

Chapter 17 – United States History and Citizenship

PO.8 – United States History and Citizenship

EO.1 – Explain the Type of Government in the United States

EO.2 – Perform Community Service

EO.1 - Explain the Type of Government in the United States

The United States of America uses a system of government called **federalism**. We don't hear this word very often, but it means power in our country is shared by **national, state, and local** levels, the three levels of our government.

Our country began as thirteen separate colonies that turned into separate states. Each of these states had its own set of laws, and they all struggled to work together as one union like we are now because they each wanted all the powers of a nation: to make laws, treaties, money, and do business with other nations. However, for all the states to best survive and compete with other nations around the world, leaders in each state agreed they would need to work together. In 1776 the states all agreed to the Articles of Confederation which established a very limited national government could declare war and negotiate peace with one vote from each state.

After the Revolutionary War, this very limited system of government was no longer working. The states were not agreeing with one another once again, so leaders from the states met and created the government we know today by writing and signing the United States Constitution which created a **strong central or national government** that had national powers such as the ability to create federal laws.

The Constitution states that **any power not given to the federal government will go to the state governments and the people**. This is how state and local governments were established: everyone who lives or visits the United States must follow our national or federal laws, but there were still some powers that needed to go to the states such as raising their own taxes and deciding how they wanted citizens in their states to live, work, and behave. We follow all federal laws first and then any laws that apply to the state we live in or are visiting.

This same idea applies to **local** governments which can be as large as a **county or parish** and as small as a **town or township**. Local governments have to decide how they want people who live in their small area to live, work, and behave, so they have their own laws as well. Any power not regulated by federal or state governments is taken care of by local governments.

Following three different sets of laws may sound like it can get confusing at times, but there are rules in place to make it very simple. **Federal or national laws come first before anything else.** The Constitution states no laws can come before a national law and no law can conflict with a national law. This means state and local governments cannot make a law that would go against the United States Constitution. For example, a state cannot outlaw free speech because it is a law of the Constitution. You only obey the laws of the places you live in or are visiting. For example, if you live in New York City, New York, you do not have to obey laws in Los Angeles, California because you do not live in that city or state. The only time you must obey another city or state's laws is if you visit that area. However, you always must obey national or federal laws no matter what state you live in.

EO.2 – Perform Community Service

Being a good citizen means actively and purposefully participating in your community. Perform a community service by volunteering for an activity that directly benefits your community. You should perform a minimum of **fifty hours** of community service either with your unit or on your own. These hours should also be performed in accordance with the Young Marines Awards Manual. Use the chart in **Appendix E** to record your efforts. You can also print the form in the database library or from the Young Marines website.