

VERMONT

COUNTY GOVERNMENT OVERVIEW

Counties

14

Government Form

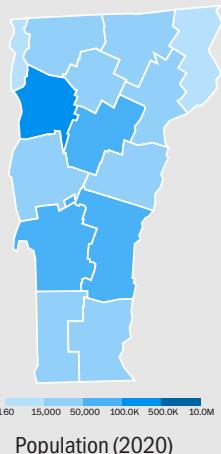
Traditional¹

Governing Body Size

3

Population (2020)

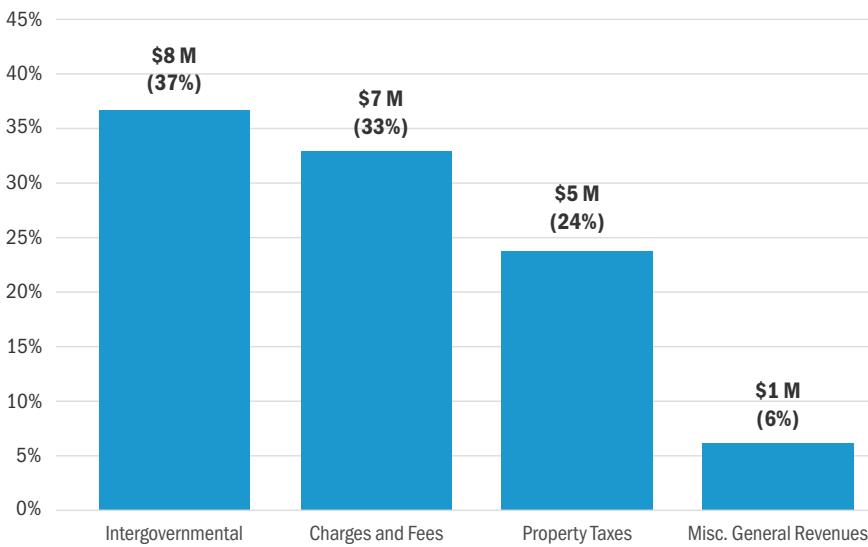
643,000²



County Authority

Most Restrictive (Dillon's Rule): Vermont counties are governed under Dillon's Rule and therefore are only afforded the authorities that are explicitly provided by state legislature. Counties do not have an option to form or adopt home rule charters.

TOP REVENUE SOURCES FOR VERMONT COUNTIES



Source: NACo Analysis of U.S. Census Bureau - Census of Individual Governments: Finance, 2017

Summary of County Services

Services counties MUST provide:

- Construct and furnish courthouses.
- Provide and equip a sheriff's department.

Services counties MAY provide:

- Authorize capital construction projects.

Services counties CANNOT provide:

- Create health departments.
- Regulate public utilities.

¹"Government Form" refers to the distribution of executive decision making authority in a county. "Traditional" county states mandate that counties exercise executive decision making power solely through the board of elected officials (commissioners, supervisors, etc.). "Reformed" county states mandate that counties employ an elected or appointed county executive, manager or similar position to take on at least some of the county's executive decision making authority. "Mixed" county states means that some counties in that state are "traditional" and some are "reformed."

²NACo Analysis of U.S. Census Bureau - 2020 Decennial Census

STRUCTURE/AUTHORITY

SUMMARY

Vermont counties have limited jurisdiction and authority. All counties are governed by three assistant judges which serve as both the legislative and executive decision-making authority for their county government. The state does not authorize administrators or executives and has only established a handful of county row officers, most of which are appointed rather than elected. The assistant judges are primarily responsible for keeping county land and county buildings. Most local governance is provided by cities, towns and other municipal corporations.

Row Officers	Elected/ Appointed	Mandatory/ Optional
Clerk	Appointed	Mandatory
High Bailiff	Appointed	Mandatory
Sheriff	Elected	Mandatory
Treasurer	Appointed	Mandatory



COUNTY STRUCTURE

Legislative Branch: Three assistant judges serve as the sole legislative decision-making authority for each county.

Executive Branch: Three assistant judges serve as the sole executive decision-making authority for each county.

Judicial Branch: The Vermont Superior Court serves as a replacement for the formerly separated superior, district, family and environmental courts. The Superior Court includes five divisions - civil, criminal, environmental, family and probate. Each of Vermont's 14 counties contains a superior court.

