The Three Branches of Minnesota State Government

Legislative Branch: The Lawmakers
Bicameral Legislature: Minnesota House of Representatives and Minnesota Senate.

House of Representatives and Senate
Members:
134 representatives, one from each House district; 67 senators, one from each Senate district (there are two House districts within each Senate district)

Terms: two years for House members; four years for senators (in years ending in “0,” senators are elected to a two-year term)

Requirements:
• qualified to vote in Minnesota
• at least 21 years old
• Minnesota resident — one year
• district resident — six months before election

Responsibilities:
Legislative
• introduce and study ideas (bills) for laws (all revenue-raising bills begin in the House)
• serve on standing committees
• pass state laws (all bills must pass both the House and the Senate)
• pass the state’s biennial (two-year) budget
• can override governor’s veto (requires two-thirds vote in both House and Senate)

Judicial
• judge election qualification of members
• can expel members
• House can impeach members of the executive and judicial branches
• Senate can convict and remove members of the executive and judicial branches after House impeachment

Other
• respond to the needs and concerns of constituents
• elect regents to the University of Minnesota
• Senate confirms governor’s agency head appointments

Organization:
Each body
• begins regular session every odd-numbered year in January and meets beginning usually in February each even-numbered year
• may meet for up to 120 legislative days during the biennium, but not after the first Monday following the third Saturday in May
• organizes on the basis of majority and minority caucuses
• elects a member as presiding officer (speaker of the House; president of the Senate)

Executive Branch: The Administrators
Five Constitutional Officers: Governor, Lieutenant Governor, Secretary of State, State Auditor, Attorney General.

Governor
Term: four years

Requirements:
• qualified to vote in Minnesota
• at least 25 years old
• Minnesota resident — one year

Responsibilities:
Executive
• administer laws and affairs of the state
• appoint heads of departments and agencies
• act as commander-in-chief of state military forces

Legislative
• inform Legislature of condition of the state
• propose a state budget
• review bills the Legislature passes — approve (sign) or reject (veto)
• can call emergency legislative sessions

Judicial
• appoint judges to fill vacancies in district, appellate and supreme courts
• can issue pardons and reprieves, restore civil rights to felons
Lieutenant Governor
Term: four years (voters elect as team with governor)
Requirements:
• qualified to vote in Minnesota
• at least 25 years old
• Minnesota resident — one year
Responsibilities:
• represent governor
• assume governor’s responsibilities in governor’s absence or if a vacancy occurs
• assume duties governor assigns

Secretary of State
Term: four years
Requirements:
• qualified to vote in Minnesota
• at least 21 years old
Responsibilities:
• act as chief election official
• certify official documents, governor’s executive orders, laws the Legislature passes
• regulate Minnesota businesses
• act as custodian of official records

State Auditor
Term: four years
Requirements:
• qualified to vote in Minnesota
• at least 21 years old
Responsibilities:
• collect, check and standardize financial information from local units of government
• investigate audit reports

Attorney General
Term: four years
Requirements:
• licensed to practice law in Minnesota
• qualified to vote in Minnesota
• at least 21 years old
Responsibilities:
• provide legal services to state government
• represent the state in court cases
• enforce laws concerning charitable organizations
• protect public rights

State Departments and Agencies
Departments
• 24 executive departments
• governor appoints the head (commissioner) of each department
 Agencies
• independent, separate from departments
• governor appoints portions of membership
• example: Minnesota Zoological Garden

Semi-State Agencies
• separate from departments and agencies
• not under direct appointive control of the governor

Judicial Branch: The Judges
Three Levels of Courts: Supreme Court, Court of Appeals, District Court.

Supreme Court
Members:
One chief justice and six associate justices (total seven judges)
Term: six years
Requirements:
• licensed to practice law in Minnesota
• qualified to vote in Minnesota
• at least 21 years old
Responsibilities:
• hear appeals on decisions from the Court of Appeals, Workers’ Compensation Court of Appeals, Tax Court and persons convicted of first-degree murder
• hear constitutionality cases
• interpret the law and constitution
• regulate all courts in the state
• recommend improvements of the judicial system
• oversee law practice and judicial planning

Court of Appeals
Members:
One chief judge, 18 associate judges (total 19 judges)
Term: six years
Requirements:
• licensed to practice law in Minnesota
• qualified to vote in Minnesota
• at least 21 years old
Responsibilities:
• hear appeals on decisions from lower courts
• hear appeals from administrative agencies
• hear appeals from commissioner of Employment and Economic Development

District Court
Members:
Ten judicial districts, each with several judges (295 judges total across the state)
Term: six years
Requirements:
• licensed to practice law in Minnesota
• qualified to vote in Minnesota
• at least 21 years old
Responsibilities:
• hear only civil claims of damages up to $15,000 (except for disputes over consumer credit transactions, which must be less than $4,000 to be heard in conciliation court)

Conciliation Court
Members:
One conciliation court in each county — District Court judges serve as conciliation court judges except in Hennepin and Ramsey counties where assigned attorneys serve as referees
Requirements:
• licensed to practice law in Minnesota
• qualified to vote in Minnesota
• at least 21 years old
Responsibilities:
• hear only civil claims of damages up to $15,000 (except for disputes over consumer credit transactions, which must be less than $4,000 to be heard in conciliation court)

Judicial Boards and Advisory Committees
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• advise courts
• consists of lawyers, administrators, legislators, judges, lay members

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