

Goals for this guide:

By the end of this field guide, you will be able to:

- ✓ Explain what a county is and why counties matter.
- ✓ Identify important county services that affect daily life.
- ✓ Recognize the roles of county officials.
- ✓ Understand how county leaders make decisions.
- ✓ Research your own county and its unique characteristics.
- ✓ Practice thinking like a county official solving real-world problems.
- ✓ Understand how to find information about counties on **TexasCountiesDeliver.org**.

Content for this guide was generated as part of the Texas Association of Counties' educational campaign, Texas Counties Deliver. Learn more at texascountiesdeliver.org.



Why Counties Matter

Counties impact our daily lives

Think about your week. Have you ridden on county roads, gone with a guardian to vote in an election, needed a copy of your birth certificate or seen a sheriff's vehicle patrolling your area?

County government helps make all of those things possible.

Texas has **254 counties**, more than any other state in the nation. Counties serve as the local arm of state government and provide services that communities rely on every day.

What counties deliver

- ✓ Public safety and justice
- ✓ Elections and voter services
- ✓ Road construction and maintenance
- ✓ Emergency management
- ✓ Public records
- ✓ Health and safety services

County quick fact

- Counties are **led by** local officials who live and work in **the communities they serve**.
- Counties are designed to meet local needs while carrying out responsibilities established by state law.



"Counties, Distinctly Texas"



Watch this video to learn more about Texas counties.

texascountiesdeliver.org/video-library

Reflection

What are some new things you have learned about counties and their impact?

TEXAS COUNTIES AT A GLANCE

Did you know?

- ✓ Texas has **254 counties**, which is the most of any state.
- ✓ Every Texas county has a **county seat**.
- ✓ **47%** of Texas roads are built and maintained by Texas counties.
- ✓ Counties maintain **thousands of miles** of roads.
- ✓ Thousands of Texans help **conduct elections** each year.
- ✓ County officials help communities prepare for **emergencies and disasters**.

The county connection

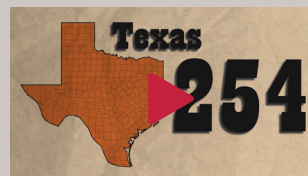
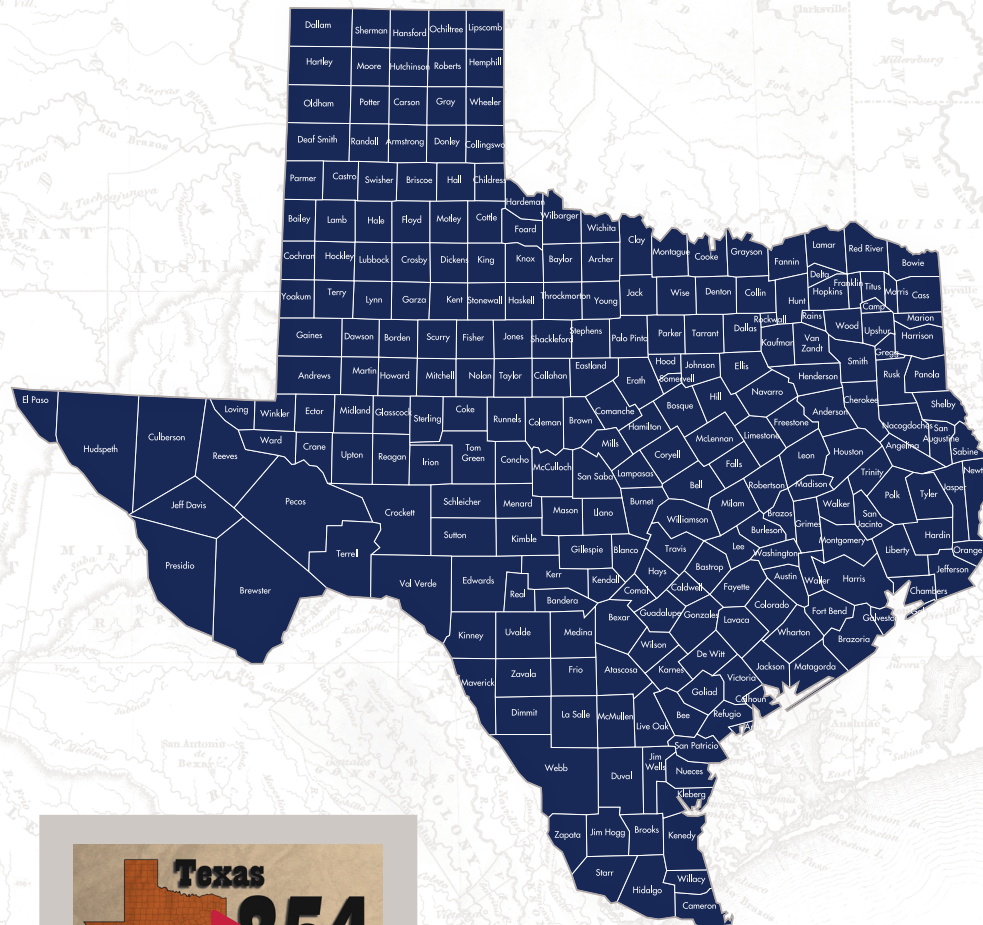
Think about your day:

- ☐ Riding on roads
- ☐ Seeing emergency vehicles
- ☐ Visiting a county building
- ☐ Hearing about elections
- ☐ Getting weather alerts
- ☐ Using public records

EACH of these may connect to county government.

Reflection

What county services do you think affect your life the most? Why?

[illegible]

"254 Counties"



Watch this video to learn how Texas ended up with 254 counties.

texascountiesdeliver.org/video-library



Who Keeps a County Running?

COUNTY OFFICIALS AND THEIR ROLES

Counties work through many offices and officials. Each has different responsibilities, but they work together to serve the public. The information below is a snapshot of some their duties, but not an exhaustive list. For information and details, read through each role at texascountiesdeliver.org/county-officials.

☐ **County Judge**

Leads county government, oversees county operations and serves as the county's emergency management leader. In many counties, the judge also handles certain court cases.

□ County Commissioners

Serve on the Commissioners Court, represent one of four precincts in the county, and are often responsible for maintaining roads and bridges within their precinct.

☐ **County Clerk**

Maintains important county records, including birth certificates, marriage licenses and property records. In many counties, they also serve as the chief elections officer and support county courts.

☐ District Clerk

Manages records for the district courts, coordinates jury selection and helps maintain court documents and funds related to legal cases.

** In counties with a population of fewer than 8,000 people, the county clerk also serves as the district clerk.*

□ Sheriff

Serves as the county's chief law enforcement officer, enforces state laws, operates the county jail, provides courthouse security and serves legal documents such as warrants and court orders.

☐ Justices of the Peace

Handle minor legal matters, including traffic tickets, small claims cases, truancy cases and some misdemeanor offenses. May also perform marriage ceremonies and serve as coroners in counties without a medical examiner.

❑ Constables

Serve as licensed peace officers who serve court documents, execute warrants and help support the courts. Constables may also patrol their precinct, enforce laws and assist with public safety in their communities.

☐ **County Attorney**

Prosecutes misdemeanor criminal cases, provides legal advice to county officials, and represents the county in legal matters.

☐ **District Attorney**

Prosecutes felony criminal cases, works with law enforcement during investigations, and presents cases to grand juries.

** Some counties have either a criminal district attorney or a combination county and district attorney. In these counties, one office performs the functions of both. County/District Attorneys also protect children in certain court cases.*

☐ **Tax Assessor-Collector**

Handles vehicle titles and registration. May also collect taxes and fees for local taxing entities, register voters and process boat registrations.

☐ **County Treasurer**

Manages county funds and helps track county finances. In some counties, they may also oversee payroll, investments, employee benefits and other financial responsibilities.

☐ **County Auditor**

Reviews county spending, maintains financial records and prepares budget information. In larger counties, also serves as the county's budget officer. Auditors are appointed by District Judge/s.



Reflection

Which county job sounds most interesting to you and why?

[illegible]

Think Like a County Official

COUNTY OFFICIALS AND THEIR ROLES

Choose ONE county official:

- ☐ County Judge
- ☐ County Commissioner
- ☐ Sheriff
- ☐ County Clerk or District Clerk
- ☐ Tax Assessor-Collector
- ☐ County Treasurer
- ☐ Justice of the Peace
- ☐ Constable
- ☐ County or District Attorney
- ☐ Auditor

Research Challenge



Review your county's websites and the Texas Counties Deliver website (texascountiesdeliver.org/mycounty) to investigate:

1. What is the county official's name in your county?
2. How long have they been in office?
3. What are this official's responsibilities?
4. What skills would someone need to do this job?
5. What challenges might they face?
6. What decisions might they make in a typical week?
7. Is there anything unique about this official's position in your county?



