



Lesson Objectives: Local Government Curriculum

Unit 1

Lesson 1

Students will:

- Be introduced to the Student Voices Project
- Understand that multiple points of view exist in a society
- Participate in democratic decision-making
- Demonstrate the impact of scarcity on decision-making
- Consider the rights and responsibilities of citizens in a democracy

Lesson 2

Students will:

- Examine the structure of their local government
- Understand how the principle of federalism affects the decision-making process in their local government
- Learn how to locate the names and contact information of their elected officials
- Understand how levels of government impact a community issue differently

Unit 2

Lesson 1

Students will:

- Identify issues in their community
- Understand the interrelation between various issues in the community
- Conduct neighborhood interviews to validate classroom perceptions
- Classify issues according to issue subject

Lesson 2

Students will:

- Interpret data to identify trends in their community
- Understand the impact of community trends on community issues
- Evaluate data analysis as a means of identifying community issues

Lesson 3

Students will:

- Understand the elements of survey design
- Interpret poll results

- Evaluate polling as a means of identifying community issues
- Classify issues according to issue subject

Lesson 4

Students will:

- Compare neighborhood survey results to classroom findings
- Engage in democratic deliberation to determine their Youth Issues Agenda
- Provide evidence to support why their chosen issues are important to the community

Lesson 5

Students will:

- Graphically represent local government
- Understand how federalism impacts issues in local government
- Identify possible formats for capstone projects

Unit 3

Lesson 1

Students will:

- Understand the process of how a bill becomes law in their local government
- Determine specific operating procedures of their local legislative body
- Identify past legislation on their chosen issue
- Determine where in the legislative process citizens can have an impact

Lesson 2

Students will:

- Gain firsthand knowledge of the operation of a local legislative body

Lesson 3

Students will:

- Understand the structure of the executive branch of local government
- Identify past executive actions on their chosen issue
- Determine where in the executive branch citizens can have an impact in the local legislative process

Lesson 4

Students will:

- Understand the role of elected officials in addressing citizens' concerns

Unit 4

Lesson 1

Students will:

- Define government budget terminology including: revenue, expenditures, debt, deficit, goods and services
- Understand the relationship between tax revenue and government expenditures
- Analyze local government revenue and expenditures
- Understand the concept of balanced budget laws

Lesson 2

Students will:

- Simulate a local government budget process
- Understand the impact of interest groups and scarcity on resource allocation

Lesson 3

Students will:

- Determine specific operating procedures of the local budget process
- Identify past budget allocation on their chosen issue
- Determine where in the budget process citizens can have an impact

Unit 5

Lesson 1

Students will:

- Examine citizens' information needs in a democratic society
- Identify the media's roles in a democratic society
- Understand the role of the First Amendment in ensuring access to information about local government

Lesson 2

Students will:

- Evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of each form of media in fulfilling media's roles in a democratic society
- Identify past media coverage of their chosen issue
- Determine which roles the local media has played in covering their chosen issue

Unit 6

Lesson 1

Students will:

- Identify three approaches for how local government can address their chosen issue
- Be able to define "constituencies"
- Identify the political actors who may support or oppose their three approaches
- Determine how citizens can work with government to address public policy issues

Lesson 2

Students will:

- Present their approaches for addressing their chosen issue
- Evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of other approaches

Unit 7

Option 1

Students will:

- Demonstrate engaged citizenship by presenting their research on their chosen issue or suggested approaches to the surrounding community

Option 2

Students will:

- Demonstrate engaged citizenship by presenting their research on their chosen issue or suggested approaches to local government

Option 3

Students will:

- Demonstrate engaged citizenship by writing about their research on their chosen issue or suggested approaches to local government for local media

Option 4

Students will:

- Demonstrate engaged citizenship by creating their own communication medium about their research on their chosen issue or suggested approaches

Unit 8

Lesson 1

Students will:

- Identify the civic behaviors they have completed over the course of the semester
- Summarize what actions have been taken by local government and media regarding their issue

Lesson 2

Students will:

- Reflect on their accomplishments over the course of the semester
- Understand that civic engagement is an ongoing responsibility for all citizens



Unit 1

Understanding Your Local Government

Unit Overview

Introduction

In the first unit of Student Voices: Local Government, students explore the meaning of community and analyze how the structure, function, and issues of different levels of government relate to each other.

Lesson 1: You and Community

In this opening lesson, students role-play to explore the meaning of community in a democratic society, consider how and why communities form, and examine how the decision-making process in a democracy is used to allocate scarce resources across diverse communities. They will evaluate the rights and responsibilities of citizens in a democratic society.

Lesson 2: Who Represents You

Students use the Internet, their local government organizational chart, or other resources to examine the structure of their local government and how it relates to county, state, and federal government. They research the names and contact information of their elected officials and consider how differences in elected officials' responsibilities at each level of government lead them to address an issue differently.



Overview

Objectives of the Lesson

Students will:

- Be introduced to the Student Voices Project
- Understand that multiple points of view exist in a society
- Participate in community democratic decision-making
- Understand the rights and responsibilities of citizens in a democracy

Preparation before Lesson 1

- Make two copies of [Questions for Your Community](#) for each student.
- Make one copy of [Civic Actions Continuum](#) for each student.



Lesson Plan

1. Introduce Student Voices

- Student Voices is a nationwide project designed to encourage young people to find and use their civic voices in making a positive difference in their communities.
- Student Voices recognizes that in a democracy, it is important to include young people in discussions about issues important to the entire community. The project is designed to help young people make their voices heard about issues of importance to them at the local level – in community and policy-making groups, in hearings on local legislation or budgets, or in their local media.
- Over the course of the semester, students will research an issue of concern to them, identify three ways to address that issue in their community, and choose the plan they think is best. At the end of the semester, they will present their research or their plan to local government agencies, administrators, elected officials, or the media.
- Through Student Voices, students will become well-informed about issues, share information, take civic action, and encourage their fellow students to take an active role in civic life.

2. Ask students to get up from their desks and form communities of 3-5 students. Students should be allowed to move about the classroom to form their communities.

NOTE: Do not define community for the students. Allow the class to have free movement and choice about what constitutes a community.

3. Hand out **Questions for Your Community** and read instructions together as a class. Instruct students to work on the handouts within their groups.

NOTE: Students should remain standing while completing Part 1 of **Questions for Your Community**. They should use two desks or chairs to complete Part 2 of the handout.

4. Each student community should report findings to the class as a whole. Record each group's findings in the front of the classroom and keep them in full view for the duration of the class.
5. Instruct communities to join to form two large communities. Repeat steps 3 and 4. Have students fill out the second **Questions for Your Community** handout with their original community groups.
6. Ask students to return to their desks. Distribute the **Civic Actions Continuum** and read the directions as a class. Ask students to complete the handout.

