



Cost of County Governments – Fiscal Year 2018

Prepared by the Utah Taxpayers Association in cooperation with Strata Policy

The Utah Taxpayers Association's 2019 *Cost of County Governments* report, based on FY 2017 - 18 data, shows the relationship between county government revenue and citizen income in Utah's 29 counties. This data provides a snapshot of on average **how much of each thousand dollars earned by a citizen is consumed by the county government in Utah.**

This report systematically compares how well elected officials in Utah's counties control public spending and illustrates the relationship between government as a service provider and citizens as consumers. If government were a business, citizens would be consumers purchasing services with tax dollars and fee payments. But because government is not a private business, citizens are compelled to pay, and the cost of government may not be reflective of the true value of the services provided.

The Utah Taxpayers Association regularly reviews the budgets and tax rates of Utah's cities, counties and school districts. But to provide a more standardized means of comparing how well elected officials control public spending, the Taxpayers Association, in cooperation with Strata Policy, has created this report. An explanation of our methodology is at the end of this report.



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Highest Cost vs. Lowest Cost County Governments

In the Utah Taxpayers Association's 2019 *Cost of County Governments* report, Daggett County ranks highest for cost of government, where residents pay on average \$82.65 of each \$1000 they earn. The lowest ranked county is Washington County, where residents only pay \$11.77 of each \$1000 earned to the county government. The median cost of county governments in Utah is \$33.03, an increase of roughly \$2.50 from FY 2016.

Rural vs. Urban Counties

Residents in rural counties generally face a higher cost of county government than residents in urban counties. This rural versus urban trend is expected, as higher population in urban counties helps spread the burden of the counties' fixed costs in providing basic services to county residents.

Salt Lake County and Weber County are the highest cost urban county governments, where the county government consumes \$24.57 and \$24.44 of each \$1,000 earned in the county respectively. Salt Lake County's Cost of Government is higher than its population would suggest. Although Salt Lake County has nearly double the population of any other county in Utah, it is the most expensive urban county in the state. Salt Lake County's revenue from taxes

	County	Population	Rank	County Government Revenue from Taxes and Fees	Rank	County Per Capita Income	Rank	County Gov. Revenue from Taxes & Fees Per Capita	Rank	County Gov. Revenue from Taxes and Fees Per \$1000 of Citizen Income	Rank
1	Daggett	980	29	\$ 2,311,197	27	\$ 28,533	5	\$ 2,358.36	1	\$ 82.65	3
2	Garfield	5080	25	\$ 10,802,307	22	\$ 23,228	15	\$ 2,126.44	2	\$ 91.55	2
3	Kane	7709	23	\$ 15,288,766	17	\$ 24,836	11	\$ 1,983.24	3	\$ 79.85	4
4	Beaver	6580	24	\$ 12,806,033	20	\$ 21,128	23	\$ 1,946.21	4	\$ 92.11	1
5	Grand	9764	22	\$ 18,376,053	14	\$ 25,662	7	\$ 1,882.02	5	\$ 73.34	6
6	Summit	41933	10	\$ 72,947,811	5	\$ 52,671	1	\$ 1,739.63	6	\$ 33.03	15
7	Emery	10014	21	\$ 16,079,449	15	\$ 21,465	21	\$ 1,605.70	7	\$ 74.81	5
8	Duchesne	19964	16	\$ 27,372,511	11	\$ 23,323	13	\$ 1,371.09	8	\$ 58.79	8
9	Rich	2464	27	\$ 3,172,237	26	\$ 19,512	26	\$ 1,287.43	9	\$ 65.98	7
10	Millard	13006	18	\$ 14,341,279	18	\$ 23,283	14	\$ 1,102.67	10	\$ 47.36	9
11	Wasatch	33240	12	\$ 29,276,770	10	\$ 30,086	4	\$ 880.77	11	\$ 29.28	16
12	Uintah	35438	11	\$ 30,387,807	9	\$ 25,001	10	\$ 857.49	12	\$ 34.30	14
13	Wayne	2690	26	\$ 2,197,874	28	\$ 22,195	19	\$ 817.05	13	\$ 36.81	12
14	Salt Lake	1152633	1	\$ 853,297,344	1	\$ 30,134	3	\$ 740.30	14	\$ 24.57	19
15	Sevier	21539	14	\$ 15,933,407	16	\$ 21,196	22	\$ 739.75	15	\$ 34.90	13
16	San Juan	15449	17	\$ 10,657,985	23	\$ 17,385	29	\$ 689.88	16	\$ 39.68	10
17	Carbon	20269	15	\$ 13,370,014	19	\$ 22,536	18	\$ 659.63	17	\$ 29.27	17
18	Piute	1445	28	\$ 936,072	29	\$ 17,455	27	\$ 647.80	18	\$ 37.11	11
19	Weber	256359	4	\$ 158,389,347	3	\$ 25,275	9	\$ 617.84	19	\$ 24.44	20
20	Morgan	12045	19	\$ 6,386,227	24	\$ 30,457	2	\$ 530.20	20	\$ 17.41	25
21	Tooele	69907	7	\$ 35,634,795	8	\$ 24,069	12	\$ 509.75	21	\$ 21.18	24
22	Juab	11555	20	\$ 5,889,573	25	\$ 20,457	24	\$ 509.70	22	\$ 24.92	18
23	Box Elder	54950	8	\$ 27,087,101	12	\$ 22,808	17	\$ 492.94	23	\$ 21.61	23
24	Iron	52775	9	\$ 25,000,448	13	\$ 19,791	25	\$ 473.72	24	\$ 23.94	21
25	Davis	351713	3	\$ 151,714,402	4	\$ 28,293	6	\$ 431.36	25	\$ 15.25	27
26	Sanpete	30623	13	\$ 12,197,689	21	\$ 17,426	28	\$ 398.32	26	\$ 22.86	22
27	Cache	127068	6	\$ 43,004,009	7	\$ 21,752	20	\$ 338.43	27	\$ 15.56	26
28	Utah	622213	2	\$ 207,034,411	2	\$ 23,207	16	\$ 332.74	28	\$ 14.34	28
29	Washington	171700	5	\$ 55,707,754	6	\$ 25,415	8	\$ 324.45	29	\$ 12.77	29
	Median	20,269		\$ 16,079,449		\$ 23,228		\$ 739.75		\$ 33.03	
	Average	109,004		\$ 64,744,851		\$ 24,434		\$ 979.13		\$ 40.68	

