

# Ohio

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Ohio ranks 6th among the states in number of local governments, with 3,636 as of June 2002.

## **COUNTY GOVERNMENTS (88)**

There are no areas in Ohio lacking county government. The county governing body is called the board of county commissioners. All but one county in Ohio operates in accordance with general statutes, although they may also organize, with voter approval, either under an alternate statutory form or under home rule charter. As of fiscal year 2002, Summit County is the only county to adopt one of the alternate forms (home-rule charter). Its governing body is called the county council.

## **SUBCOUNTY GENERAL PURPOSE GOVERNMENTS (2,250)**

The 2,250 subcounty general purpose governments in Ohio comprise the 942 municipal (city and village) governments, and the 1,308 township governments.

### **Municipal Governments (942)**

Municipal governments in Ohio are the cities (incorporated places having 5,000 inhabitants or more) and villages (incorporated places with fewer than 5,000 inhabitants). Cities and villages may exist within township areas, however, when the boundaries of a township are coterminous with the boundaries of a city or village, the township ceases to exist as a separate government. The minimum population requirement for incorporation is 1,600 for a village and 25,000 for a city.

### **Township Governments (1,308)**

The entire area of the state is encompassed by township governments, except for townships that are coterminous with a city or village. Townships that are coterminous with a city or village are not counted as separate governments in census statistics on governments. Township governments are governed by boards of township trustees.

Townships with 5,000 or more population in their unincorporated area may adopt limited home rule government powers, either after voter approval or by resolution of the board of township trustees under certain conditions. Such townships with 15,000 or more population are called “urban townships.”

## **PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEMS (667)**

### **School District Governments (667)**

The following types of school districts in Ohio are counted as separate governments for census purposes:

- City school districts
- Local school districts
- Exempted village school districts (authorization for formation of any additional exempted village school districts, however, has been repealed)
- Community college districts
- Joint vocational school districts

An elected board of education governs each city school district, local school district, or exempted village school district. These districts may levy local school taxes and issue bonds with voter approval.

A school district previously under state supervision (“municipal school district”) may be governed by a board whose members either are elected or appointed by the Mayor of the municipality containing the greatest portion of the district’s area.

Community college districts may be established by resolution of one or more counties having a total population of 75,000 or more, or by petition to the county board of elections. Approvals by the voters and by the state board of regents are required. A board of trustees, with three members appointed by the Governor with the consent of the senate and six members appointed by the board of county commissioners, governs each district.

Community college districts may levy school taxes and issue revenue and general obligation bonds. Tax levies and general obligation bonds require voter approval.

Joint vocational school districts are established for joint support of vocational schools by two or more regular school districts. The joint vocational school district board consists of representatives from the boards of the participating school districts. Joint vocational school districts may issue bonds and levy ad valorem taxes with voter approval. They are counted as school district governments in census reporting. A joint vocational school district, if it is located within a single county, may as an alternative, be governed by the educational service center board.

### **Dependent Public School Systems (0)**

Ohio has no dependent public school systems.

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## Other Educational Activities

Ohio law permits school districts to enter into agreements for joint or cooperative provision of facilities, programs, projects, activities, or services, subject to the approval of the state superintendent of public instruction. Pursuant to this law, Ohio Education Computer Network facilities and special education regional resource centers have been established. As of fiscal year 2002, 24 Ohio Education Computer Network facilities were reported in operation.

Technical college districts are created by the state board of regents after local school boards or qualified voters submit a resolution or petition. Such districts are largely state supported. They are not counted as governments in census reporting, but are classified as state institutions. In addition, there are state community college districts, with trustees appointed by the Governor, that are classified as state institutions and are not counted as separate governments.

Each county comprises an educational service center for supervision of local schools. They are governed by an elected board. Joint educational service centers may be formed by up to five counties. Joint centers are governed by elected boards as well, and may include additional members appointed by the elected members. These centers are not counted as governments, but are classified as a dependent activity of the county government(s) they serve.