7. As a class, discuss the students' responses to Part 2 of the handout. Students should use examples from real life or from the community exercise they just completed to defend their answers.
8. (Optional discussion extension): Ask students to consider their relationship with members of their smaller communities compared to their relationship with the larger group. Explain that the first community exercise was an example of "**direct democracy**," where all citizens can participate in the decision-making process. The second community exercise was an example of "**representative democracy**," where citizens choose representatives to speak on their behalf in the decision-making process. The United States federal government is a representative democracy, also called a "**republic**." State governments are also representative democracies. Local governments can be either direct or representative democracies.
9. (Optional discussion extension): Ask students to consider how they decided to give out the chairs in their communities. Did they give the chairs to those who may have needed to sit down, such as the recorders, or were the chairs given to whoever wanted them? Explain that the limited number of chairs represents the economic principle of "**scarcity**," or the basic problem that people will always have unlimited wants, but that resources such as chairs (or textbooks, or money) are always limited. In a democracy, people ideally would engage in democratic "**deliberation**," or a discussion that considers all sides of an issue, before deciding how to give out those scarce resources in a fair way.

NOTE: In Part 2 of the exercise, students may not have cared who was allowed to sit and who had to remain standing. If this is the case, discuss how having an interest in the decisions and resources at stake acts as a motivator for citizens to become involved in community decision-making. If they lack an understanding of how they are affected by government decisions and resource allocation, it is easy to see why citizens often choose not to participate in government. However, this choice not to participate is a misconception. Citizens are affected by all government decision-making, whether they see the impact or not.

Assignment Suggestions

- Write a paragraph or 1-page essay about the one action you believe matters most in democracy, the one which you believe matters least, and why you chose those two.
- Write a paragraph or 1-page essay about the one action in a democracy in which young people most commonly engage, the one which you believe is the least common, and how you might make the least common activity more common among young people.
- Using examples, write a paragraph or 1-page essay about how one of the civic actions from the **Civic Actions Continuum** was demonstrated in the community exercise.
- Look for examples of civic action in everyday life over the next 24 hours. Add any new forms of participation to the continuum and decide how you would rate them on the **Civic Actions Continuum**.



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- Look for examples of scarcity and deliberation in everyday life over the next 24 hours. Write a paragraph or 1-page essay describing how the example demonstrates either of the two ideas.
- Using examples from the community exercise, write a paragraph or 1-page essay arguing whether direct democracy (as modeled in the small communities) or representative democracy (as modeled in the larger communities) is a better form of government and why.



Overview

Lesson Objectives

Students will:

- Define federalism
- Examine the structure of their local government
- Learn how to locate the names and contact information of their elected officials
- Understand the powers of various government offices and how each level of government affects a community issue differently
- Consider how citizens and government can work together to address issues

Preparation before Lesson 2

- Make one copy of **Who Represents You?** for each student.
- Make one copy of **Who Has the Power? Your Job...My Job** for each student.
- Make one copy of **Research and Resources** for each student.
- (If Internet access is available): arrange for Internet access.
- (If Internet access is not available): Use the Student Voices website; city, state, county, and federal government websites; or other sources to find the following information for students.
 1. Who represents the students at the federal, state, county, and local levels.
 2. Your city government's organizational chart or a list of key positions in your local government.



Project Ideas

- Students create an information sheet listing who represents their community in government and distribute it to community members or locations throughout the community.
- Students create an information sheet or website listing common local problems and where in local government citizens should go to have these problems addressed.



Lesson Plan

1. Introduce the purpose of government as established by the preamble to the U.S. Constitution, which reads,

“We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defence, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.”
 2. Explain that the Constitution established a government system known as “**federalism**,” where the power to govern the country is shared by federal and state governments. Ask students to consider if there is any other form of government established by the U.S. Constitution.
 3. Ask students why local governments exist if they are not established by the U.S. Constitution. As a class, brainstorm reasons for local government.
 4. Hand out **Who Represents You?** and go over the worksheet instructions as a class. Discuss the powers listed for the national and state levels of government.
 - If Internet access is available: Divide students into groups of 2-3 and have them research the answers to one of the rows, columns, or blank boxes in the table. Suggest that they visit the Student Voices website, their local government website, state and national government sites, or other online resources to fill in the chart. Remind students to take note of the sources they use to fill in the chart on their **Research and Resources** handout.
 - If Internet access is not available: Hand out the materials you gathered prior to class for the students to use in their research. Remind students to keep track of the sources they use on their **Research and Resources** handout. Keep these materials for use in Unit 3.
- NOTE:** The Research and Resources worksheet asks students to determine whether their source is “fact” or “opinion.” You may need to remind students that a **fact** is something that is objectively true, while an **opinion** is someone’s view, judgment, or belief about a particular matter. A newspaper story about a recent bill passed by the state legislature is an example of fact. A journalist’s column that is critical of the bill is an example of opinion.
5. Have each group present its findings to the class. Ask students to complete the remaining blanks of their **Who Represents You?** charts with others’ findings.
 6. Explain to students that for any issue facing a community, there may be a federal, state, county, or local government way to address that issue. There are powers reserved for the states under the United States Constitution and powers that are specifically given to the



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states. Or, it is possible that citizens might address the issue without any assistance from the government at all. For example, if a community wanted a neighborhood park to be cleaner, the City Council might pass a law that raised fines on littering in the park. Or, at the state level, the state legislature might give the city more money to keep its parks clean. Or, citizens might address the issue by forming their own volunteer park clean-up committee.

7. Hand out **Who Has the Power? Your Job...My Job** to students and go over the instructions as a class. Have students complete the handout, either in their groups, in pairs, or on their own.

Assignment Suggestions

- Using your local government's organizational chart as a guide, write a paragraph explaining the organization of your local government.
- Create a list of 5 problems in your community and identify ways that citizens and local government can work together to address those issues.
- Identify an issue in your community and research how federal, state, county, and local governments address the issue differently. Which of these government entities has primary responsibility for handling the issue?



Questions for Your Community

Part 1

You have now formed a community within the classroom. Remain standing while you choose roles within the community. Your community needs a:

- Recorder - Takes notes on the proceedings
- Facilitator - Makes sure that everyone's opinion is heard
- Presenter - Shares results with the larger group

Once positions have been chosen, remain standing and answer questions 1-5. The presenter should be prepared to share your answers with the class as a whole.

1. How did you choose to be a member of this community?
2. What do members of the community have in common? What differences exist between members of the community?
3. How were positions picked?
4. Was it possible to have every voice heard in the community?
5. What roles did students without specific positions play in the community?

Part 2

Your community has been given two desks. You must decide the best way to use the desks within the community. After the community decides what to do with the desks, answer the following questions:

1. How are the desks being used?
2. Is the way you decided to use the desks fair to everyone in the group? Why or why not?
3. Who made the decisions? How were the decision-makers chosen?
4. Would you have used the desks differently from the way the group decided to use them? Did you make this suggestion? Why or why not?
5. Can every opinion be heard in your group? Why or why not?



Civics Action Continuum

NAME: _____

DATE: _____

Part I: Considering Civic Actions

Think about each participatory civic action below. The actions are all things that citizens can do to strengthen their communities (local, state, and national) in a democratic republic. For each action listed below, put a number next to it indicating how important you think that action is. For example, if you believe “holding elective office” is very important, you will put the number 4 next to line A “running for elected office.”