Your Findings

Official Chosen: _____

Most Important Responsibility:

Most Interesting Fact:



Thinking Like a Leader

LONE STAR COUNTY LEADERSHIP CHALLENGES

Read through the following scenarios that take place in fictional Lone Star County and think about how you would handle each situation as a county official. Use **texascountiesdeliver.org** for information about county official's duties and roles.

Scenario 1: Severe Weather Emergency

A strong storm system is moving toward Lone Star County. Weather experts predict heavy rain, flash flooding, and possible tornadoes. Some roads may become unsafe, and residents need information about shelters and emergency services.

Your Challenge

You are part of the leadership team helping Lone Star County prepare for the storm.

Questions

1. Which county officials should be involved?

- ☐ County Judge
- ☐ County Commissioner
- ☐ Sheriff
- ☐ County Clerk
- ☐ Emergency Management Staff
- ☐ Other:

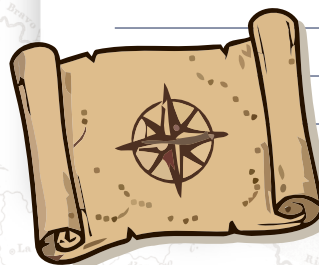
2. What should each official do before the storm arrives?

3. What information should be shared with residents and how?

4. What should be the county's top priority?

Think Like a Leader: Severe Weather Emergency

What difficult decisions might county officials have to make if roads become flooded or power outages occur?





LONE STAR COUNTY LEADERSHIP CHALLENGES

Scenario 2: Election Day Is Coming

Election Day is three weeks away in Lone Star County. More residents have registered to vote than ever before. County leaders want to make sure voting locations are ready and that voters know where to go.

Your Challenge

Help Lone Star County prepare for a successful election.

Questions

1. Which county officials should be involved?

- ☐ County Clerk/
Elections Administrator
- ☐ County Judge
- ☐ Commissioners Court
- ☐ Sheriff
- ☐ Other: _____

2. What should county officials do before Election Day?

3. How can the county help voters find accurate information?

4. What problems could happen if the county does not prepare properly?

Think Like a Leader: Election Day Is Coming

Imagine you are the Elections Administrator for Lone Star County. What would be your top three priorities to make sure Election Day runs smoothly? Explain your choices.





LONE STAR COUNTY LEADERSHIP CHALLENGES

Read through the following scenarios that take place in fictional Lone Star County and think about how you would handle each situation as a county official. Use [texascountiesdeliver.org](https://www.texascountiesdeliver.org) for information about county official's duties and roles.

Scenario 3: Sheriff Phone Scam Alert

Residents across Lone Star County are receiving phone calls from people pretending to be Sheriff's Office employees. The callers demand money and claim residents will be arrested if they do not pay immediately. Several citizens have already reported the scam.

Your Challenge

Help county officials respond to the situation.

Questions

1. Which county officials should be involved?

- ☐ Sheriff
- ☐ County Judge
- ☐ County Communications Staff
- ☐ County Clerk
- ☐ Other:

2. What should the Sheriff's Office do to protect residents?

3. How should the county warn the public about the scam?

4. What advice should officials give residents?

Think Like a Leader: Sheriff Phone Scam Alert

Why is it important for county officials to communicate quickly during situations like this?





LONE STAR COUNTY LEADERSHIP CHALLENGES

Scenario 4: Back-to-School Season

Your Challenge

Questions

- ☐ County Commissioners
- ☐ Sheriff
- ☐ Constable
- ☐ Tax Assessor-Collector
- ☐ County Clerk
- ☐ Other:

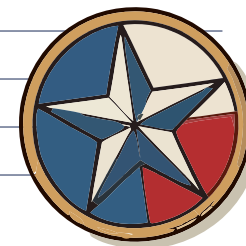
3. How can county roads and traffic patterns affect students and families?

4. Which county office may families need to visit for vital records such as birth certificates?

5. What message would you share with residents before school begins?

Think Like a Leader: Back-to-School Season

Imagine you are a county commissioner preparing for the new school year. How would you prepare to help students and families have a successful start to the school year? Explain your choices.



Leadership reflection

Good county leaders often balance safety, budgets, time, and community needs when making decisions.

- ✓ A famous landmark
- ✓ A historical event
- ✓ A natural feature
- ✓ A local tradition
- ✓ An important industry
- ✓ A unique record or achievement
- ✓ Named after an interesting person or event

Year County Founded:

My county's unique story:



TexasCountiesDeliver.org

THE HEART OF COUNTY GOVERNMENT

Use **TexasCountiesDeliver.org** to answer the following questions.