Optional Forms of Government: There are no alternative forms of county government.



COUNTY AUTHORITY

Executive Power: Assistant judges care for and supervise county property and may allow county clerks to process U.S. passport applications; take deeds and leases of real estate; rent, sell and convey unused lands belonging to the county; and maintain a courthouse, jail and other county buildings.

Special Districts: There are over 150 special districts throughout Vermont. State statute lists seven different types of special districts, authorities and commissions, including mass transit authorities, water districts and conservation commissions. Vermont counties do not have any role in establishing these special districts.

SERVICES

OVERVIEW OF COUNTY SERVICES

Vermont counties have relatively limited authority over services. Counties' primary responsibilities include providing public safety and maintaining county buildings. Almost every local public service is provided by towns, cities or other municipal corporations, either directly or by a special service district. However, counties may provide some services, such as capital construction projects.



HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

County Health Department: The **state** appoints a local health officer for each town or city. Counties **cannot** create health departments.

Hospitals: Counties **cannot** create or operate public hospitals.

Senior Care Facilities: Counties **cannot** create or operate senior care facilities.

Mental Health Facilities: Counties **cannot** create or operate mental health care facilities.

Welfare: Counties **cannot** provide welfare services. A town or incorporated village may appropriate money to support social service programs for residents.



INFRASTRUCTURE

Roads: Towns maintain roads and bridges, but county road commissioners **may** oversee and enforce repairs. Each county superior court appoints three county road commissioners annually.

Utilities: The **state** regulates public utilities. Counties do not have authority over public utilities. Municipalities may operate and distribute water, gas, electricity and sewage disposal services.



ZONING AND DEVELOPMENT

Capital Construction Projects: The assistant judges of a county **may** authorize the preparation of preliminary plans and cost estimates for a capital construction project. The assistant judges may employ or retain architects, engineers and other personnel required for this purpose.

Zoning Power: Counties **cannot** establish a zoning authority. Municipalities may create Municipal Planning Commissions and have zoning power.

Housing Authority: Counties **cannot** create housing authorities. Each town, village or city has a housing authority.



PUBLIC AMENITIES

Parks and Recreation: Counties **cannot** provide parks and recreation services. Cities or incorporated villages may appropriate money to purchase public playgrounds and land for recreational purposes.

Libraries: Counties **cannot** create or operate public libraries, but each county **may** have a county law library in the county courthouse. Municipalities may establish and maintain public libraries.

SERVICES, CONTINUED



PUBLIC SAFETY

Law Enforcement: Counties **must** provide each sheriff's department with law enforcement equipment, supplies, insurance and funds for maintaining and operating the department in a safe and accountable manner. Each sheriff's department consists of an elected sheriff, deputy sheriffs and supporting staff.

Jails: The assistant judges of each county **may** maintain and repair the county jail.

Courthouses: Counties **must** provide a suitable courthouse, pay all utility and custodial services and keep it well furnished for use by the Superior Court, county clerk, assistant judges and probate judges. The assistant judges of each county must keep the courthouse and make needed repairs and improvements.

Fire: Counties **cannot** provide fire services. A town, city or incorporated village may create and maintain a fire department.

Ambulance: The **state** may provide emergency medical service districts, governed by a board of directors. Counties **cannot** establish or provide county ambulance services or an ambulance services district.

Emergency Management Agency: Counties **cannot** provide emergency management. Each municipality must establish a local organization for emergency management.



SCHOOLS

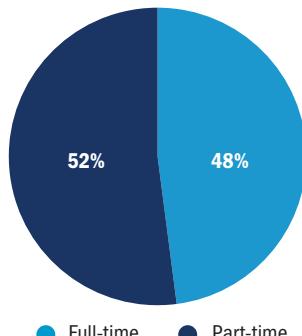
Education, Generally: The **state** board of education is responsible for evaluating education policy proposals, engaging local school board members and establishing and advancing education policy for Vermont. At the local level, education is managed by town school districts or incorporated school districts.

School Board: Each town school district must have a school board consisting of three locally elected directors. The board is responsible for determining the educational policies of the school district.

