

Approximately 35,000 special districts are local governments providing critical infrastructure and essential services in thousands of communities across the country. They exist when a community demands a service that another unit of government is not otherwise providing. These agencies are established and locally governed under an enabling act or special act of a state to provide a limited and specific set of public services.

The Problem

Despite the significant presence of special districts in the U.S., **Federal law lacks a consistent definition and reference to special purpose units of local government.**

As a result, special districts:

- May have difficulties directly accessing funding opportunities.
- Are commonly omitted as eligible in the definitions of “local government” for proposed legislation and laws intended to assist all local governments.
- Are mistaken for small businesses or nonprofit corporations.
- Lack official population figures, as they are not federally recognized as “geographic units of government.”

The Solution

- Federally **define “special district.”**
- Ensure “special districts” are included as a **“unit of local government,”** when specifically defined in legislation.
- **Provide adequate resources for the U.S. Census Bureau** divisions responsible for the data and statistics collection of the nation’s local governments.

“Special District,” Defined.

The following is NSDC’s proposal for a federal definition of “special district”:

“The term “special district” means “a **political subdivision of a State**, with specified boundaries, created by or pursuant to the laws of the State, for the **purpose of performing limited and specific governmental or proprietary functions**, *except that the term does not include a school district, college, county, city, town, township, village, parish, borough, or other general purpose unit of government.*”

Common Services Provided

- | | | |
|--------------------|------------------------|-----------------------|
| Water & Wastewater | Healthcare & Hospital | Road & Highway |
| Irrigation | Park & Recreation | Airport |
| Fire Protection | Port/Harbor/Navigation | Electricity |
| Ambulance | Library | Mosquito Control |
| Transit | Cemetery | Resource Conservation |

Quick Facts

35,000

Special District Governments

17%

All local government revenue

50 states

Connect & Engage on Solutions

NSDC is the only national organization representing and advocating for all types of special districts at the federal level.

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