NOT IMPORTANT 1	SOMEWHAT IMPORTANT 2	NOT SURE 3	VERY IMPORTANT 4	MOST IMPORTANT 5
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- A. running for elected office _____
- B. registering to vote and voting _____
- C. volunteering to work for a candidate _____
- D. posting a political sign in your yard _____
- E. following the daily news _____
- F. voicing your opinion in the discussion of an issue _____
- G. writing a letter-to-the-editor about a community, national, or international issue _____
- H. holding a protest _____
- I. taking part in a food or clothing drive _____
- J. belonging to a neighborhood or service club _____
- K. contacting a local issue to share your thoughts on an issue of importance to you _____
- L. attending a public meeting _____

Part II: Reflection

1. Which item listed above do you consider to be the most important for a citizen to do in a democracy? Use examples from real life to explain your choice.
2. Which item listed above do you consider to be the least important for a citizen to do in a democracy? Use examples from real life to explain your choice.
3. Which items listed above do you think young people do most often? Why do you think this is?
4. Which items listed above do you think young people do least often? Why do you think this is?



Who Represents You? Levels of Government

Assignment: Find information about how state and local government are structured and complete the chart by filling in the empty boxes. Most of the first row (national government) is already completed for you. Note how local and state governments have similar structures to national government.

Level of Government	Executive	Major Powers of the Executive	Legislative Body	Major Powers of the Legislative Body
National	President George W. Bush	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Commander-in-chief of the Armed Forces▪ Pre-appoints ambassadors, Supreme Court justices, judges, and other officials provided for by the Congress, with Senate approval▪ Gives an annual State of the Union▪ Grants reprieves and pardons▪ Recommends legislation to Congress	U.S. House of Representatives ▪ Rep. _____ U.S. Senate ▪ Sen. _____ ▪ Sen. _____	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Make or pass laws▪ Coin money▪ Maintain a military▪ Declare war on other countries▪ Regulate interstate and foreign commerce▪ Represent the interest of the citizens
State	Gov. _____	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Serves as head of the state's National Guard▪ Enforces laws▪ Advises the legislative branch on needed laws▪ Calls special sessions▪ Pardons and commutes sentences	State House of _____ ▪ Rep. _____ State Senate ▪ Sen. _____ ▪ Sen. _____	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Make or pass laws▪ Represent the interest of the citizens
County				
City				



Who Has the Power? Your Job...My Job

NAME: _____ **DATE:** _____

We all have issues within our community, state and nation that we feel need to be addressed. While some problems demand government attention, others can be solved by citizens working on their own, or citizens can work with local government departments and elected officials to get the issue addressed.

Consider the problems listed in the chart below, indicating what issue category the problem falls into, what local government could do to address the issue, and what citizens can do to help.

Problem	What can citizens do?	What can local government do?	What can they do together?
There have been several car accidents at an intersection in your neighborhood.			
You and your friends want jobs for the summer.			
You are concerned about potholes on your street.			
There are plans to bring a new shopping center to your community, and you are concerned about loss of open space, increased traffic, and poor air quality.			
Parks and recreation in your neighborhood are lacking and you would like to see more of them.			
Chemicals and fumes from a factory are polluting your neighborhood.			
Local government is talking about closing a fire house in your community.			
You think your school needs better materials, more technology, or more after-school activities.			
Your sister has turned 18 and wants to register to vote.			
There have been more crimes committed in your neighborhood recently.			



Research and Resources

As you research your issue, you might find newspaper articles, local government websites, community blogs, or other sources of information that help you learn more about your issue and what can be done to address it. Use this handout to keep track of the sources you find. For each entry, be sure to record:

- the **date** you found the information
- the **title** of the piece
- the **author**
- whether the information is **fact or opinion**

Source #1: _____

Source #2: _____

Source #3: _____

Source #4: _____

Source #5: _____

Source #6: _____

Source #7: _____

Source #8: _____

Source #9: _____

Source #10: _____



Unit 2

Youth Issues Agenda

Unit Overview

Introduction

In the second unit of Student Voices: Local Government, students explore issues of importance to their community and develop their Youth Issues Agenda, which will guide the rest of their research throughout the semester.

Lesson 1: Community Issues

Students are asked to think of issues most important to them as individuals and as a class. Students broaden their perspective on community issues by interviewing other members of the community.

Lesson 2: Use Data to Understand Community Issues

Students use data to determine demographic trends that may relate to community issues.

Lesson 3: Conducting a Survey

Students learn about polling and surveying through readings and experience. They develop, administer, tabulate, and interpret a community survey about issues, citizen knowledge, or voting behavior.

Lesson 4: Developing the Youth Issues Agenda

Having conducted interviews in the community or a survey to research community issues, students analyze their data to make sense of what they learned, summarize their results, and add to their list of issues. As a class, students select the 1-5 issues they consider to be the most important and determine that these will form their Youth Issues Agenda.

Lesson 5: How Will You Make Your Voices Heard?

Students use a concept map to determine how they will disseminate information about how local government operates, what local government has done about their issue, what can be done about their issue at the local level, or their ideas about how to address the issue locally. NOTE: This work is meant to constitute a semester-long project, but teachers may opt to do additional small projects throughout the semester for assessment purposes.



Overview

Objectives of the Lesson

Students will:

- Identify issues in their community
- Understand the interrelation between various issues in the community
- Conduct neighborhood interviews to validate classroom perceptions
- Classify issues according to issue subject

Preparation before Lesson 1

- Make copies of [Community Interviews](#).



Lesson Plan

1. Ask students to write down five community strengths and five community problems.

NOTE: “Community” can be defined in a variety of ways. It might be used to mean the neighborhood in which students live, the neighborhood in which they go to school, the school itself, or some other definition entirely. Consider whether you want to provide students with a definition of community to work from, or whether you would rather they decide amongst themselves what definition of community they want to use.

2. Have students mark which community strength they are most proud of and which community problem is the most important to address.
3. Put students in groups of 3-4 to share their ideas on what works well in their community and what are the areas in which the community could improve?
4. Ask the class which items came up most frequently in their groups and write these on the board. Begin to categorize the specific items under broader headings. (Students are more likely later to find issues discussed in the media in terms of such broad categories.) Make sure to lead students toward ideas that can be acted on by local government. This activity also helps students to see their specific issues as part of the larger community discussion.
NOTE: Be sure to save this list for Day 4 of this unit.
5. (Optional) Take students into the school community in groups of two to four with an adult. Have the students walk around the area and interview people they pass by, using the Community Interviews sheet. If possible, have the students use a camera or video recorder to document interviews.

Specific Issues	CATEGORY
litter; abandoned buildings	ENVIRONMENT
large class size; school repairs	EDUCATION
unemployment; more businesses	ECONOMY
drugs; violence; theft	CRIME
terrorism; safe neighborhoods	SECURITY
need for insurance; hospitals	HEALTH
others...	TRANSPORTATION, HOUSING



Assignment Suggestions

- Hand out the [Community Interviews](#) sheet and ask students to use it to interview three people in their community, asking them to identify areas in which the community could improve. Students can use family or friends for these interviews. Encourage safety in selection of people to interview.
- (Optional) Have students look at their local newspaper (either in hard copy or online from the [Student Voices website](#)) and write down two issues that they found in the newspaper that concern their community.



