



How Many People Run Our Towns?

Fact Sheet: Positional Leadership Across Rural and Urban Utah

December 20, 2023

Benjamin Winchester, Rural Sociology Educator, Community Development
benw@umn.edu

Governmental Leadership

Positional leaders are crucial components of our communities and there are many governmental positions - both elected and appointed - to fill. In Utah there are 29 counties, 250 municipalities, 41 school districts, and 299 “special” districts which provide oversight functions related to water, sewer, cemeteries, highways, airports, fire protection, soil and water conservation, and hospitals.¹ This amounts to a total of 619 governmental agencies requiring leadership. Of the 2,324,051 residents in the state over the age of 18 (eligibility for positional leadership) we find that 1 in every 751 adults in Utah need to serve as a government leader.²

Nonprofit Leadership

Social life as seen through the nonprofit lens reflects who we are as communities. We recognize many of these groups such as the American Red Cross, 4-H Clubs, and Humane Societies. There are also community-specific groups such as bicycling associations, community improvement groups, libraries, arts and cultural groups, and lake associations. The nonprofit sector in Utah is thriving, and in 2020 there were a total of 8,244 registered nonprofits across the state.³ These social organizations also require positional leaders. We find in Utah that 1 in every 47 people need to serve as a nonprofit leader.⁴

¹ Source: 2017 Census of Governments, 2020 Decennial Census, U.S. Census Bureau.

² To simplify, an assumed calculation of five leaders needed for each governmental agency will be used, this also keeps in line with previous reports.

³ Source: 2020 National Center for Charitable Statistics, Internal Revenue Service

⁴ This assumes that every nonprofit group requires six people to serve. Data on average board sizes range from 12 to 15 and estimates for optimal board sizes range from 5 to 7.

The Rural-Urban Continuum

There are important differences in leadership between urban and rural places. The Rural-Urban Continuum Code (RUCC), created by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Economic Research Service, assigns counties on a continuum from large metropolitan to small nonmetropolitan. The full list of the counties assigned to each Continuum Code can be found in the Appendix.

The demand for government leadership can be calculated by taking the number of residents over the age of 18, divided by the number of governments requiring boards. The size of these boards are not available by each type of government, rather the analysis will assume that five resident positions will be demanded by each.

Table 1: Number of Governments by Rural-Urban Continuum Code

RUCC	Governments	Population Age >18	Leadership Demands
1 (most urban)	90	923,634	1 in 2,053
2	188	934,405	1 in 994
3	66	226,898	1 in 688
4	38	73,036	1 in 384
5	-	-	-
6	47	50,559	1 in 215
7	132	106,137	1 in 161
8	11	1,743	1 in 32
9 (most rural)	47	7,639	1 in 33
TOTAL	619	2,324,051	1 in 751

The difference in demands for government leadership between the most urban and most rural counties is striking. In the urban counties of the state, 1 in 2,053 residents over the age of 18 must serve as a governmental leader (Table 1). In the most rural counties of the state this demand dramatically increases to 1 in 33 residents.

The leadership infrastructure of communities also includes nonprofit groups. The demand for nonprofit leadership can be calculated by taking the number of residents over the age of 18, divided by the number of nonprofits. Here we assume that each nonprofit board will require six resident members.

Table 2: Number of Nonprofits by Rural-Urban Continuum Code


RUCC	Nonprofits	Population Age >18	Leadership Demands
1 (most urban)	4,205	923,634	1 in 37
2	2,304	934,405	1 in 68
3	652	226,898	1 in 58
4	396	73,036	1 in 31
5	-	-	
6	163	50,559	1 in 52
7	464	106,137	1 in 38
8	13	1,743	1 in 22
9 (most rural)	47	7,639	1 in 27
TOTAL	8,244	2,324,051	1 in 47

In the most urban counties across Utah, 1 in 47 to nearly 1 in 70 residents over the age of 18 must serve as a nonprofit leader (Table 2). There tends to be a high concentration of nonprofits in urban areas due to proximity to economic and political centers of activity. In the most rural counties of the state this demand is highest where 1 in 22 residents are needed to serve as a nonprofit leader. Combined with the governmental leadership demands, it is likely true that our rural communities have a higher demand for leaders.

Table 3: Number of Governments and Nonprofits by Rural-Urban Continuum Code

RUCC	Gov'ts	Nonprofits	Total Organizations Demanding Leadership	Demand	Percent Gov't
1 (most urban)	90	4,205	4,295	1 in 36	2%
2	188	2,304	2,492	1 in 63	8%
3	66	652	718	1 in 53	9%
4	38	396	434	1 in 28	9%
5					
6	47	163	210	1 in 42	22%
7	132	464	596	1 in 31	22%
8	11	13	24	1 in 13	46%
9 (most rural)	47	47	94	1 in 15	50%
TOTAL	619	8,244	8,863	1 in 44	7%

Putting together these two data sources, we find there are a total of 8,863 government and nonprofit organizations demanding leaders in Utah (Table 3). All the county-based government and nonprofits demand 1 in 44 adults serve as a positional leader. One additional difference between the most urban and most rural places lies in the



proportional relationship between the government and nonprofit sectors. In the urban counties, just 2% of overall leadership demands are derived from governmental sources. Whereas in the most rural counties, governmental make up 50% of overall leadership demands - almost ensuring the need to cross government-nonprofit boundaries to fulfill leadership supply.

See how your county stacks up in Table 4 below.
For questions, contact Ben Winchester, benw@umn.edu.

Table 4: Number of Governments, Nonprofits, and Residents Age 18+ by County

	Gov'ts, 2017	Nonprofits, 2020	2020 Population Age >18	Demand
Beaver County, Utah	8	15	4,910	1 in 38
Box Elder County, Utah	40	98	39,411	1 in 50
Cache County, Utah	42	315	94,161	1 in 45
Carbon County, Utah	11	85	15,185	1 in 27
Daggett County, Utah	7	5	716	1 in 11
Davis County, Utah	32	618	246,384	1 in 64
Duchesne County, Utah	19	43	13,268	1 in 38
Emery County, Utah	15	31	6,956	1 in 27
Garfield County, Utah	23	21	3,881	1 in 16
Grand County, Utah	13	72	7,622	1 in 15
Iron County, Utah	11	133	41,030	1 in 48
Juab County, Utah	10	16	7,756	1 in 53
Kane County, Utah	10	33	5,915	1 in 24
Millard County, Utah	23	31	8,935	1 in 30
Morgan County, Utah	6	28	7,996	1 in 40
Piute County, Utah	7	3	1,092	1 in 21
Rich County, Utah	11	13	1,743	1 in 13
Salt Lake County, Utah	72	4,097	874,895	1 in 35
San Juan County, Utah	9	38	10,342	1 in 38
Sanpete County, Utah	21	64	20,434	1 in 42
Sevier County, Utah	17	78	15,073	1 in 27
Summit County, Utah	27	263	32,006	1 in 19
Tooele County, Utah	18	108	48,739	1 in 66
Uintah County, Utah	17	71	23,846	1 in 47
Utah County, Utah	53	981	443,266	1 in 72
Wasatch County, Utah	16	66	24,210	1 in 51
Washington County, Utah	24	337	132,737	1 in 62
Wayne County, Utah	10	18	1,950	1 in 12
Weber County, Utah	47	563	189,592	1 in 52

Appendix 1: Rural-Urban Continuum Code counties

RUCC	Description	Counties
1	Counties in metro areas of 1 million population or more	Salt Lake County, Utah Tooele County, Utah
2	Counties in metro areas of 250,000 to 1 million population	Box Elder County, Utah Davis County, Utah Juab County, Utah Morgan County, Utah Utah County, Utah Weber County, Utah
3	Counties in metro areas of fewer than 250,000 population	Cache County, Utah Washington County, Utah
4	Urban population of 20,000 or more, adjacent to a metro area	Iron County, Utah Summit County, Utah
5	Urban population of 20,000 or more, not adjacent to a metro area	
6	Urban population of 2,500 to 19,999, adjacent to a metro area	Kane County, Utah Sanpete County, Utah Wasatch County, Utah
7	Urban population of 2,500 to 19,999, not adjacent to a metro area	Beaver County, Utah Carbon County, Utah Duchesne County, Utah Emery County, Utah Grand County, Utah Millard County, Utah San Juan County, Utah Sevier County, Utah Uintah County, Utah
8	Completely rural or less than 2,500 urban population, adjacent to a metro area	Rich County, Utah
9	Completely rural or less than 2,500 urban population, not adjacent to a metro area	Daggett County, Utah Garfield County, Utah Piute County, Utah Wayne County, Utah

© 2023, Regents of the University of Minnesota. University of Minnesota Extension is an equal opportunity educator and employer. In accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act, this publication/material is available in alternative formats upon request. Direct requests to 612-625-8233.