# Michigan County Government Survey: Services Provided to Local Government Summary Report 

# A Collaboration Between the Michigan Association of Counties and the Michigan State University Extension Center for Local Government Finance and Policy 

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## Executive Summary

The Michigan Association of Counties and Michigan State University Extension conducted a survey of county government officials to collect information regarding the number and types of services county governments provide to other local governments. The goal of the survey is to identify services typically provided by cities, townships, and villages that are being provided by county governments. There are a total of 83 counties in Michigan, of which 58 counties responded to the survey for a response rate of approximately $70 \%$.

The survey highlights six sets of services offered by county governments to local units in Michigan, including public safety, assessor and property tax, planning, zoning, and economic development, financial reporting, IT support, and other services.

Findings show that public safety is the most common type of service with $91 \%$ of counties extending such offerings to local governments. The sharing of financial reporting services is relatively uncommon, which is provided by fewer than $10 \%$ of counties. County officials indicated that a variety of other services are provided to local governments, of which geographic information systems (GIS) services were reported several times.

Ninety percent of services are provided to townships where services have generally been provided for more than 10 years. A notable finding is the emergence of IT support service provision, where 65\% of such services have been provided for less than a decade. Also, IT service support is the only service that counties share with other counties.

Services are provided using contractual fees, no contract pro bono, or a combination of fees and pro bono with a roughly equal balance of the three arrangements across counties.

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## I. Introduction

The Michigan Association of Counties and Michigan State University Extension conducted a survey of county government officials to collect information regarding the number and types of services county governments provide to other local governments. The goal of the survey is to identify services typically provided by cities, townships, and villages that are being provided by county governments.

There are a total of 83 counties in Michigan where the survey has been accessed 70 times in total. However, some respondents accessed the link but did not complete the survey. While there was a total of 57 respondents, nine counties withdrew during the survey, and four counties are recorded as having taken the survey twice, Hence, there were 48 completed surveys with a response rate of $58 \%$. Table 1 presents the basic demographic characteristics of the surveyed counties.

Counties completing the survey encompassed more than half of the total number of townships and villages but accounted for one-third of the total state population. Also note that the average household income among counties completing the survey is two-thirds of the statewide Michigan average.

In the survey, $85 \%$ of the respondents were county administrators. Within this group, approximately $10 \%$ hold multiple roles or titles in county government, including county clerk, register of deeds, equalization director, and finance manager. The survey also identified other categories, such as county controller, administrative assistant, chief deputy clerk, controller, financial director, and commissioner. (See Figure 1)

Table 1. Characteristics of Surveyed Counties

|  | Michigan | Participating Counties |
| :---: | :---: | :---: |
| Number of counties | 83 | 48 |
| Number of cities | 280 | 138 |
| Number of townships* | 1,240 | 741 |
| Number of villages | 253 | 143 |
| Population | $10,057,024$ | $5,476,364$ |
| Average income (household) | 47,912 | 43,511 |

*These numbers include townships and charter townships.
Source: Population data is sourced from the United States Census Bureau's 2021 estimated total population table. County income per capita data is taken from the United States Census Bureau's 2021 five-year estimates, with averages calculated across counties.


Figure 1. Respondent Role/Title within County Government
In the survey, six sets of questions about county services provided to local governments are asked, including the following categories: 1) public safety; 2) planning, zoning, and economic development; 3) assessment and property taxation; 4) financial reporting; 5) IT support; and 6) other services. Although public health and environmental management services are generally considered to be a primary duty of county government, the survey also included questions related to this type of service. A succinct overview of the survey
is provided next, which is followed by a more detailed discussion pertaining to each service category.

## II. Overview

As shown in Figure 2, within the six different service sets, approximately $91 \%$ of counties provide public safety services to local governments. About $60 \%$ of counties offer planning, zoning, and economic development services to local units and $50 \%$ provide assessor and property tax related services, while fewer than $10 \%$ offer financial reporting services to local governments. More than $30 \%$ of surveyed counties reported that they offered a range of other services to local units. Figure 3 reveals that these services are primarily directed toward townships, with over 20\% of IT services catering to cities.


Figure 2. County Services Provided to Other Local Governments


Figure 3. Services Provided by Type of Local Government

Figure 4 shows that service fees provided by county governments vary among service sets.

