

State Profile

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Rhode Island, America's smallest state, with a land area of 1,045 square miles, provides its citizens with an excellent quality of life. Despite the fact that Rhode Island has been urbanized since the 1820s, nearly sixty percent of the state is woodland and open space. Recreational, cultural and leisure activities are plentiful. Attractions include the Newport Mansions, Benefit Street's Mile of History, Slater Mill, the International Tennis Hall of Fame, the State Capitol, the Blithewold Mansion, Gardens and Arboretum, the Museum of Art at the Rhode Island School of Design, Block Island and some of the finest beaches in New England. The state features more than 400 miles of coastline, hence its nickname "The Ocean State". Narragansett Bay is the state's most valuable natural resource, providing the state with a native source of seafood, passage for ships and barges, swimming and boating activities and thousands of jobs in fishing, shipbuilding and other maritime endeavors.

Rhode Island is rich in history. Founded by Roger Williams in 1636, seeking freedom of religious worship, it was the first colony to declare its independence from Great Britain some two months before the other twelve colonies. It was the last of the original colonies to ratify the United States Constitution, demanding that the Bill of Rights, which guarantees individual liberties, be adopted.

Once known as the "Jewelry Capital of the World", the state's economic base is now much more diversified. According to the Rhode Island Department of Labor and Training, in October 2005, 84.5 percent of total employment in Rhode Island was in service producing industries. Just over 98,500 persons were employed in education and health services, 13.7 percent of total employment in wholesale/retail trade, with just over 52,600 employed in retail trade; 10.9 percent of total employment was in manufacturing, with nearly 36,700 people employed in durables manufacturing; 13.3 percent of total employment was in government, with slightly more than 56,900 employed at the state and local level; and 8.2 percent of total employment, or nearly 35,500 workers were in finance, insurance, and real estate. Rhode Island boasts twelve institutions of higher learning, including some of the most prestigious schools in the nation.

Rhode Island is the 43rd most populous state, with approximately 1.08 million residents, and is the second most densely populated state, with 1,003 persons per square mile. In the 2000 Census, Rhode Island ranked first among the states in the number of college students per capita, fifth in the percentage of persons over age 85, seventh in the percentage of persons over age 65, and tenth in the percentage of foreign born residents. Other sources reveal Rhode Island to have the highest percentage of children with disabilities, first in the percentage of persons receiving Temporary Assistance for Needy Families cash assistance, and eighth in the percentage of children in foster care. Rhode Island is tied for second lowest in the percentage of non-elderly without health insurance. It is the most immunized state in the nation.

Rhode Island exports goods and services worldwide, totaling \$1.3 billion in 2004. The four countries receiving the largest percentage of Rhode Island exports were Canada with 34.1 percent of total exports, Singapore with 6.6 percent of total exports, the U.S. with 5.2 percent of total exports, and Mexico with 5.1 percent of total exports. Rhode Island's chief commodity exports in 2004 were computer and electrical products at 19.8 percent of total exports, miscellaneous manufacturing at 15.8 percent of total exports, waste and scrap at 12.2 percent of total exports, machinery excluding electronics at 10.0 percent of total exports, and chemicals at 9.5 percent of total exports. Rhode Island is home to several corporate headquarters including toy maker Hasbro in Pawtucket, lottery equipment provider GTECH in West Greenwich, CVS/pharmacy in Woonsocket and industrial conglomerate Textron in Providence.

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Rhode Island is governed by its Constitution, most recently amended in 1986. Under the State Constitution, the powers of government are divided into three branches: legislative, executive and judicial. The legislative power of the government is vested in the General Assembly, which consists of a 38 member Senate and a 75 member House of Representatives. All members of the General Assembly are elected biennially from senatorial and representative districts established by general law on the basis of population. The General Assembly meets annually beginning on the first Tuesday in January.

The chief executive power of the State is vested in the Governor and, by succession, the Lieutenant Governor. Each are elected for four year terms. The Governor is primarily responsible for the faithful execution of laws enacted by the General Assembly, and for the administration of State government. The Governor is granted the power to veto any act adopted by the General Assembly, which can be overridden by a 3/5 vote of both houses of the General Assembly. The Governor does not have the power of line-item veto. The State Constitution also provides for the election of the Lieutenant Governor, Attorney General, Secretary of State, and General Treasurer.

The judicial power of the State is vested in the Supreme Court and such lower courts as are established by the General Assembly. The Supreme Court, appointed by the Governor and confirmed by the Senate and the House of Representatives, has advisory and final appellate jurisdiction upon all questions of law and equity. The General Assembly has also established a Superior Court, a Family Court, a District Court and certain municipal courts in various cities and towns in the State.

Rhode Island is divided into 39 cities and towns, ranging in size from 1.3 to 64.8 square miles. There is no county governmental structure. Local executive power is generally placed in a mayor or administrator/manager, and legislative power is vested in a city or town council. Municipalities have the right of self government in all local matters by adopting a "home rule" charter. The General Assembly, however, specifically authorizes municipalities to levy, assess and collect taxes, or borrow money. Local governments rely principally upon general real and tangible personal property taxes and automobile excise taxes for the provision of revenue.

In addition to municipal governments, there is a federally recognized tribe of Native Americans, the Narragansett Indian Tribe, that maintains control of an 1,800-acre land trust in the Town of Charlestown. The state is also served by numerous special districts that provide water, wastewater treatment or fire protection services. These districts often have their own taxing and/or assessment powers. There are no federal land holdings in Rhode Island of any jurisdictional significance outside of U.S. Navy installations.

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Director

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