Community Colleges: The Vermont state college public corporation controls community colleges.

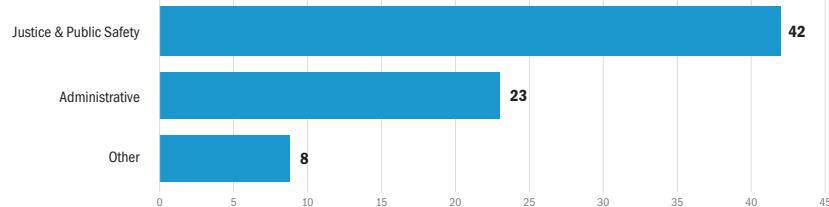
Judicial Education of Assistant Judges: Assistant judges, either collectively or through an authorized committee, **must** identify the training needs for the position and design, organize and implement an appropriate training.

VERMONT COUNTIES EMPLOY 73 GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES



Source: NACo Analysis of U.S. Census Bureau - Census of Individual Governments: Employment, 2017

VERMONT COUNTY GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES BY TOP FUNCTIONAL CATEGORIES



Source: NACo Analysis of U.S. Census Bureau - Census of Individual Governments: Employment, 2017

TAXATION/FINANCES

OVERVIEW OF COUNTY FINANCE STRUCTURE

Vermont counties have limited authority to levy taxes and raise revenue, and most of the combined revenue from all counties comes from charges, fees and intergovernmental sources. Counties may collect taxes from town treasurers to pay indebtedness and estimated expenses, but the whole tax amount cannot exceed 5 cents on a dollar of the equalized grand list of the county in one year.



FINANCES, TAXES AND LIMITATIONS

Property Tax: Tangible personal property is subject to taxation in the town, village, school and fire district where such property is situated. The county treasurer **may** issue a warrant to the town treasurer to pay the appropriate amount to the county to cover indebtedness and necessary expenses, but the whole tax amount must not exceed 5 cents on a dollar of the equalized grand list of the county in one year.

Personal Property: Tangible personal property **may** be assessed for property taxes.

Income Tax: Counties **cannot** impose an income tax.

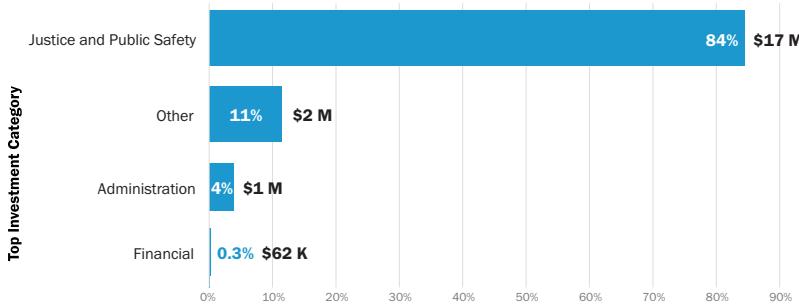
Sales Tax: Counties **cannot** impose a sales tax.

Mineral Tax: Counties **cannot** impose a mineral tax.

Gas/Fuel Taxes: Counties **cannot** impose a gas or fuel tax.

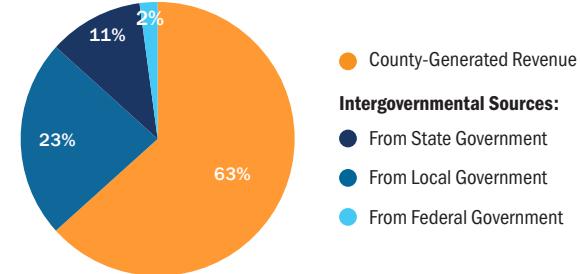
Debt and Debt Limit: The assistant judges of a county **may** submit, and have approved by voter referendum, a proposal to incur a bonded debt of any amount necessary for a capital construction project.

VERMONT COUNTIES INVEST \$20 MILLION ANNUALLY



Source: NACo Analysis of U.S. Census Bureau - Census of Individual Governments: Finance, 2017

VERMONT COUNTIES RECEIVE \$8 MILLION FROM INTERGOVERNMENTAL SOURCES



Source: NACo Analysis of U.S. Census Bureau - Census of Individual Governments: Finance, 2017