and fees per capita is nearly identical to Sevier County's, even though Salt Lake County's population is more than fifty times that of Sevier County.

Property Values vs. Cost of County Government

Another general trend observed in this report is the direct relationship between property values and Cost of County Government. Utah's biggest resort community, Park City, located in Summit County, has a lower percentage of land occupied by primary residences than most cities. With so little land receiving a primary residence's 45% reduction in property taxes, Summit County tends to have more property tax revenue available. With more property tax revenue available, the county tends to spend more.

Similarly, the power plants in Emery and Millard counties generate unusually high-assessed valuations, and so they have more money to spend than counties with similar populations.

This analysis indicates that county commissions enjoying higher than average property tax revenues spend the money available, rather than lowering tax rates to keep their county's cost of government more in line with counties of a similar population.

In interpreting the cost of government in Utah's various counties, readers should keep in mind that each county provides a different mix of services. For example, Salt Lake County funds a countywide library system, while Utah County provides no such service.

Cost of County Governments also doesn't account for taxes and fees across other levels of government and only shows the cost of the *county* government to citizens.

Methodology and Data

In order to determine the Cost of Government for Utah's 29 counties, 2018 population estimates and 2017 per capita income data was collected from the US Census Bureau. Government revenue and line item data was gathered from 2018 county financial reports from the Utah State Auditor's Office.

The **County Government Revenue from Taxes and Fees** includes all county government revenue *minus* certain intergovernmental line items such as grants, sale of assets, rents, interest earnings, contributions, and intergovernmental transfers. This reflects how much county revenue is obtained through taxes and fees paid directly by citizens, and avoids double counting across levels of government.

The **Cost of County Government** is calculated by dividing the discounted revenue totals for each county by total per capita income in the county, and is expressed in thousands of dollars. This figure shows how much of each thousand dollars earned by citizens in a county is consumed by the county government.

The **County Government Revenue from Taxes and Fees Per Capita** shows County Government Revenue from Taxes and Fees divided by the county population, giving a rough estimation of how much revenue the county extracts per citizen.

Both numbers are useful in understanding how well elected officials control public spending. However, as stated earlier, each county provides a different mix of services, and this variation in services should be kept in mind when interpreting and comparing the cost of government in Utah's 29 counties.

Sources:

Per Capita Income Data: US Census Bureau, 5-year estimates from American Fact Finder

Government Revenue Data: Utah State Auditor's Office, audited county financial reports

All calculations by the Utah Taxpayers Association