Overview

Lesson Objectives

Students will:

- Interpret data to identify trends in their community
- Understand the impact of community trends on community issues
- Evaluate findings as a means of identifying community issues

Preparation before Lesson 2

- Arrange for Internet access for your students to use the U.S. Census Bureau's website <http://factfinder.census.gov>
- If Internet access is not available to students in the classroom, go to the Census Bureau's website, <http://factfinder.census.gov>, and use the directions in the Lesson Plan to print out for students:
 1. Fact sheet with demographic profile for your city, town, county, zip code or state and make copies for students
 2. Population Finder sheet showing trends from 1990-2003 for your city/town or county
- Print out copies of **Using Data to Understand Issues**.



Project Idea

- Analyze data to identify trends in the community that could be used to support emerging issues in local government. Display findings graphically.



Lesson Plan

- Explain to students that another way to understand what is happening in their communities is by looking at census data. Hand out copies of **Using Data to Understand Issues** for students to use to compile information about their communities.
- If you have Internet access for the class, have students either individually or in pairs use the Student Voices website to go to the American Fact finder website of the U.S. Census Bureau (or go directly to <http://factfinder.census.gov>) At the top center of the homepage, under “Fast Access to Information,” they will see a screen that says “Get a Fact Sheet for Your Community.” Here students will have the option for entering their city, town, county, or zip, or their entire state.
- If students do not have Internet access, distribute copies of the relevant fact sheets.
- Ask students to use the data in the Fact Sheet to answer the questions in Part 1 of **Using Data to Understand Issues**.
- Next, ask students to return to the home page of the American Fact Finder website. On the upper left hand side of the home page, they should click on “Population Finder,” which will take them to a page that allows them to enter the name of their city, town or county and find out how the size of the population has changed since 1990. (If no Internet access is available, distribute copies of the page that shows these population figures.)
- Ask students to use this data to complete Part 2 of **Using Data to Understand Issues**.
- Discuss with students the demographic trends they found for their community and the kinds of issues those trends might present. Ask students if the data have suggested new issues to add to their list of issues that concern them.

Assignment Suggestion

- Ask students to use **Using Data to Understand Issues** to write a 1-page essay describing
 - 1) Their community’s demographic make-up,
 - 2) Its pattern of growth or decline, and
 - 3) What issues these data raise for the community.



Overview

Lesson Objectives

Students will:

- Understand the elements of survey design
- Interpret survey results
- Evaluate surveys as a means of identifying community issues
- Classify issues according to issue subject

Preparation before Lesson 3

- Make one copy of [Survey Savvy](#) for each student.
- (Optional) Make one copy of [Interviewing and Polling](#) for each student.



Project Idea

- Conduct a survey on community attitudes, knowledge about local government, opinions about issues in the community, or voting behavior.



Lesson Plan

1. Inform students that they will be conducting their own survey to discover what other people in their community think are important issues for their local elected officials to discuss.
2. Ask students to establish the goals of their survey. What exactly do they want to learn by surveying community members? The survey could focus on any of the following: issues, political knowledge of the local government, or representatives' positions on issues.
3. Hand out **Survey Savvy** and read with students. Discuss with students each segment of the handout.
 - ✓ What is the goal of our survey?
 - ✓ How will we select the people that we survey? What are the demographics of the community?
 - ✓ What type of sample will we seek? Representative vs. Convenience Sample? (Discuss the benefits and drawbacks of each type of sample).
 - ✓ Have students develop survey questions examining issues, political knowledge or voting behavior. Brainstorm with students to frame quality questions for the survey.
 - ✓ Discuss the importance of valid survey questions.
4. (Optional): Depending on your students' abilities and interest, you may want to use the **Interviewing and Polling** handout instead of the **Survey Savvy** handout to deepen their understanding of how to formulate a survey.

Assignment Suggestions

- Have students pre-test their survey questions on one member of the community or school. After administering the survey, discuss with the person who took the survey what he or she felt each question meant and if any questions were confusing. Students should take note of any questions that are misleading, difficult to understand or biased. Students should collectively revise/eliminate invalid questions.
- Create final surveys. Have students administer their surveys to the determined number of community members. Students should then tally and analyze responses.
- Instruct students to write a summary of their survey results and their interpretation of the results.
- Have student's reconsider/revise their Youth Issues Agenda to reflect the input of their respondents.



Overview

Lesson Objectives

Students will:

- Compare neighborhood survey results to classroom findings
- Demonstrate democratic deliberation to determine their Youth Issues Agenda
- Provide evidence that shows why their chosen issues are important to the community

Preparation before Lesson 4

- Write on the board the community issues list developed by students on Day 1 of this unit.
- Make one copy of the [Community Interviews - Small Group Summary](#) for each group.
- Arrange access to the Internet and the [Student Voices Website](#).
- Have available extra copies of [What's the Issue?](#) writing template for use in the assignment.



Lesson Plan

1. Explain the **Youth Issues Agenda** to students — that it is their class’s agenda of important issues facing their community, which they will present to the local officials or community leaders to address. The Youth Issues Agenda is the central focus of the rest of the Student Voices curriculum and the key to moving forward. Using the information they have collected by interviewing community members, from analyzing data and survey results, and from their own opinions, students should come up with 1-5 items for a Youth Issues Agenda — things that can be changed to improve their community.
2. Divide students into groups of four or five. Have students chose a facilitator and a recorder for each group. The facilitator should make sure that everyone is heard. The recorder is responsible for filling out the Community Interviews - Small Group Summary sheet.

NOTE: You may want to use alternate roles for individuals in the group if you have already established a system for sharing group work responsibilities in the class.

Specific Issues	CATEGORY
litter; abandoned buildings	ENVIRONMENT
large class size; school repairs	EDUCATION
unemployment; more businesses	ECONOMY
drugs; violence; theft	CRIME
terrorism; safe schools & neighborhoods	SECURITY
need for health insurance; access to hospitals	HEALTH
others...	HOUSING, TRANSPORTATION, FACILITIES

3. In their groups, have students share and discuss information collected on their individual **Community Interviews** sheets. If they have conducted a survey or analyzed data about the community, they should add their findings from these sources to the discussion of issues. Recorders should write down two to five issues from each student in the group. Each group



Unit 2 :: Lesson 4 :: Developing the Youth Issues Agenda

should categorize the specific issues under major headings (as in the example table on the previous page) and select three issues that group members consider to be most important for a Youth Issues Agenda. (If student groups cannot decide on the top three issues through discussion alone, have them vote to choose the top three issues.) Encourage groups to prepare reason for why they chose those three issues, using example from their interviews, survey results, or census data to support their choices.

4. Have each group present their top three issues to the class, providing reasons for why these were chosen over others. Write down the Youth Issues Agenda items from each group on the board.
5. As a class, discuss these issues and select one to five of the most important ones of the class Youth Issues Agenda. If students cannot decide on their top three issues through discussion alone, have them vote to choose the top three issues.

Assignment Suggestions

- If the class cannot come to a consensus about the Youth Issues Agenda, assign students to write a 1-minute speech in favor of choosing their issue over others. Students should use data or other information to support their arguments for why this issue is one of the most important facing the community.
- Ask students to write about the issue they have found to be the most important one in their community—and the issue they believe is most important for local officials to address. (Students might want to use the What's the Issue? writing template. Teachers may want to fill in the template using one issue.) They should:
 - Name the issue.
 - Describe the issue and give examples of it — what is it? what does it look like? and so on.
 - Describe why they think the issue is important, including any information collected from the interviews or survey on what other people in the community think about the issue or any census data collected.
- Encourage students to send their writing to the Student Voices Web site for consideration for posting as a story or to send the writing to their local newspaper as a letter-to-the-editor.