County school financing districts may be formed by an educational service center to finance special education and school improvements. These districts are governed by an educational service center board within its service area. Because county school finance districts participate in activities on behalf of the educational service centers, they are not counted as separate governments for census purposes.

Cooperative education school districts may be formed out of existing county school financing districts, for the purpose of operating a joint high school, by identical resolutions of a majority of the individual school districts in the service area. The district may be governed by the educational service center board serving *ex officio*, or by a board composed of at least one member appointed by each participating school district, and one or more members appointed by the educational service center. These districts are classified as activities of the school districts they serve and are not counted as separate governments.

Prior to September 4, 1947, school districts were permitted to establish by resolution free public libraries. The law provides for the continuance of those in existence at that time. Such a library is classified for census purposes as a dependent agency of the establishing school district, and is not counted as a separate government. A board of trustees appointed by the school district board governs each

such library. While the sponsoring school district may levy an ad valorem tax for library purposes, most libraries are financed from the proceeds of a portion of the state income tax (distributed on the basis of budgets submitted by the library boards of trustees to the board of education of the school district) that is made available to libraries that offer free library service to all county residents.

## SPECIAL DISTRICT GOVERNMENTS (631)<sup>1</sup>

Ohio statutes authorize the creation of a variety of special districts or authorities that are counted as governments. These are discussed in detail below.

### Conservancy Districts

These districts provide for flood control, reclamation, irrigation, water conservation, water supply, and sewage disposal within a given area. They may be established by the court of common pleas of a single county, or by joint action of the courts of two or more counties, on petition of landowners or governing bodies of public corporations and after hearing. The district board of directors is appointed by the court of common pleas. Conservancy districts may issue bonds, levy special benefit assessments, and fix rates for the sale of water.

### Joint Ambulance Districts

These districts are established by resolution of the governing bodies of two or more townships or municipalities or any combination thereof. A board of trustees appointed by the governing bodies of the participating governments governs each district. Joint ambulance districts may fix charges and rates, and, after referendum, may levy ad valorem taxes and issue general obligation bonds. Some districts of this type are called emergency medical services districts. They are separate from joint emergency medical services districts established by county boards of commissioners, which are classified as county dependent agencies.

### Joint Fire Districts

Joint fire districts may be established by resolution of the governing bodies of one or more townships and one or more municipalities, or by joint resolution of two or more townships or of two or more municipalities. A board of trustees, selected from the governing boards of the participating governments, governs each district. The district may impose charges, levy ad valorem taxes, and issue bonds upon voter approval.

### Joint Fire and Ambulance Districts

These districts are established by joint resolution of the governing bodies of a joint fire district and a joint ambulance district whose geographic service areas are identical.

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<sup>1</sup>Legislation authorizing tuberculosis hospital districts was repealed in 2000.

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A board of trustees, which is appointed as provided by the authorizing agreement, governs each district. The district may fix charges and, after referendum, may levy ad valorem taxes and issue general obligations bonds. On creation of the joint fire and ambulance district, the participating districts cease to exist as separate governments.

### **Joint Solid Waste Management Districts—1953 Law**

Districts to provide solid waste collection and disposal are created by resolution of one or more counties. A population minimum of 120,000 applies in some cases. A board of directors, consisting of the county commissioners of each participating county, or of members appointed by the county governing body in counties not having a board of county commissioners, governs each district. The districts may charge fees and issue revenue bonds. In addition, participating counties may levy ad valorem taxes and issue bonds on behalf of the districts. Districts under this law that serve only one county are not counted as separate governments. See "Subordinate Agencies and Areas," below.

### **Joint Township Hospital Districts**

These districts may be established by vote of the governing bodies of any two or more contiguous municipalities or townships. A board consisting of all members of the boards of trustees of the participating townships, plus representatives from each participating municipality, governs each district. The districts may accept county and township appropriations, impose charges, and, with voter approval, levy taxes. Bond issues must be approved by the voters.