Website scavenger hunt

1. How many county officials are in Texas?
2. Name three services counties provide.
3. Which county official issues motor vehicle registration and licenses?
4. What county office operates the county jail?
5. What percentage of Texas roads are maintained by counties?
6. What are some things that make county government different from city or state governments?

Bonus Challenge

Find one fact on the website that surprised you.



"City, State and County Government"



Watch this video to learn more about the difference between your city, state and county government.

texascountiesdeliver.org/video-library

Your Answers

[illegible]

County Careers

THE PEOPLE BEHIND COUNTY SERVICES

Careers in county government

- Law enforcement officers
- Emergency managers
- Engineers
- Accountants
- Technology specialists
- Election administrators
- Clerks and records managers
- Attorneys
- Communications professionals
- Road and bridge crews

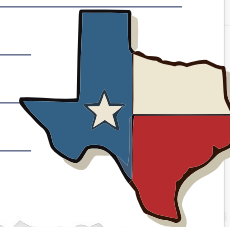
Match your interests

Check any that describe you:

- ❑ Problem Solving
- ❑ Technology
- ❑ Leadership
- ❑ Writing
- ❑ Math
- ❑ Helping Others
- ❑ Organization
- ❑ Public Speaking

Reflection

Based on what you feel are your interests and strengths, which county career would you like to learn more about?

This image shows a vertical sheet of white paper with horizontal blue lines. In the bottom right corner, there is a graphic of the state of Texas. The Texas map is filled with a blue and white star pattern, similar to the Texas state flag. To the right of the map, there is a vertical strip of red and white stripes, also mimicking the Texas flag. The graphic is partially cut off by the right edge of the paper.

Texas Courthouses

TEXAS COUNTIES DELIVER WEB CHALLENGE

Across Texas, every county has a courthouse that serves as the center of county government. Many courthouses are among the most recognizable and beautiful buildings in their communities.

Texas courthouses are known for their unique architecture, historical designs, and impressive features such as clock towers, domes and grand entrances. No two courthouses are exactly alike. They reflect the history, culture and character of the counties they serve.

County courthouses are where important county business takes place. They often house offices such as the county judge, county clerk, district clerk, and other county departments. Courts hear cases, public records are maintained, and county leaders make decisions that affect their communities.

Quick facts

- Every Texas county has a courthouse.
- Each courthouse has its own unique history and design.
- Many courthouses have been carefully restored and are considered architectural treasures.
- Texas courthouses are some of the most photographed historic buildings in the state.

Courthouse challenge

Look up your county courthouse and find the following:

- The year it was built
- One unique architectural feature
- One county office located inside
- One interesting fact about its history



Your County Courthouse





Texas Counties Quiz

TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

Circle the best answer.

1. How many counties does Texas have?

- A. 178
- B. 254
- C. 422
- D. 1,799

2. Which county official serves as a bailiff for the Justice Court?

- A. County Clerk
- B. Sheriff
- C. Treasurer
- D. Constable

3. Justices of the Peace keep records for birth certificates and marriage licenses.

- A. True
- B. False

4. Which county official often serves as the chief elections officer?

- A. County Clerk
- B. Sheriff
- C. District Attorney
- D. Auditor

5. Which office handles vehicle registration?

- A. Commissioner
- B. Auditor
- C. Tax Assessor-Collector
- D. Treasurer

6. Counties can help provide emergency management services.

- A. True
- B. False

7. What is the governing body of the county?

- A. City Council
- B. School Board
- C. Commissioners Court
- D. State Legislature

8. Which official helps maintain county roads?

- A. County Clerk
- B. Sheriff
- C. Constable
- D. Commissioner

9. Counties are divided into six precincts.

- A. True
- B. False

10. County government affects daily life through roads, elections, records, and public safety.

- A. True
- B. False



What Did You Learn?

TEXAS COUNTY GOVERNMENT

Be Curious

County government is part of everyday life. The more you learn about your community, the more you'll discover how local leaders, employees and residents work together to solve problems and deliver services across Texas.

Content Foundation

This guide is based on the Texas Counties Deliver educational framework, county government educational materials, and the Texas County Field Guide planning documents provided for development.

Keep exploring at
[TexasCountiesDeliver.org](https://www.texascountiesdeliver.org)



County 10 quiz answers, pg. 22:	1. B	5. C	9. B
	2. D	6. A	10. A
	3. B	7. C	
	4. A	8. D	

Reflection

Before reading this guide, I thought county government was:

Now I understand that county government:
