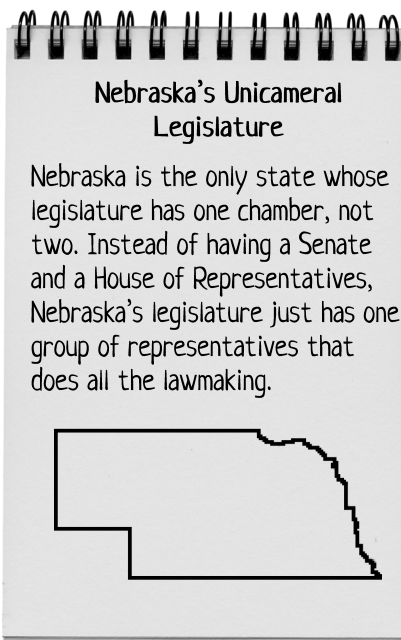


## State Government: Sound Familiar?


State governments work almost exactly like the federal government. There are three branches of government: an executive branch, a legislative branch, and a judicial branch. At the state level, the head of the executive branch is called the governor. Every state except one also has a **bicameral** legislature, meaning that the legislature is made up of two chambers. In most states, those chambers are called the Senate and the House of Representatives. A state's judicial branch normally includes a high court, often called the Supreme Court, and a system of lower courts. These lower courts include trial courts and appeals courts.

A state's three branches interact just like the three branches at the federal level. The purpose of having three branches is to balance power so that no one branch or person becomes too powerful. The state's legislature passes laws. A state's governor can veto laws that are passed, and a state's high court has the power to decide whether state laws violate the state's constitution.



### Nebraska's Unicameral Legislature

Nebraska is the only state whose legislature has one chamber, not two. Instead of having a Senate and a House of Representatives, Nebraska's legislature just has one group of representatives that does all the lawmaking.



Many state legislatures have outgrown their historic buildings, such as this state capitol building in Arizona.

## The State Legislative Branch

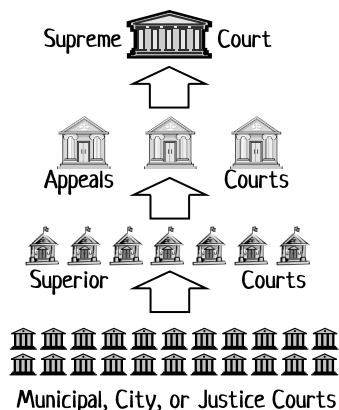
The state **legislature** is the state's lawmaking body. The state's **legislators** are the state's lawmakers. Each state is divided into legislative **districts** that contain roughly the same number of citizens. Citizens in each district elect representatives to serve in the state legislature. That means the state legislators represent the citizens who live in their district. This way, the interests of people in different parts of the state can be represented when state laws are being considered.



Governors from each state belong to the National Governors Association and meet twice each year to discuss issues that affect all states.

## The State Executive Branch

The head of a state's executive branch is the state **governor**. The governor is like the "president" of a state and has similar powers, such as the power to veto bills passed by the state's legislature. A state's executive branch also includes many **departments**. States usually have their own departments of education, transportation, health, and other services. These departments carry out the laws passed by the state's legislature.



## The State Judicial Branch

At the state level, like the federal level, cases start in a trial court. In many states, the trial-court level is called the **superior court**. States also have appeals courts where people can fight a trial court's ruling. And, of course, every state has a high court. A state's high court reviews the decisions made by lower courts, supervises the other courts, and interprets the state constitution as it applies to the law. State judicial branches also include a level of courts below the trial courts. These courts handle the thousands of smaller issues that come up every day, such as traffic tickets and minor crimes called misdemeanors.



*The New York Assembly*

## State Laws

The state legislature is a state's lawmaking body. But in all states, the "law of the land" is the **state constitution**. Just like the U.S. Constitution, a state's constitution describes how the state's government must operate. It may also include other laws, such as requiring a free education for state citizens. In addition to the state constitution and the state legislative branch, there are usually other ways that laws can be made in a state. In many states, the **initiative** process allows citizens to draft laws they would like to see adopted. If citizens collect enough signatures, the law will be placed on the ballot for state citizens to vote on. The **referendum** process works the same way but is used to let citizens vote on a law already passed by the state legislature. However a state law is adopted, the law only applies inside that state.

## Services, Services

State governments provide many services to state citizens. These include things like police, fire safety, child protective services, roads, schools, and parks. One of the biggest services is maintaining the state's **infrastructure**—the basic support structures that serve a geographic area, such as transportation, communication, and power systems. All of these services cost money and are generally paid for with taxes collected from citizens. Usually, however, states cannot afford to provide all the services citizens need. Very often, states look to the federal government for help. The federal government gives states money in the form of **grants**, which are sums of money designated for a certain purpose such as improving an airport or providing health care to low-income households.



*Idaho's Division of Building Safety issues licenses to electricians, plumbers and others.*

## Regulations = Rules

State governments also protect citizens by **regulating**, or making rules about, many activities. Doctors, dentists, accountants, builders, barbers, and many other professionals must be certified by state agencies. State and local governments enforce building codes that specify exactly how buildings must be constructed. They conduct food safety inspections at restaurants, check to make sure gasoline pumps are accurate, and administer tests to people seeking a driver's license. The state agencies that carry out these regulations are almost always part of the state's executive branch.

## Local Governments

Local governments, such as cities and counties, get their power from the state government. The state decides what services cities and counties are responsible for providing and what kinds of laws cities and counties are allowed to make. Because local governments are the closest to citizens, often they are the ones that can most easily provide services. Some services such as schools, libraries, police, water, and trash collection are usually controlled at the local level. Even so, local governments must follow both state and federal laws when providing these services.



*Animal licensing and leash laws are usually controlled by local governments.*

# The Great State

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

**A. Vocabulary Search!** Find and circle a word that matches each clue. When you find the word, write it on the blank next to the clue.

1. Parts of the executive branch that carry out laws.  
\_\_\_\_\_

2. A legislature made up of two houses.  
\_\_\_\_\_

3. Basic support structures such as communication and power systems.  
\_\_\_\_\_

4. Citizens in these geographical areas elect legislators to represent them in the state's legislative branch.  
\_\_\_\_\_

5. A state's judicial branch is made up of these.  
\_\_\_\_\_

|   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| C | M | B | X | S | Q | J | F | O | V | K | L | N | K | I | X | N | J |
| Q | O | U | I | K | T | S | Q | G | J | D | E | O | B | X | D | Y | H |
| I | R | N | D | C | H | R | O | Q | E | I | G | I | Q | M | W | N | A |
| A | O | U | S | N | A | V | U | P | L | E | I | T | A | B | W | O | I |
| X | A | D | R | T | E | M | A | O | R | N | S | A | J | X | Q | D | L |
| I | P | Z | D | R | I | R | E | W | C | O | L | L | N | L | J | W | H |
| A | D | L | N | H | T | T | E | R | H | U | A | U | E | G | I | J | V |
| L | N | O | P | M | Z | R | U | F | A | X | T | G | M | J | J | K | G |
| H | R | D | E | R | G | N | J | T | E | L | U | E | R | I | C | H | D |
| N | W | N | B | U | V | T | K | Y | I | R | R | R | D | D | S | B | N |
| U | T | S | E | C | I | V | R | E | S | O | E | Q | Z | I | E | A | T |
| S | P | I | P | U | N | B | E | Y | T | Y | N | Q | Y | S | K | N | F |
| I | N | F | R | A | S | T | R | U | C | T | U | R | E | T | A | W | R |
| Y | O | G | J | T | W | H | Q | U | E | N | I | Z | Y | R | R | I | O |
| C | I | T | Y | P | X | I | U | O | H | U | Q | Y | G | I | C | U | S |
| E | V | I | T | A | I | T | I | N | I | O | A | H | F | C | Z | Y | M |
| C | F | V | G | N | U | U | N | S | O | C | Q | R | E | T | R | G | J |
| U | N | I | C | A | M | E | R | A | L | U | V | T | F | S | P | U | G |

6. Each state has one of these to describe how the state government runs. \_\_\_\_\_

7. A process that lets citizens place a law on the ballot to be voted on. \_\_\_\_\_

8. States provide these to state citizens. \_\_\_\_\_

9. A state's lawmaking body. \_\_\_\_\_

10. Money the federal government gives a state for a certain purpose. \_\_\_\_\_

11. Another word for rule. \_\_\_\_\_

12. A type of local government. \_\_\_\_\_

13. The head of a state's executive branch. \_\_\_\_\_

14. Process where citizens vote on a law the state legislature has adopted. \_\_\_\_\_

15. A type of local government. \_\_\_\_\_

**Mystery Word!** What word is in the puzzle but not in the clue list? \_\_\_\_\_

This word is special because \_\_\_\_\_.

# The Great State

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

**B. That's Incorrect!** There's something wrong with each of the following statements. Figure out what it is. Cross out parts of the sentence and make corrections on the line.

1. Unlike the federal government, state governments only have one branch of government.

\_\_\_\_\_

2. States are divided into districts, and citizens in each district elect a governor to be head of their district.

\_\_\_\_\_

3. A state's executive branch includes many departments that handle thousands of small issues such as misdemeanors.

\_\_\_\_\_

4. States can afford to provide citizens with all necessary services and do not usually need any financial help.

\_\_\_\_\_

5. Local governments are independent and have the power to do anything they want to.

\_\_\_\_\_

**C. Licensed... or Not?** When you make an "educated guess," you are guessing based on things you already know. Read the list of professions below. Which jobs do you think most states require a license for? Think about what these people do and make an educated guess about whether they need a state license. Put a check mark next to every job you think requires a license in most states.

- |                                    |  |                                       |  |
|------------------------------------|--|---------------------------------------|--|
| <input type="radio"/> Architect    | <input type="radio"/> Real Estate Agent    | <input type="radio"/> Event Planner   | <input type="radio"/> Office Manager     |
| <input type="radio"/> Cashier      | <input type="radio"/> Exterminator         | <input type="radio"/> Teacher         | <input type="radio"/> Massage Therapist  |
| <input type="radio"/> Dentist      | <input type="radio"/> Private Investigator | <input type="radio"/> Nail Technician | <input type="radio"/> Fitness Instructor |
| <input type="radio"/> Interpreter  | <input type="radio"/> Car Salesperson      | <input type="radio"/> Embalmer        | <input type="radio"/> Electrician        |
| <input type="radio"/> Veterinarian | <input type="radio"/> Software Developer   | <input type="radio"/> Actor           | <input type="radio"/> Hair Dresser       |

Now choose three jobs you checked. Explain why you think states probably require a license for that.

| JOB | PROBABLY REQUIRES A LICENSE BECAUSE... |
|-----|--|
|     |  |
|     |  |
|     |  |