### **Library Districts**

Three types of library districts in Ohio are counted as special district governments. These districts are to be distinguished from public libraries administered by county, municipal, township, or school district governments.

**County library districts.** These districts may be created by the county commissioners on approval by the voters, or by the boards of trustees of libraries serving school districts on approval of the taxing authorities of the subdivisions having jurisdiction over the libraries. A board of trustees, consisting of three members appointed by the judges of common pleas and four appointed by the county commissioners, governs each district.

**Regional library districts.** These districts are created by joint resolution of the commissioners of two or more contiguous counties. The library trustees are appointed jointly by the boards of county commissioners.

Both county and regional library districts may levy ad valorem taxes. In practice, however, these library districts are financed from the proceeds of a portion of the state

income tax (distributed on the basis of budgets submitted to the library boards of trustees) that is made available to libraries that offer free library service to all county residents.

**Regional library systems.** These districts are created by agreement among the boards of trustees of public libraries in two or more counties, or among four or more libraries within a metropolitan area as defined by the state library board, and upon approval by the state library board. The library system trustees are selected from the members of the governing bodies of the participating libraries. These organizations provide and coordinate regional library services, may receive state, local, and federal funding, and may also receive funding in connection with contracts.

Authorization for area library service organizations was repealed in 1999.

### **Metropolitan Housing Authorities**

These authorities are established by the state director of development. If the area served by an authority has a population of less than 1 million, the probate court, the court of common pleas, and the board of county commissioners each appoint a member to the authority's governing body. The chief executive officer of the most populous city appoints two members. If the area served by the authority has a population of 1 million or more, the chief executive officer and the governing body of the largest city served each appoint two authority board members. Also, the chief executive officer of the city with the second highest number of authority-owned housing units appoints one member. The authorities may issue bonds, fix rates and fees, and accept grants or contributions.

### **New Community Authorities**

These districts are created by resolution of the board of county commissioners of each of the counties in the district or, under certain circumstances, by the governing body of a municipality within the district, after a hearing on a petition filed by a community developer and after concurrence of proximate cities. A board of trustees, initially appointed but thereafter elected, governs each district. New community districts may fix and collect service fees, rentals and community development charges; and may issue revenue bonds.

### **Park Districts**

Ohio statutes authorize two types of park districts:

**Park districts.** These districts are created by the county probate judge on petition of the voters or of any county, municipal, or township governing body and after public hearing. A board of park commissioners appointed by the probate judge governs each district. The district may issue bonds and may levy ad valorem taxes and benefit assessments.

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**Township park districts.** These districts may be created by the court of common pleas on petition of the voters to the township trustees. They are governed by boards of park commissioners appointed by the court of common pleas or, if the entire park district is contained within the unincorporated area of the township, by the board of township trustees. The districts may impose charges, levy ad valorem taxes, and upon voter approval, issue bonds.

### **Port Authorities**

Port authorities may provide port or airport facilities within an area or promote economic development, housing, and other activities. They may be established by a municipal, county, or township government, or by a combination thereof. If established by more than one government, the number of authority board members representing each participating government is determined by agreement among the participating governments. Port authorities may collect rates and charges and issue revenue bonds. They may also levy ad valorem taxes and issue general obligation bonds upon voter approval.

Port authorities serving only one county, municipal, or township government are not counted as separate governments. See "Subordinate Agencies and Areas," below.

### **Regional Airport Authorities**

Regional airport authorities are established by resolution of the board of county commissioners of a single county or from two or more contiguous counties. A board of trustees, selected in the manner specified by the resolution creating the authority, governs each authority. The board may issue revenue bonds and collect rates, rentals, and charges for use of facilities.