In general, it is rare to find contracts with no fees when county governments provide services. Most assessor and property tax services involve contractual fees. Most county governments provide IT support services pro bono. As shown in Figure 5, most services provided by county governments have been in operation for more than 10 years. However, IT support and assessor and property tax services represent relatively new emerging services, with $30 \%$ to $65 \%$ counties providing such services to local governments for less than 10 years.


Figure 4. Service contract and fee


Figure 5. Service years of policies

Figure 6 presents a set of six maps to show which counties provide services and types of fee arrangement for the three most common services offered to local governments. The first two maps show public safety services, the second two maps show planning, zoning, and economic development services, and the last two maps show assessor and property tax services. The maps demonstrate the diversity of service provision and fee arrangements across counties.

a. Public Safety Services in Michigan

b. Fees for Public Safety Services in Michigan

c. Planning, Zoning, and Economic Development Services in Michigan

d. Fees for Planning, Zoning, and Economic Development Services in Michigan

e. Assessor and Property Tax Services in Michigan

f. Fees for Assessor and Property Tax Services in Michigan

Figure 6. Geographic distribution of services in Michigan

## III. Discussion of Each Public Service Set

Before presenting more details on each service set, Table 2 provides the list of counties that responded to the survey and the services provided. Following the order services presented in Table 2, each service subset is then discussed.

Table 2. County Services Provided by Michigan Counties to Local Governments

| County | Public safety | Planning, zoning, and economic development | Property | IT support | Financial reporting | Other services |
| :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: |
| Alcona | v | v |  |  |  |  |
| Alger | v |  |  |  | v | v |
| Alpena | v |  | v | v |  |  |
| Antrim | v | v | v |  |  |  |
| Baraga* |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Barry | v | v |  | v |  |  |
| Benzie | v |  |  |  |  |  |
| Branch |  |  |  | v |  |  |
| Calhoun | v | v |  |  |  | v |
| Cheboygan | v | v |  |  |  |  |
| Chippewa* |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Clare | v | v | v |  |  | v |
| Clinton | v | v |  | v |  |  |
| Crawford | v |  |  |  |  | v |
| Eaton | v | v |  |  |  | v |
| Genesee | v | v |  |  |  |  |
| Gladwin | v | v | v |  |  |  |
| Gogebic | v |  |  | $v$ |  |  |
| Grand Traverse | v | v | v | v |  |  |
| Gratiot | v | v | v |  | v | v |
| Houghton | v | v | $v$ |  |  | v |
| Huron | v | v | v |  |  | v |
| Isabella | v | v |  | v |  |  |
| Jackson | v | v | v |  |  | v |
| Kalamazoo | v |  |  |  |  |  |
| Kalkaska |  | v |  |  |  | v |
| Kent | v |  |  |  |  |  |
| Lake | v | v | v |  |  |  |


| County | Public safety | Planning, zoning, and economic development | Property | IT support | Financial reporting | Other services |
| :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: |
| Livingston | v | $v$ | v | v |  | v |
| Marquette | v |  | $v$ |  |  |  |
| Mason | v | v | v |  |  | v |
| Mecosta | v | v | v |  |  |  |
| Midland | v |  | $v$ |  | v | v |
| Missaukee | v |  | v |  |  |  |
| Monroe | v | v | v | v |  | v |
| Montcalm | v | v |  |  |  |  |
| Montmorency | v |  |  |  |  |  |
| Newaygo | $v$ | v | v |  |  |  |
| Oceana | v | v |  |  |  |  |
| Ogemaw | v | v | v |  |  |  |
| Ontonagon | v |  |  |  |  |  |
| Osceola | v |  |  |  |  |  |
| Roscommon | v |  | v |  |  | v |
| Sanilac | v | v |  |  |  |  |
| St. Clair | v | v | v | v |  | v |
| Tuscola | v |  | v | v |  |  |
| Wayne |  | v | v |  |  |  |
| Wexford | v |  | v |  |  | v |
| Total | 43 | 29 | 24 | 10 | 3 | 17 |

* Baraga county and Chippewa county completed the survey and provided no services to local units.