Overview

Lesson Objectives

Students will:

- Graphically represent local government
- Understand how federalism impacts issues in local government
- Identify possible formats for capstone projects

Preparation before Lesson 5

- One copy of [Making Voices Heard](#) concept map sample for each student
- One blank sheet of paper for each student



Lesson Plan

1. Explain to students that they will use the rest of the Student Voices semester to research how their issue has been addressed in the community, as well as how they would like to see it addressed in the future. Their final activity of the semester will be to communicate their research or ideas to an audience in the real world.

NOTE: You may want to have students divide into issue research teams with each team creating a project about one of the issues on their Youth Issues Agenda. Or, you may want the class to work on a single issue and project together.

2. Distribute copies of the **Making Voices Heard** sample concept map to students. Explain that concept mapping is one way to brainstorm ideas and use graphics/pictures to show how these ideas are related. Students should use circles to represent each of their ideas and straight lines or arrows to show how their ideas relate to one another.
3. Hand out a blank sheet of paper to each student. Instruct students to write “ways to share information” in a circle in the center of the paper. Have students draw circles around the center for “the media,” “the school,” “the community,” “local legislature/city council,” and “local executive/mayor.”
4. Have students brainstorm ways to share information on their issue (as it relates to local government) with each of these groups and add the ideas to the concept map. They may want to use their notes from Unit 1, Lesson 2 for guidance. Some ideas for disseminating information include:
 - writing letters to the editor or opinion pieces for a local or school newspaper
 - testifying at a local hearing about the issue to share their experiences and ideas
 - contacting a local official to share their experiences with the issue and ideas for how to better address it in the community
 - publishing brochures or launching web sites as guides to local government
 - holding an in-school expo about their issue and how it is addressed by local government
 - creating a petition and using it in the school or community to get local government to use the students’ ideas for how to address the issue
 - translating research from English into languages spoken by students and community members and distributing it in the neighborhood
 - creating and posting posters (with permission) in the school or community about the issue or local government
 - performing a skit on the issue at school or at community events



Unit 2 :: Lesson 5 :: How Will You Make Your Voices Heard?

5. After students have completed their concept maps, have them choose their favorite idea and share it with the class. As a group, consider what it will take to use each of these methods of disseminating information. Ask the students to think about whether the format is realistic, feasible, relevant to local government, and the best way to communicate about their issue.
6. After considering the feasibility of each option as a class, choose one to pursue. This will be the class's project for the rest of the semester, which will culminate in Unit 7, "Making Your Voices Heard in Local Government."



Community Interviews

NAME: _____

DATE: _____

Introduction: What do your neighbors think are the biggest problems in their community? What do you think are the biggest problems? What do other people you know think they are? This activity, in which you conduct interviews with people in your community, will help you to get a better idea of what you and the people you know would like to see changed in your community.

Activity: Draw a map of the Community. Start by mapping the place you would consider your community on the back of this sheet. Don't look at any "real" maps, just work from your memory and what you know from living there. Label the important streets and places—stores, friends' houses or recreation areas, etc. When you interview people, stay inside the area you map. Only talk to people who work or live in this area.

Interviews: To get a variety of views, interview four different people. Select people you think are likely to have different views. Start by "interviewing" yourself so you can compare your views with those of others. Write down your ideas about what the big issues are in your neighborhood. Then, interview **three** more people, trying to get one from each of the following categories:

- | | | |
|---|--|--|
| ✓ Family member | ✓ Store owner or employee | ✓ Friend |
| ✓ Person who lives and works in the community | ✓ Person who lives in the community and works somewhere else | ✓ Person who does a service job in the community—postal worker, etc. |

Write down what you learn in the table below.

Name of person	Role (family member? store owner? etc.)	Top three community problems or issues
1. Yourself <hr/> Your Name		1. 2. 3.
		1. 2. 3.
		1. 2. 3.
		1. 2. 3.



Using Data to Understand Issues

NAME: _____

DATE: _____

■ PART 1: DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

Name of your community (city/town, county, or zip code)

1) What is the average age of the population? _____

2) What percentage graduated from high school or higher? _____

3) What is the percentage of families below the poverty level? _____

4) What is the percentage of families in the U.S. below the poverty level? _____

5) What other observation can you make about your community based on the census data profile?

6) What problems might your community face as a result of the data described above?

■ PART 2: POPULATION CHANGE

Did the population of your community grow or decline between 1990 and 2003? _____

What was the percentage change (growth or decline) from 1990 to 2003? _____

Can you think of possible reason(s) for this growth or decline?

Is the change in population good or bad for your community? Or both? Why?



Using Data to Understand Issues

Students will click here to complete Part 2.

For Part 1, have students enter their city and state in the box and drop-down menu here.

U.S. Census Bureau



American FactFinder

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Your source for population, housing, economic, and geographic data

POPULATION
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PEOPLE

HOUSING

BUSINESS AND
GOVERNMENT

ABOUT THE DATA

DATA SETS

MAPS AND
GEOGRAPHY

REFERENCE SHELF

TOOLS

Address Search...

Enter a [street address](#)
to find Census 2000
data

- [Browser Notes](#)
- [Confidentiality](#)
- [Citing FactFinder](#)

Fast Access to Information



Get a **Fact Sheet** for your community...

city/town,
county, or zip
state

[or select a state using a map >](#)

For age, education, income, and race, click [People](#).
For home values, ownership, and mortgage, click [Housing](#).
For foreign trade, governments, and housing starts, click [Business and Government](#).

Getting Detailed Data

To learn about Data Sets, check out [About the Data](#).
Expert user? Go directly to [Data Sets](#).

What's New

Percentage of million-dollar homes has nearly doubled since 2000. [more >](#)

U.S. voter turnout up in 2004. [more >](#)

New products and features in American FactFinder released April 14th, 2005. [more >](#)

2004 Population Estimates for counties are now available from the American FactFinder [data sets page](#).

[past items >](#)

Data in American FactFinder

The [Decennial Census](#) is taken every 10 years to collect information about the people and housing of the United States.

The [American Community Survey](#) - an ongoing survey that provides data about + your community every year.

The [Economic Census](#) profiles the U.S. economy every 5 years.

The [Population Estimates Program](#) publishes population numbers between censuses.



U.S. Population Clock

15:14 GMT (EST+5) May 27, 2005



296,216,563

more [population clocks >](#)

In the Spotlight



2002 Economic Census data available in American FactFinder - 2002

Economic Census data are being released on a flow basis, as [Quick Reports](#) and [Detailed Statistics Data Sets](#).

Establishments, sales, employment, and payroll data are being released for counties, economic places, and more. See [Geography Quick Reports](#).

[past items >](#)

Special Interest

[Kids' Corner](#) - Learn fun facts about your state and take a quiz.

[Censo 2000 Puerto Rico](#) en español.

[American Indian and Alaska Native](#) data and links

The Bureau's [latest news releases](#) and [The Broadcast Zone](#).