### **Regional Arts and Cultural Districts**

These districts are formed by resolution of a county or a combination of counties, municipalities, or townships. They operate cultural facilities and support existing arts and cultural organizations. A district's board of trustees is appointed by the governing bodies of the governments that created it. It may accept grants, collect rents and charges, and with voter approval, levy property taxes and issue bonds.

In counties containing a city with a population over 500,000, such districts may, as an alternative, be governed by the board of county commissioners. In such cases, the district is not counted as a government. See "Subordinate Agencies and Areas," below.

### **Regional Solid Waste Management Authorities—1988 Law**

Under this law, authorities providing solid waste collection and disposal services are created by resolution of one or more counties or board of directors of a joint solid waste

management district, after approval by a majority of the municipal and township governments in the area served. A board of trustees governs each authority; it includes representatives appointed by each participating county, as provided in the agreement creating the authority, plus members appointed jointly by the municipal and township governments served. The authorities may fix fees and charges and may issue revenue bonds.

### **Regional Transit Authorities**

Regional transit authorities may be established by any county or by two or more counties, municipalities, or townships by resolution or ordinance of their governing bodies. If an authority is created exclusively by action of one county, the authority board members are appointed by the county commissioners. If an authority is created by two or more governments, its board members will be appointed by public officers specified in the initiating resolution. The authorities may impose rates and charges for services, accept grants, and issue revenue bonds. The authority may also issue general obligation bonds, levy sales and use taxes, and levy ad valorem taxes upon voter approval.

### **Regional Water and Sewer Districts and Authorities**

These districts may be created by the court of common pleas on petition of one or more municipal, township, or county governments, or any combination thereof, and after hearing. A board of trustees selected in a manner determined by each district governs each district. The districts may levy special assessments, fix and collect rates and charges, issue bonds, and with voter approval, may levy ad valorem taxes.

### **Sanitary Districts**

Sanitary districts to provide sewerage, garbage disposal, and water supply facilities, to take pest abatement measures, or to prevent stream pollution, may be established by the court of common pleas, on petition of land-owners or of any governmental corporation, after public hearing. A board of directors, whose appointment depends on the type of district involved, governs each district. The district board may issue bonds, levy ad valorem taxes and benefit assessments, and impose charges for services.

### **Soil and Water Conservation Districts**

Ohio law provides that each county constitutes a soil and water conservation district. An elected board of supervisors governs each district. The district may levy special assessments and receive revenue from donations, gifts, and contributions. The district may also receive state aid, county general fund contributions, and the proceeds from a county ad valorem tax.

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## Transportation Improvement Districts

Districts to construct or improve road, public place, building or other infrastructure are established by resolution of the board of county commissioners. A board of trustees governs the districts; its members are appointed based on two methods provided by the authorizing state legislation. The district board may issue revenue bonds, levy benefit assessments and motor vehicle license taxes, receive federal and state aid, and impose charges for projects.

## Watershed Districts

These districts are established after a map and description of the proposed district are prepared by the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency and filed with the secretary of state and each participating county. The participating counties, at an organizational meeting of the president (or designated representative) of each board of county commissioners, appoint a board of directors to administer the district. Fiscal requirements of each district are prorated among the constituent counties on the basis of the taxable value of real and personal property in the district.

## SUBORDINATE AGENCIES AND AREAS

Shown below are various governmental designations in Ohio that have certain characteristics of governmental units but that are classified in census statistics as subordinate agencies of the state or local governments and are not counted as governments. Legal provisions for some of the larger of these are discussed below (see "Public School systems," above, regarding educational agencies of this nature).

Among the subordinate agencies and areas listed below, some represent "special taxing areas" within the territory of an established government. This method of financing additional services in limited areas by property taxation, while also used by some municipal and township governments in a few states, is more widely utilized by county governments.

**Ohio Air Quality Development Authority (state).** This authority was created by act of the legislature to finance air pollution control facilities. A board of seven members, five of whom are appointed by the Governor, plus the director of environmental protection and the director of health ex officio, governs the authority. The authority may make loans and grants, fix rents and other charges, accept grants and contributions, and issue revenue bonds.

