

County Form of Government 2002

The *County Form of Government* survey was conducted in winter 2002 and spring 2003 and mailed to all U.S. counties. Of the 3,046 counties that received surveys, 992 responded (32.6%).

For more information on the ICMA's *County Form of Government* survey, please contact [Sebia M. Clark](#).



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Following is the survey text with the aggregate results shown next to each answer. Each answer represents the percentage reporting for that question, except where noted.

1. Please indicate which of the following best describes your current legal form of government as defined by your charter, ordinance, or state law. *(Please read all definitions first and check only one.)*
 - 27.2 Each elected commissioner or board member serves as director of one or more functional departments (e.g. Public Works Director or Director of Health and Human Services) in addition to his/her policymaking role. The presiding officer may be chosen from the board or elected directly (e.g., county judge). This is popularly known as the ***commission*** form of government.
 - 29.0 An elected board sets policy, adopts legislation, and approves the budget. The commission appoints an administrator to conduct the day-to-day county business, to prepare the budget, to oversee department heads, and to recommend policy to the board. This is popularly known as the ***council-administrator*** form.
 - 19.1 An elected board sets policy, adopts legislation, and approves the budget. The commission appoints a manager or administrator with broad executive authority to oversee and manage county departments, hire and fire most department directors, hire and fire county staff, prepare the budget, and recommend policy to the board. This is popularly known as the ***council-manager*** form.
 - 9.9 The elected board is responsible for making policy. The executive, elected at -large, implements county board policies, prepares the budget, and acts as county spokesperson. The executive often has veto power, which can be overridden. This form fully separates the legislative and executive powers and is popularly known as the ***council-elected executive*** form.
 - 14.8 Did not answer/respond
2. How is your county's *structure or form of government* established? *(Check only one.)*

9.2 Charter	3.9 Council resolution
80.5 State law	2.0 Other
4.4 Local ordinance	
3. Does your county have the position of *chief appointed official* (CAO)? **54.0** Yes **46.0** No
 - A. If your county does have the position of *chief appointed official*, what action established the position? *(This question refers only to the establishment of the position, not to the person or group that does the hiring.)*

7.7 Charter	25.5 Commission resolution
37.6 State law	6.0 Chief elected official created position
18.5 Local ordinance	4.7 Other
 - B. If your county does have the position of *chief appointed official*, who appoints the chief appointed official? *(Check only one.)*

2.0 Presiding officer	8.6 Combination of presiding officer and commission
87.5 Commission	2.0 Other

4. How is your presiding officer selected? *(Check only one.)*
- 22.5** Voters elect directly
63.7 Commission selects from among its members
1.4 The commission member receiving the most votes in the general election becomes the presiding officer
11.5 Commission members rotate into the position of presiding officer
0.9 Other
5. Is the presiding officer a member of commission? **94.3** Yes **5.7** No
6. How long is the presiding officer's term of office? *(Important: If the presiding officer is a member of the commission, specify the term for the position of presiding officer, not of commission member.) (Check only one.)*
- 51.8** 1 year
15.1 2 years
28.9 4 years
4.2 Other
7. Does the presiding officer have the authority to veto commission-passed measures? **4.9** Yes **95.1** No
- A. If yes, in what cases may the presiding officer exercise veto power? *(Check all applicable.)*
- 71.9** Over ordinances
25.0 Over specific sections of ordinances
71.9 Over resolutions
37.5 Over appropriations
31.3 Over specific items of appropriations
18.8 Other
8. Since 1997, have any recall initiatives been filed against the presiding officer? **4.4** Yes **95.6** No
- A. If yes, were any successful? **5.4** Yes **94.6** No
9. How many seats, vacant and filled, are on your commission? **6.1** (Average)
10. How many current commission members are: **5.2** Male **1.7** Female (Average)
11. How many current commission members are:
- 2.0** Native American **1.3** Hispanic **0.4** Asian or Pacific Islander **5.6** White **1.7** Black (Average)
12. Does your county have a provision for any of the following? *(Check all applicable.)*
- 36.5** Initiative Permits citizens to place charter, ordinance, or home rule changes directly on a ballot for approval or disapproval by the voters.
- 35.8** Binding referendum Allows voters to determine the outcome on public issues by binding the governing body to act on voters' opinions.
- 34.4** Non-binding referendum Allows voters to express an opinion on a specific topic without binding the governing body to act on voters' opinions.
- 69.7** Recall A vote by the citizens to remove an elected official from office before the expiration of that official's term.
- 27.1** Petition or protest referendum Allows voters to delay enactment of local ordinance or bylaw until a referendum is held.
13. Are the members of your commission elected? *(Check only one.)*
- 27.9** All at large **61.8** All by ward/district **10.6** Combination of at large and ward/district.
- A. If you selected c, indicate the number of commission members elected by each of the following methods:
- 1.4** at large **4.3** by ward/district (Average)
14. Does the political party affiliation of commission candidates appear on the ballot in your local general elections?
- 81.6** Yes **18.4** No
15. Are the following department heads appointed or elected?
- | | <u>Appointed</u> | <u>Elected</u> | | <u>Appointed</u> | <u>Elected</u> |
|-------------------|------------------|----------------|-----------------------------|------------------|----------------|
| a. Assessor | 44.0 | 56.0 | f. School superintendent | 81.0 | 19.0 |
| b. Prosecutor | 7.2 | 92.8 | g. Treasurer | 14.1 | 85.9 |
| c. Civil attorney | 67.0 | 33.0 | h. Clerk of governing board | 40.2 | 59.8 |
| d. Sheriff | 0.8 | 99.2 | i. Clerk of court | 26.9 | 73.1 |
| e. Recorder | 13.1 | 86.9 | j. Controller | 74.5 | 25.5 |
16. Is there a legal limit on the number of terms a commission member may serve? **8.5** Yes **91.5** No

- A. If yes, what is the maximum number of terms allowed by law? **2.4 (Average)**
- B. When was the term limitation enacted? **1988 (Average)**
- C. By what authority is the number of terms limited? *(Check only one.)*
8.9 Ordinance **5.1** Charter **73.4** State law **12.7** Other

17. How many incumbents ran for reelection to commission in the last general election? **3.7 (Average)**
- A. How many incumbents ran unopposed? **2.1 (Average)**
 - B. How many incumbents were reelected? **3.3 (Average)**

18. How is a commission member's seat filled if it is vacated before the term has expired? *(Check only one.)*

- 10.9** Special election
- 31.9** Appointed by commission
- 13.8** Method depends on length of term remaining
- 6.2** Appointed by presiding officer
- 0.3** Position left vacant until next regular election
- 31.3** Political party/governor appoints
- 0.9** Other
- 4.8** Appointed by executive committee or group

19. When does your fiscal year begin? **May, 2003 (Average)**