Information on [Religion](#) and [Genealogy](#)



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U.S. CENSUS BUREAU

Helping You Make Informed Decisions



Using Data to Understand Issues

U.S. Census Bureau

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POPULATION FINDER

FACT SHEET
PEOPLE
HOUSING
BUSINESS AND GOVERNMENT
ABOUT THE DATA
DATA SETS
MAPS AND GEOGRAPHY
REFERENCE SHELF
TOOLS

Legend
geographic comparison tables (compare many geographies)
thematic maps

Main ► Population Finder

POPULATION FINDER

United States
United States

city/town, county, or zip
state
-- select a state -- GO
[search by address >](#)

■ The 2004 population estimate for the United States is **293,655,404**.

■ View population trends...

	2004	2000	1990
Population	293,655,404	281,421,906	248,709,873

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2004 Population Estimates, Census 2000, 1990 Census

■ View more results...

Population for all states in the United States, 2000-2004:
[alphanumeric](#) [ranked](#)

Map of Persons per Square Mile, United States by State:
[2004](#) [2000](#) [1990](#)

See more data using the [Fact Sheet](#) and other links on the left.

Census Bureau Links: [Home](#) • [Search](#) • [Subjects A-Z](#) • [FAQs](#) • [Data Tools](#) • [Catalog](#) • [Census 2000](#) • [Quality](#) • [Privacy Policy](#) • [Contact Us](#)

U.S. CENSUS BUREAU
Helping You Make Informed Decisions

For Part 2, Students will enter their city and state here.



"What I want to get done is what the people desire to have done, and the question for me is how to find that out exactly."

~Abraham Lincoln

A survey is a detailed study to gather and analyze information. In order to understand what is important to the people in your community it is essential that we gather and analyze information from the people themselves.

Steps to Creating a Quality Survey

1. Establish the goals of the survey - What do you want to learn?
2. Determine your sample - Who will you interview?
It is impossible due to practical limits to survey all people within the community. For this reason we often will survey a small group or a portion of the community. This smaller group is known as a **sample**. There are two primary types of samples:
 - **Representative Sample**- sample that has characteristics similar to that of the entire population.
 - **Convenience Sample**- sample that is taken of people who are easily accessible to complete a survey.
3. Create your questionnaire - What questions you will ask?
 - Keep Questionnaire Short
 - Keep Questions Simple
 - Start With Interesting Questions
 - Don't Ask Biased or Leading Questions
 - Keep Questions "Closed-Ended" (Multiple choice or "yes" or "no" answers)
 - Put Questions in Order: Start with General, Proceed to Specifics
4. Conduct interviews and enter data - Ask the questions to the determined sample. Collect completed interviews and enter responses into a spreadsheet. This is your data!
5. Analyze the data - Produce reports on the data you collected using a spreadsheet. You may want to analyze:
 - How frequently the same answer was chosen for each question
 - Whether people who answered the same on one question gave the same answers on other questions
 - If people who answered the same had similar backgrounds or demographics



Interviewing and Polling

Most of the polls you see about government focus on the amount of support that candidates or elected officials have from citizens. But polls and surveys can do much more to inform citizens about important issues, how well they understand the issues, and how well they know candidates' and elected officials' positions on those issues.

You can conduct your own poll to answer some of these questions. Your community may have problems that are unique or that do not get much attention in the news. This is your chance to find out what those problems might be and how much of a concern they are to people in your community.

The first step in finding out what problems people experience is to ask people **"open-ended"** questions about the problems they think are most important. Open-ended questions give **respondents**, or the people answering your questions, the chance to choose their own answers. For example, you might ask: "What do you personally think are the most important problems facing our community?" Each respondent would be allowed to name up to three things that they were concerned about. Open-ended questions are very different from **"forced-choice"** questions, which give respondents a few possible options for their answer. Multiple-choice questions are a form of forced-choice questions, and so are true-false questions.

Surveys often use professional telephone interviewers who use sophisticated computer-assisted methods for selecting people to call and for doing the interview. One reason for using computer-assisted methods is that it allows you to call people at random. This gives you a better chance of reaching every kind of resident (who has a phone) and produces what is called a **"representative sample."**

For your class survey, you will not have the resources available to conduct a representative sample survey. In your case, you will probably do your surveys using what is known as a **"convenience sample."** This sample probably does not represent your community as well as a representative sample, but it is the best you can do. Typical convenience samples are the people you might find in a shopping mall or on a busy street. Convenience samples often do a good enough job of representing people's opinions, and they are used very often in marketing research.

Once you know the most important problems confronting your community, you will want to know what people think should be done to solve the problems. Because solutions to problems are complex, you probably will need to ask what people think causes those problems. You may want to give your interviewees a choice between 3-5 approaches to solve a problem.

Or, you may want to do a poll that measures citizens' political knowledge. It is the responsibility of the news media to inform citizens about the candidates and elected officials. A good example of a poll assessing citizen knowledge would ask people the names of their elected officials or the major candidates running in the election. It would also ask them if they knew their stands on the issues. As you research candidates' or elected officials' stands on issues, you will be able to see how accurate your respondents' views are.

In doing polls, it is important to recognize that the wording of the questions has a strong influence on the answers that you get back. This is especially true for complex election issues.

Tips for Asking Good Survey Questions

- Keep wording simple and clear.
- Include basic demographic questions, such as the age and ethnic background of the respondent.
- Keep personal views and biases out of questions.
- Use neutral and balanced wording.
- Ask general opinion questions before questions about specific news events.
- Use simple and clear wording in open-ended questions. For example, a simple and clear open-ended question is: "What do you think is the most important problem facing the community?"



Community Interviews — Small Group Summary

Group Members: _____

DATE: _____

Introduction. Your small group needs to decide on 3 issues you all agree are the most important ones discovered in your community. Use this sheet to help organize your discussion. Once you have selected a facilitator and recorder (Step 1), record 3-5 issues from each group member (Step 2) and then come to consensus among yourselves on the 3 most important (Step 3).

(NOTE: Everyone must have completed individual Community Interview sheets to do this activity.)

Step 1. Select a **facilitator** and a **recorder** for your small group – a facilitator should make sure everyone is heard and a recorder is responsible for writing things down.

Step 2. Issue Summary for Small Groups

1. Go around the group and ask each person to state 5 community problems from the interview sheets. The recorder writes these down, then reads back the lists when they are complete.
2. As a group, you should agree on a list of **3 issues** that you select as the most important things to change in your communities. Have the recorder circle the 3 issues on the chart below and write them into the second table of “Top Items for Youth Issues Agenda.” These items form an agenda—a list of items for action.

	Issue 1	Issue 2	Issue 3	Issue 4	Issue 5
Member 1					
Member 2					
Member 3					
Member 4					
Member 5					

Step 3: Group Summary (What are your group’s top 3 choices of issues for the class’s Youth Issues Agenda)

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____



What's the Issue?

NAME: _____

DATE: _____

Directions: Use this template to write about the issue you think is the most important one in your community, state, or country as a whole.

