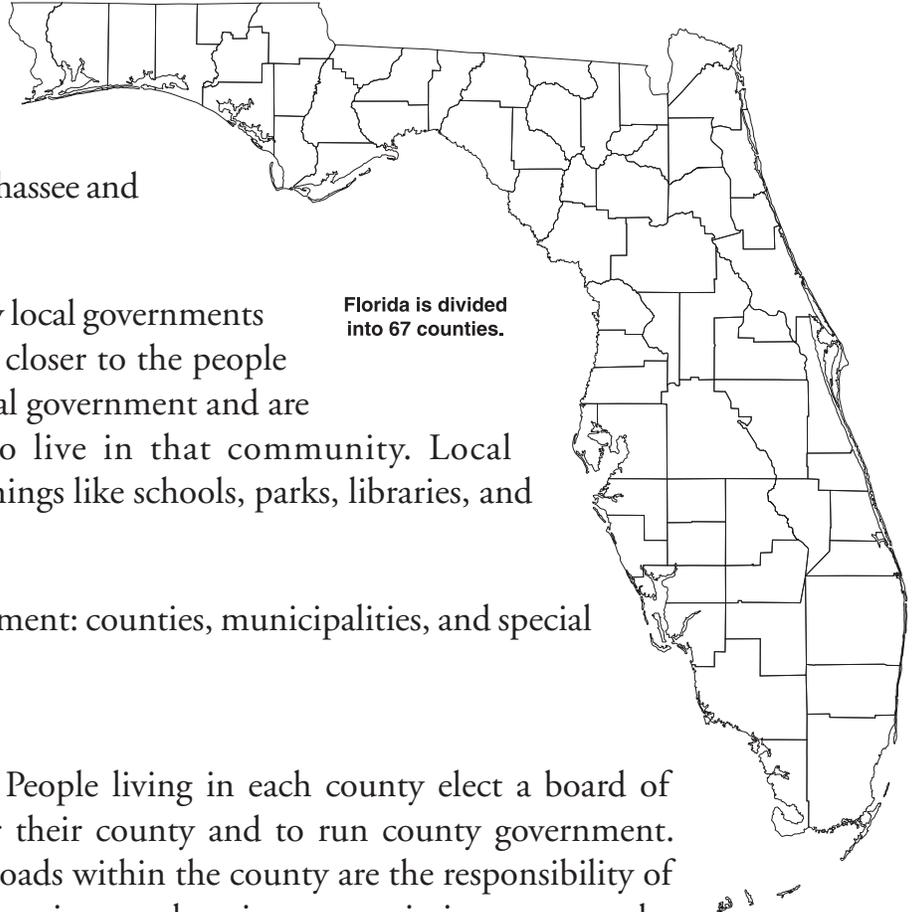
Florida is divided into 67 counties. People living in each county elect a board of commissioners to make the laws for their county and to run county government. Planning for land development and roads within the county are the responsibility of county government. In larger counties, a planning commission may make recommendations to the board of commissioners. Some other elected jobs for the county include the sheriff, tax collector, supervisor of elections, and county judges.

Each county keeps records for its citizens. County employees run courts, prisons, parks, libraries, and health care services. The county court house contains offices for many of these county workers.

Each county in Florida has its own school district. An elected school board makes most decisions regarding the county's schools. Some counties have an elected superintendent of schools and some counties have one appointed by the school board.

Municipal Government

Within each county, cities and towns also set up governing bodies. This is called municipal government. A mayor is elected as the top official. A city council is elected to make policies and decisions that impact the specific city or town. The city charter and related laws guide the city council.



The elected officials are supported by staff. Parks and recreation, arts and cultural affairs, sewer, and water are just some of the responsibilities of city workers. The city hall serves as the location for much of municipal government.

Public safety is a major responsibility of municipal government. The fire department and police department are instrumental in maintaining public safety in the cities and towns of Florida.

Special Districts

Special districts are set up by the state to govern areas that might cover more than one county. These districts are spread throughout the state and serve special purposes, like flood control. District boards make the policies and decisions regarding the special purpose.

One type of district that is extremely important to all Floridians is the Water Management District. Because fresh water is scarce, the government divided Florida into five water districts. The governing board for each district decides how much water can be used from rivers and aquifers. They also approve permits for water use and developments. Over 175 gallons are used each day by the average Floridian and the population of Florida is increasing rapidly. In times of drought, the governing boards restrict how home and business owners use water in order to conserve this important resource.