## 1. Public Safety Services

At least 43 counties provide one or more public safety-related services. Figure 7 shows that these services encompass a range of offerings. Especially in the category "other" includes emergency medical services (EMS), animal control, local law enforcement records management, corrections, search and rescue, Special Response Team (SRT), local ordinance enforcement assistance, and Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) services in collaboration with other municipalities. These services are extended to 42 cities, 463 townships, and 64 villages. Approximately $80 \%$ of counties have been providing these services for over 10 years. The distribution of fee arrangements-contract with no fee, no contract pro bono, and a mixture of fee and no fee-is roughly evenly split, as depicted in Figure 8.


Figure 7. Public Safety Services


Figure 8. Public Safety Fee Arrangements

## 2. Planning, Zoning, and Economic Development Services

Sixty percent of county governments provide planning, zoning, and economic development services (See Figure 9). Also, as reported in the 'Other' category, two counties indicated that they provide building code services to local governments.

These services have been provided to 55 cities, 373 townships, and 58 villages for more than 10 years. Around $50 \%$ of services are provided with no formal contract pro bono,
while around $45 \%$ of services are provided under a contract with a fee or a mixture of fee and no fee.


Figure 9. Planning, Zoning, and Economic Development

## 3. Assessor and Property Tax Services

About half of counties ( 24 counties) offer assessor and property tax services, serving 23 cities, 251 townships, and 25 villages. In the survey, 13 counties provided assessment services, 11 managed property tax collection, and 4 offered property tax appeal services. Last, 12 county governments mentioned providing other assessor and property taxrelated services to local governments (see Table 3).

Regarding service contracts, $50 \%$ involve fees, $27 \%$ have a mix of fee and no fee, $20 \%$ are pro bono with no contract, and around 3\% are contracted without fees. Furthermore, 73\% of these services have been provided for over ten years, while $26 \%$ have been offered for one to six years.

Table 3. Other Assessor and Property Tax Related Services

| Service Category | Service description |
| :---: | :--- |
| Billing services | • Tax bill preparation <br> • Tax bill printing and mailing |
| Mapping services | • Tax maps <br> • GIS for assessing <br> - Aerial photography /EagleView database |


| Service Category | Service description |
| :---: | :--- |
| Management services | - Property Splits and combinations <br> - Change of ownership transfers from recorded deeds and <br> death certificates <br> - County works with locals |
|  | - Assessment Roll maintenance <br> - Balancing rolls assistant |
| Information services | - Assessment change notices <br> - Monthly export to all units for transfer of ownership, <br> address changes, and attachments |

## 4. IT Support Services

Only $23 \%$ of the responding counties offered IT support-related services. However, the coverage of IT support varies among different county governments. Some county governments share websites and servers with local governments, some provide minimal maintenance and help desk-related services, while other counties offer full IT support, including installation, procurement, and infrastructure.

These services are provided to nine cities, 41 townships, and 14 villages. Figure 10 shows that $90 \%$ of services are provided under a contract with a fee or a mixture of fee and no fee. There are no services provided with no formal contract pro bono, and only $10 \%$ of services are provided under a contract with no fee. IT support could be considered an emerging service because only $45 \%$ of such services have been provided for more than 10 years.


Figure 10. Fee for IT Support Services

## 5. Financial Reporting Services

Three counties reported that they provide financial reporting-related services. First, the millage balance service is provided to one city, one village, and seven townships for more than 10 years. This service involves a mixture of fees and no fees. Second, annual audit report and annual financial report services have been provided to one city, one village, and 16 townships for more than 10 years. This service is provided with no formal contract pro bono. Finally, the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds tracking and reporting services have been provided to four townships for less than five years. This service is offered with no formal contract pro bono.

## 6. Other Services

Thirty-seven percent of counties provided other services to local governments, with a particular focus on voting or early voting services. County governments also offer various other services, including library services and grant writing. Three counties mentioned that they provided GIS services to local governments, and one county offered law enforcement records management systems. In total, these services are provided to 32 cities, 211 townships, and 39 villages. Over $85 \%$ of these services have been provided for more than ten years. Note that no responding county indicated that they provided human resources related services (See Figure 11).