The issue that I believe is most important to my community is _____

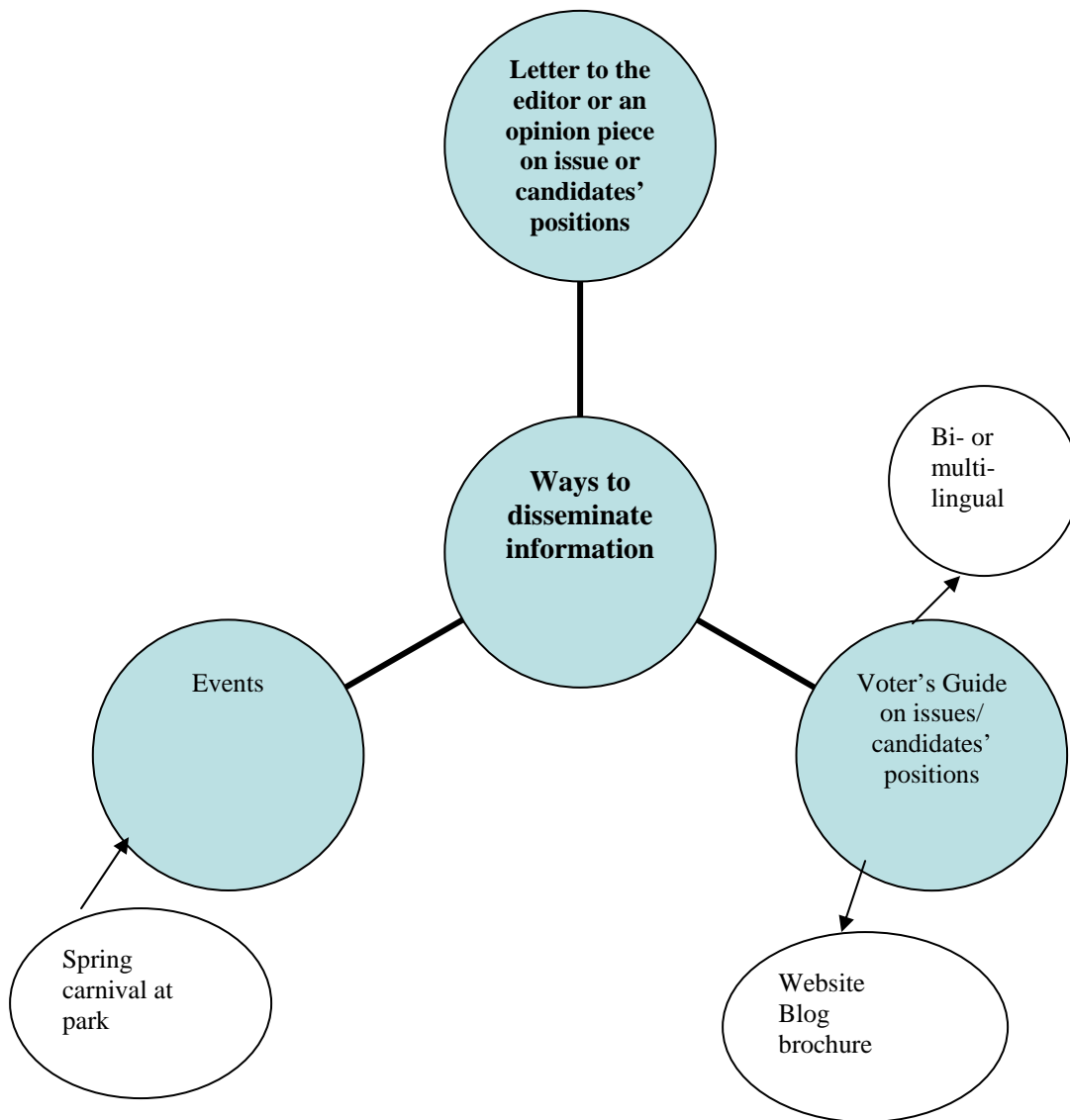
If you walk around my community you will see **[give examples of the problem and what it looks like, or evidence it exists]** _____

People who work or live in the community also think this is a problem. They say _____

The reason that I think _____ *is the most important problem in the community is* _____



Making Voices Heard Sample Concept Map





Unit 3

Issues and Local Government

Unit Overview

Introduction

This unit is designed to help students gather background information about their issue. They examine the executive and legislative branches of their local government to determine where citizens may have an impact in each branch's decision-making process. Students should be encouraged to analyze the information they gather and to think about why some types of needed information may not be available. Lessons Two and Four provide optional first-hand learning experiences.

NOTE: Teachers may want to refer to the Portfolio Assessment Guide in the “Rubrics and Assessments” section of the Student Voices binder. The Portfolio Assessment is a tool to track students' work throughout the research and implementation of the Student Voices curriculum. The use of a portfolio both helps students keep all of their materials in one central location and provides a set of documents to be graded at the end of the curriculum.

Lesson 1: How a Bill Becomes a Law

Students trace the process by which a bill becomes a law in their local government. They determine where citizens can have an impact in that process and conduct a local government information search to understand how their local government functions. They research what legislative action (if any) their local legislative body has taken about their issue and record this information in their **What Has Been Done About My Issue?** chart. Finally, they consider if legislative action is appropriate and how local government can impact their issue.

Lesson 2: Observing the Legislative Branch

Students attend a local governing body session or public hearing to gain a firsthand sense of how issues are debated and addressed in local government.

Lesson 3: How the Executive Branch Works

Using their local government's organizational chart, students research the functions of their local executive, executive-level agencies, and heads of agencies or departments. They consider where citizens can have an impact in the executive branch's policy-making process and research what executive action their local government has taken about their issue, recording this information in their **What Has Been Done About My Issue?** chart. Finally, they consider what kind of executive action they would like to see local government take about their issue and determine the appropriate next steps.

Lesson 4: Meeting with a Local Official

In this two-day lesson, students prepare questions for and meet with a local official from the executive or legislative branch to discuss his/her role in government, the role of his/her branch of government in dealing with their issue, and what action has been taken at the local level with regard to their issue.



Overview

Objectives of the Lesson

Students will:

- Understand how a bill becomes a law in their local government
- Determine specific operating procedures of their local legislative body
- Determine where citizens can have an impact in the local legislative process
- Identify past legislative action on their chosen issue

Preparation before Lesson 1

- Make a copy of [How a Local Bill Becomes a Law](#) for each student.
- Make a copy of [Local Government Information Search](#) for each student.
- Make a copy of [What Has Been Done About My Issue?](#) handout for each student.
- Make a copy of the [Write Your Elected Officials](#) letter template for each student.
- Remind students to bring their [Research and Resources](#) handout from Unit 1 to class, or make a copy of the handout for each student.
- (If Internet access is available) Arrange for Internet access or for equipment to project the Internet.
- (If Internet access is not available): Gather materials about the local legislative branch that will answer the questions on the [Local Government Information Search](#) handout or use the materials you found for use in Unit 1, Lesson 2, “Who Represents You.”



Project Idea

- Create a timeline charting what has been done by your local government to address the issue.



Lesson Plan

1. Hand out a copy of the **Local Government Information Search** to each student. Ask students to fill in as much of the chart as they can without using the Internet or any additional resources. Discuss what information they already know.
2. (If Internet access is available): Assign pairs of students to answer one of the questions on the handout, using the Student Voices website or other websites about their local government to find the answer. Have each pair share their findings with the class to fill out the rest of the handout.

