**Fiscal Facts: An abundance of local governments in Wisconsin**

Wisconsin had the 11th-most local governments of any state in 2017, due in part to a tenfold increase in the last five decades in special districts that manage lakes, sewers, and sanitation.

Like the rest of the upper Midwest, Wisconsin has an unusually high number of local governments compared to other states, recently released U.S. Census Bureau figures show.

Wisconsin’s multitude of counties, municipalities, towns, school and technical college districts and special districts has longstanding roots in the state. But it also prompts the question of whether shared delivery of services across local boundaries — or even government consolidation — should be considered.

Nearly two-thirds of the state’s local governments are “general purpose”: counties (72), cities and villages (601), and towns (1,251). The remainder includes 438 school and technical college districts as well as 734 “special district governments,” which vary from the taxing district used to finance the construction of Miller Park to city electric utilities and lake districts. Wisconsin has gained almost 700 local governments since the mid-1970s.

The abundance of governments has made overlapping responsibilities a longstanding concern. In the early 2000s, a major state panel now known as the “Kettl Commission” argued greater clarity and cooperation was needed at the local level.

In recent years, there has been growing interest in service sharing as a means to boost efficiency without eliminating entire units of government.

*This information is a service of the Wisconsin Policy Forum, the state’s leading resource for nonpartisan state and local government research and civic education. Learn more at wispolicyforum.org.*