**Ohio Building Authority (state).** This authority was established by act of the legislature. Authority board members are appointed by the Governor. The authority may fix rentals and charges for its facilities and may issue revenue bonds.

**Ohio Higher Educational Facility Commission (state).** This commission was created by act of the legislature to finance facilities for institutions of higher education. The commission consists of nine members, including

eight members appointed by the Governor, plus the Chancellor of the Ohio board of regents ex officio. The commission may fix rentals and other charges and may issue revenue bonds.

**Ohio Housing Finance Agency (state).** This agency was created by act of the legislature to provide mortgage credit for low and moderate income housing. A board of nine members, including seven appointed by the governor, plus the director of commerce and the director of development ex officio, governs the agency. The agency may fix interest rates, fees, and charges; accept grants and contributions; and issue revenue bonds.

**Ohio Public Facilities Commission (state).** This commission was created by act of the legislature. It consists of the following state officials: the Governor, the state auditor, the state treasurer, the secretary of state, the attorney general, and the director of budget and management. The commission may issue revenue bonds payable from rentals and charges for facilities.

**Ohio Turnpike Commission (state).** This commission was established by act of the legislature to build, operate, and maintain the Ohio Turnpike. It consists of four members appointed by the Governor, plus the following officials ex officio: the director of transportation, one member of the senate appointed by the president of the senate, and one member of the house appointed by the speaker of the house. The commission may issue revenue bonds and collect tolls.

**Ohio Water Development Authority (state).** This authority was created by act of the legislature to build and finance water development, solid waste treatment, and wastewater treatment, and energy resource development facilities. The authority board consists of eight members, of whom five members are appointed by the Governor, plus the directors of natural resources, environmental protection, and development, who serve in an ex officio capacity. The authority may make loans; receive rents, rates, and other charges; and issue revenue bonds.

Other examples include:

### State

Mining districts  
Ohio Agricultural Financing Commission  
Ohio Arts and Sports Facilities Commission  
Ohio Educational Telecommunications Network Commission  
Ohio Expositions Commission  
Ohio Fair Plan Underwriting Association  
Ohio Rail Development Commission  
Ohio School Facilities Commission  
Ohio State Lottery Commission  
Ohio State University Housing Commission  
State university housing commissions  
Trapping and fishing districts

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**County**

Convention facilities authorities  
County bridge commissions  
County emergency planning districts  
County road districts  
County transit systems  
County tuberculosis control units  
Countywide emergency management agencies  
General health districts  
Joint county and county alcohol, drug addiction,  
and mental health service districts  
Joint county emergency medical services districts  
Joint county public defenders  
Joint county tuberculosis clinics  
Joint detention and juvenile facilities districts  
Joint recreation districts  
Joint sewer districts  
Port authorities serving a single county  
Regional arts and cultural districts governed by county  
commissioners  
Regional authorities for emergency management (serving  
two or more counties)  
Sewer districts  
Solid waste management districts (formerly garbage and  
refuse disposal districts)—1953 law  
Veterans service commissions

**Municipal**

City bridge commissions  
City health districts  
City sewer districts (sanitary and storm)  
City water supply districts  
Joint economic development districts  
Joint municipal improvement districts  
Joint recreation districts  
Joint sewer districts  
Port authorities serving a single municipality  
Rapid transit commissions  
Resort area taxing districts (municipal)  
Special improvement districts  
Union cemetery boards

**Township**

Fire districts  
Joint economic development districts  
Joint recreation districts  
Joint township cemeteries  
Joint township police districts  
Port authorities serving a single township  
Resort area taxing districts (township)  
Road districts  
Township police districts  
Union cemetery boards  
Waste disposal districts  
Ohio laws also provide for various types of local areas for  
election purposes and administration of justice.