Figure 11. Other Services Provided by County Governments

## 7. Public Health and Environmental Management Services

In the final subsection, a summary of public health and environmental management related services is provided. Fifty-five percent of counties ( 28 counties) offer multiple services concurrently, with a focus on medical examiner, septic, and environmental health
services. Some counties also reported providing Soil Erosion Permits ${ }^{1}$, recycling, and sewer services. These services are extended to 67 cities, 466 townships, and 99 villages. Notably, 34 counties mentioned sharing these services with other county governments.

Regarding service arrangements, $43 \%$ involve a mixture of fees and no fees, $32 \%$ are pro bono with no formal contract, $21 \%$ are contracted without fees, and only $4 \%$ require a fee-based contract. Importantly, all counties providing these services have done so for more than 10 years.


Figure 12. Public Health and Environmental Management Services

## IV. Conclusion

In this report, information of types of services county governments provide to other local governments is presented. Six public service sets, including public safety, assessor and property tax, planning, zoning, and economic development, financial reporting, IT support, and other services are discussed. Data collected from the survey collectively portray a diverse landscape of county government services that are provided to overlapping local governments. While public safety services dominate and have a longstanding presence, financial reporting services are less common. Townships are a primary focus of service delivery, with villages often relying on county governments for specific services. Service fee arrangements vary, and there is a growing emphasis on emerging services like IT support and assessor and property tax services. These findings provide useful insights into the roles and priorities of county governments in serving communities within their jurisdictional boundaries.

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# Michigan County Government Survey: Services Provided to Local Governments 

## Q1 <br> SURVEY OF MICHIGAN COUNTY GOVERNMENTS: SERVICES PROVIDED TO LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

## Online Survey Consent Information

## Purpose of Research.

The Michigan Association of Counties and Michigan State University Extension is conducting a survey of county government officials to collect information regarding the number and types of services county governments provide to other local governments. The goal of the survey is to identify services typically provided by cities, townships, and villages that are being provided by your county. Your participation is important and very much appreciated. The findings of the survey and corresponding report will be shared with you. Thank you in advance for your participation!

## What You Will Do.

If you choose to participate in this research study, you will complete a 10-15 minute survey regarding services provided by your county government to other local governments. You will only take this one survey.

## Participation and Withdrawal.

Your participation in this research is voluntary. You have the right to refuse to participate in this survey. You may withdraw from the web-based survey in this research study at any time.

## Confidentiality.

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. When the results of the research are published or discussed at conferences, no information will be included that reveals your identity. Your privacy will be protected to the maximum extent allowable by law.

## Potential Benefits.

The information that you provide in the survey will help us better understand the challenges that Michigan local governments face is providing core public services to
citizens. This information will be used to improve public service delivery in the future. Results will be shared with each participant, to groups, or at conferences that will inform and provide guidance on county services.

## Potential Risks.

Remember that only the research project team will know what you have said. Results will be shared in aggregate form only without identifying who said what. The risks are therefore minimal.

## Costs and Compensation for Being in the Study.

You will not incur any expenses for participating in the survey, beyond your time, assuming you have internet access.

## Contact Information for Questions or Concerns.

If you have concerns or questions about this study, such as scientific issues, how to do any part of it, or to report an injury, please contact the lead researchers: Eric Scorsone, 90 Justin S. Morrill Hall of Agriculture, Michigan State University, East Lansing, MI 48824, email scorsone@msu.edu, tel. 517-353-9460; Mark Skidmore, 91 Justin S. Morrill Hall of Agriculture, Michigan State University, East Lansing, MI 48824, email
mskidmor@msu.edu, tel. 517-353-9172

If you have questions or concerns about your role and rights as a research participant, would like to obtain information or offer input, or would like to register a complaint about this study, you may contact, anonymously if you wish, the Michigan State University's Human Research Protection Program at:
517-355-2180, Fax 517-432-4503, or e-mail irb@msu.edu or regular mail at 202 Olds Hall, MSU, East Lansing, MI 48824.

After reading the above, please indicate if you consent to participate. Selecting "I Consent" indicates you are willing to participate. Selecting "I Do Not Consent" indicates you are NOT willing to participate.

I Do Not Consent.

Skip To: End of Survey If SURVEY OF MICHIGAN COUNTY GOVERNMENTS: SERVICES PROVIDED TO LOCAL GOVERNMENTS Online Survey Conse... = I Do Not Consent.

