

90% Happens Locally

2026 Visual Arts Competition Program Summary

It's often said that 90% of the decisions that affect you happen locally. While this isn't a precise number, it emphasizes how important the decisions made by your city and county are to your way of life. The actions that happen within 50 miles of you have much more of an effect than actions done by the federal government. This program focuses on the effects that county and city governments can have on your life, and how you can make your voice heard to the elected officials in your neighborhood.

One important distinction to make on this topic is the legal difference between a city and a town. While the terms are often interchangeable in normal conversation, they mean two different things: Two groups with different duties. The main difference is how independent each organization is. A city can run its own services, but a town relies on the county for things like policing and road maintenance. The key factor in whether a place is a city or a town is size. A city has to have at least 1,500 people to become a city. Even if it loses those people, though, it still remains a city. This is the case for Palouse and Tekoa, while Pullman and Colfax are still official cities.

Even though they have their differences, cities and towns are run basically the same way: Through a council. A council has some number of members, usually 5-7, and those members meet to discuss laws and regulations, set budgets for the year, and hear community comments. In your community, these councils can make decisions like what kind of animals you can own, how much noise you can make, and what's built in new parks. Part of their duty is to represent their citizens, and so if you have something you want changed in your city, the city council is who to talk to! Council meetings also have community comments, where you can have a few minutes to speak to the entire board, plus any other attendees, to make a case for what you want changed.

Counties are one step up from cities and towns. The county can make decisions for all the cities and towns in its area, plus all the areas that aren't part of cities and towns. They handle things like elections, public health services, and the county jail. Counties are run by county commissions, which function very similarly to city and town councils. These usually have only 3 members, but those 3 members hear out public comment just like city councils do.

Special districts are another type of government, but they aren't affiliated with county or city governments. That's why they're called special districts! They usually don't fall along city or county borders. Instead, they include everyone who lives within a certain area of whatever service they represent. For example, school districts include everyone who lives in the area that the school services. Everyone who lives in that area gets to vote on who goes on the school board, as well as how much money the school gets through taxes. Schools have special districts, but so do fire stations, hospitals, and even cemeteries! These special districts can affect how much tax you pay, and who gets to make the important decisions in these organizations.

Local government affects everything from your parks, to your pets, to your schools. These local governments decide many important things, including how much funding your community gets! You also have much more power in your local governments. While you're only 1 out of 300 million on a federal scale, you're 1 out of 50,000 on a county level, and maybe as much as 1 out of 76 in your city or town! Your voice matters to your local government, and it's important to make it heard so that your local officials can make the decisions you want to see.

Take a moment to imagine what kind of voice you might have in city government, then visualize it!

Visit lwvpullman.org for more information.