Q1 What is your name?

Q2 What is your role/title within county government? (check all that apply)

$\square$
County Administrator
(1)County Clerk
(2)Other (please indicate your role/title below)

Q3 Which county government do you represent?Alcona (4)Alger (87)Allegan
(88)Alpena (89)Antrim (90)Arenac (91)Baraga (92)Barry (93)Bay (94)Benzie (95)Berrien (96)Branch (97)Calhoun (98)Cass (99)

Charlevoix (100)

Cheboygan (101)Chippewa (102)Clare (103)Clinton (104)Crawford (105)

Delta (106)Dickinson (107)Eaton (108)Emmet (109)Genesee (110)Gladwin (111)Gogebic (112)Grand Traverse (113)Gratiot (114)

Hillsdale (115)Houghton (116)Huron (117)Ingham (118)Ionia (119)Iosco (120)Iron (121)Isabella (122)Jackson (123)Kalamazoo (124)Kalkaska (125)Kent (126)

Lake (128)Lapeer (129)Leelanau (130)Lenawee (131)Livingston (132)Luce (133)

Mackinac (134)

Macomb (135)

Mainstee (136)

Marquette (137)

Mason (138)

Mecosta (139)

Menominee (140)

Midland (141)

Missaukee (142)

Monroe (143)

Montcalm (144)

Montmorency (145)
Muskegon (146)

Newaygo (147)

Oakland (148)Oceana (149)Ogemaw (150)Ontonagon (151)Osceola (152)Oscoda (153)Otsego (154)Ottawa (155)Presque Isle (156)Roscommon (157)Saginaw (158)Sanilac (159)Schoolcraft (160)Shiawassee (161)St. Clair (162)St. Joseph (163)Tuscola (164)Van Buren (165)Washtenaw (166)Wayne (167)Wexford (168)

Q4 The first set of questions below ask you to provide information on assessor and property tax related services your county provides to other local governments within your county.

Q5 Does your county provide assessor and property tax related services to local governments within your county?Yes (7)No (8)

Skip To: Q10 If May we contact you to ask follow-up questions? = No

Q6 What kinds of assessor and property tax related services do you provide to local governments within your county? (select all that apply)

Assessment (1)

Property tax collection (2)Property tax appeal
(3)Other (please describe)
(4)

Q7 How many local units receive assessor and property tax related services from your county government?How many cities? (numerical answer only please)How many townships? (numerical answer only please)How many villages? (numerical answer only please)

Q8 These assessor and property tax related services are provided by: (select all that apply)

No contract pro bonomixture of fee and no fee

Q9 For how many years have you provided these assessor and property tax related services to local governments within your county?1-5 years6-10 yearsMore than 10 years

Q10 The second set of questions below ask you to provide information on public health and environmental management related services your county provides to other local governments within your county.

Q11 Does your county provide public health and environmental management related services to local governments within your county?Yes (7)

No (8)

## Skip To: Q16 If Does your county provide public health and environmental management related services to

 local gov... = NoQ12 What kinds of public health and environmental management related services do you provide to local governments within your county? (select all that apply)SepticWaste management
(2)Medical examinerEnvironmental healthmental healthPhysical healthOther (please describe)

Q13 How many local units receive public health and environmental management related services from your county government?How many cities? (numerical answer only please)How many townships? (numerical answer only please)How many villages? (numerical answer only please)

Q14 These public health and environmental management related services are provided by: (select all that apply)

Contract with no feeContract with feeNo contract pro bonomixture of fee and no fee

Q15 For how many years have you provided these public health and environmental management related services to local governments within your county?1-5 years (1)6-10 years
(2)More than 10 years

Q16 The third set of questions below ask you to provide information on public safety related services your county provides to other local governments within your county.

Q17 Does your county provide public safety related services to local governments within your county?Yes (7)No (8)

Skip To: Q22 If Does your county provide public safety related services to local governments within your county? = No

Q18 What kinds of public safety related services do you provide to local governments within your county? (select all that apply)Road patrol
(1)School safety officers
(2)ForensicsDetective services
(4)Other (please describe)

Q19 How many local units receive public safety related services from your county government?How many cities? (numerical answer only please)How many townships? (numerical answer only please)How many villages? (numerical answer only please)

Q20 These public safety related services are provided by: (select all that apply)Contract with no feeContract with feeNo contract pro bonomixture of fee and no fee

Q21 For how many years have you provided these public safety related services to local governments within your county?

Q22 The fourth set of questions below ask you to provide information on financial reporting related services your county provides to other local governments within your county.

Q23 Does your county provide financial reporting related services to local governments within your county?Yes (7)No (8)

## Skip To: Q28 If Does your county provide financial reporting related services to local governments within your co... = No

Q24 What kinds of financial reporting related services do you provide to local governments within your county? (please describe below)

Q25 How many local units receive financial reporting related services from your county government?How many cities? (numerical answer only please)How many townships? (numerical answer only please)

How many villages? (numerical answer only please)Shared with other counties? (numerical answer only please)

Q26 These financial reporting related services are provided by: (select all that apply)

Contract with fee

No contract pro bono

$\square$
mixture of fee and no fee
Q27 For how many years have you provided these financial reporting related services to local governments within your county?1-5 years6-10 yearsMore than 10 years

Q28 The fifth set of questions below ask you to provide information on planning, zoning, and economic development related services your county provides to other local governments within your county.

Q29 Does your county provide planning, zoning, and economic development related services to local governments within your county?Yes (7)No (8)

[^2]Q30 What kinds of planning, zoning, and economic development related services do you provide to local governments within your county?

Zoning

Q31 How many local units receive planning, zoning, and economic development related services from your county government?

How many cities? (numerical answer only please)

How many townships? (numerical answer only please)How many villages? (numerical answer only please)Shared with other counties? (numerical answer only please) (4)

Q32 These planning, zoning, and economic development related services are provided by: (select all that apply)Contract with no fee (1)Contract with fee

No contract pro bonomixture of fee and no fee

Q33 For how many years have you provided these planning, zoning, and economic development related services to local governments within your county?

1-5 years (1)6-10 years
(2)More than 10 years
(3)

Q34 The sixth set of questions below ask you to provide information on IT support related services your county provides to other local governments within your county.

Q35 Does your county provide IT support related services to local governments within your county?Yes (7)No (8)

## Skip To: Q40 If Does your county provide IT support related services to local governments within your county? = No

Q36 What kinds of IT support related services do you provide to local governments within your county? (please describe below)

[^3]How many cities? (numerical answer only please)

How many townships? (numerical answer only please)How many villages? (numerical answer only please)Shared with other counties? (numerical answer only please) (4)

Q38 These IT support related services are provided by: (select all that apply)Contract with no feeContract with feeNo contract pro bonomixture of fee and no fee

Q39 For how many years have you provided these IT support related services to local governments within your county?

1-5 years

6-10 years
(2)

More than 10 years
Q40 The seventh set of questions below ask you to provide information on other types of services not yet addressed that your county provides to other local governments within your county.

Q41 Does your county provide other types of services to local governments within your county?Yes (7)No (8)

## Skip To: Q96 If Does your county provide other types of services to local governments within your county? = No

Q42 What kinds of other services do you provide to local governments within your county?Other administrative services

Parks(12)Voting (13)Human resources (14)Other (please describe)

Q43 How many local units receive other services from your county government?How many cities? (numerical answer only please)How many townships? (numerical answer only please)How many villages? (numerical answer only please)Shared with other counties? (numerical answer only please)
(4)

Q44 These other services are provided by: (select all that apply)Contract with no feeContract with feeNo contract pro bonomixture of fee and no fee

Q45 For how many years have you provided these other services to local governments within your county?

1-5 years6-10 yearsMore than 10 years
Q96 May we contact you to ask follow-up questions?
Yes (1)No (2)

Skip To: End of Survey If May we contact you to ask follow-up questions? = No

Q46 Please provide:Phone number
(4)E-mail address
(5)


[^0]:    *Corresponding Author

[^1]:    ${ }^{1}$ More information related to soil erosion permits, see https://www.michigan.gov/egle/about/organization/water-resources/soil-erosion.

[^2]:    Skip To: Q34 If Does your county provide planning, zoning, and economic development related services to local gov... = No

[^3]:    Q37 How many local units receive IT support related services from your county government?