(If Internet access is not available): Have students work in pairs and use the materials you collected to answer one or more of the questions in the handout. Have each pair share their findings with the class to fill out the rest of the handout.
3. Ask students what they know about how local legislation, sometimes called an ordinance, is passed by government. Write students' ideas on the board.
4. Hand out copies of **How a Local Bill Becomes a Law** to each student and walk students through the steps of the process. Again working in pairs, ask students to look for two places in the chart where citizens can have an impact on the local legislative process. Discuss findings as a group.
5. As a group, brainstorm why it is important for citizens to understand 1) how the local legislative branch functions and 2) how local laws are passed. Point students toward the idea that knowing these two processes will help them research what has been done about their issue in local government.
6. Hand out a copy of **What Has Been Done About My Issue?** and **Research and Resources** to each student. Put students into issue research teams to study one of the issues on their Youth Issues Agenda or have students research one aspect of an issue that the entire class will study.
 - (If Internet access is available): Ask students to spend the rest of the class online to research the questions in Section 2 of the handout, looking for what the local legislative branch has done about their issue and looking for quotes from local legislators about the issue. (The remaining questions will be filled out in subsequent lessons). Remind students to record any resources they use to answer Section 2 in the **Research and Resources** handout. Students should keep both of these handouts for use throughout Units 3, 4, and 5.

If students are unfamiliar with online research or struggle with finding good sources, below are some suggestions for getting started.

1. If you have access to **newspaper archives** in your community, go to the newspaper archives homepage. Have students brainstorm search terms for researching the issue using the newspaper archives.



Unit 3 :: Lesson 1 :: How a Local Bill Becomes a Law

2. Show students how to get to the [Student Voices Website](#) “**News Index.**” If the students’ issues are not in the index, have them find items on the index that relate to the class issue.
3. Show students how to get to the [Student Voices Website](#) “**Student Index.**” Have students brainstorm where in this index they would look to find information on their issue.
4. Have students search for websites of community organizations or non-profits that handle their issue.
 - (If Internet access is not available): Distribute the printouts you found before class about the issue and the local legislature or the material you used in Unit 1, Lesson 3. Working alone or in pairs, ask students to spend the rest of the class researching the answers to Section 2 of the handout, looking for what the local legislative branch has done about their issue and looking for quotes from local legislators about the issue. (The remaining questions will be answered in subsequent lessons). Remind students to record any resources they use in the [Research and Resources](#) handout. Students should keep both of these handouts for use throughout Units 3, 4, and 5.
7. Hand out a copy of the [Write Your Elected Officials](#) template to each student. Explain that another way to find out what local government has done about the issue is to write to their local legislators and ask for this information. Have students write letters using the template. They should address the letters to the local legislators they found in their research for the Unit 1 [Who Represents You](#) handout.

NOTE: It may take more than one class period for students to complete [What Has Been Done About My Issue?](#) for the local legislative branch. However, in the long run it will be worthwhile to make sure their research is adequate, as students will need to refer to their findings from this handout throughout the rest of the semester.

Assignment Suggestions

- Complete letters to local legislators using the [Write Your Elected Officials](#) letter template. Students can use the template to write letters seeking information if they were not able to find it, or to supplement the information they have been able to gather.
- Using research gathered in class, write a 1-paragraph summary of what the local legislature has done to address the issue.
- Using research gathered in class, write a 1-page essay describing one of the ways that citizens can impact local legislative decision-making.



Overview

Lesson Objectives

Students will:

- Attend in person or watch on television a meeting or hearing of the local legislative branch and make observations about what takes place
- Understand how the local legislative process looks in action

Preparation before Lesson 2

- (Option 1) Find out the schedule of meetings or hearings held by your city or borough council (or any other local government group) and schedule a visit as a class trip.
- (Option 2) Have a taped recording of a city or borough council meeting, or hearing (or any other local government group meeting) available and show all or some of it during class time. Local government meetings and hearings are often aired on public access channels.
- (Option 3) If your local government televises or streams live city or borough council meetings (or any other local government group meeting) on the Internet at a time that coincides with class time, arrange for your students to watch during class.
- Make copies of the **Observing Local Government** worksheet.
- Make copies of the **Observing Local Government – Analyzing What You Saw** worksheet.

NOTE: You may need to review parliamentary procedure or your local legislative branch's rules of order with students prior to their going. This will help them follow what happens at the meeting. Below are a few suggested web resources on parliamentary procedure.

- University of Kentucky's College of Agriculture Cooperative Extension Advisory System offers a 12-page **Simple Parliamentary Procedure guide** (PDF). Go to the URL below and click on "Meeting Procedure Materials."
<http://ces.ca.uky.edu/advisorycouncil/Tools.htm>
- Page 13 of the National Forensics League's 21-page **Student Congress Manual** (PDF) contains information about parliamentary procedure. Go the URL below and click on "2004-2005 Student Congress Manual."
<http://www.nflonline.org/AboutNFL/LeagueManuals>



Unit 3 :: Lesson 2 :: Observing the Legislative Branch

In addition, you may find some of the following definitions useful:

- **Code:** the permanent laws of a city, county, state, or nation, as in, “the Pennsylvania state code prohibits singing in the bathtub.”
- **Resolution:** a formal statement or expression of opinion by the legislative body, as in, “a resolution declaring September 17 *National Constitution Day*.”
- **Ordinance:** a law or regulation generally passed by city governments, as in, “an ordinance to amend the code to permit building at the corner of State and Main Streets.”



Lesson Plan

1. As students watch the proceedings of the City Council meeting, have them fill out the **Observing Local Government** worksheet.
2. Students should be encouraged to take notes on the proceedings and write down any questions they have.
3. At the completion of the observation, have students gather in groups of 3-4 and ask them to compare their notes. Have students present their group findings to the class as a whole.

Assignment Suggestion

- Ask students to complete **Observing Local Government in Action — Analyzing What You Saw**, using the information collected on the **Observing Local Government** worksheet.



Overview

Lesson Objectives

Students will:

- Understand the structure of the executive branch of local government
- Identify past actions that the executive branch has taken on their issue
- Determine where in the executive branch citizens can have an impact

Preparation before Lesson 3

- Remind students to bring their **What Has Been Done About My Issue** and **Research and Resources** handouts to class.
- (If Internet access is available) Arrange for Internet access or for equipment to project the Internet.
- (If Internet access is not available): Make copies of any materials describing the structure of the local executive branch (if available, use your city's Local Government Organizational Chart), and/or use the materials you found for use in Unit 1, Lesson 2, "Who Represents You."
- (Possible assignment) Make copies of **Understanding Initiative and Referendum: Approaches to Direct Democracy**.



Project Ideas

- Students create a timeline of what has been done about their issue by the local executive branch.
- Students create a website or PowerPoint presentation describing the functions of local government and share their work with the community
- Students consider the role of initiatives and referenda in their local government's decision-making process and share their findings with the community.



Lesson Plan

1. Have students brainstorm names of agencies and departments in their local government. Write the list on the board. Examples of agencies or departments include: the police department, the recreation department, and the transit agency.
2. Explain to students that agencies and departments they listed make up the executive branch of their local government. Although the powers of the executive branch vary from locale to locale, this branch – generally headed by a mayor, supervisor, or some other individual – is primarily in charge of implementing the laws that are passed by the local legislative branch. For example, if the City Council passes a law making it illegal for anyone under 18 to be out past 11pm, the local police force must enforce the law by applying a penalty. In the case of curfews for young adults, the penalty is usually a fine.
3. Remind students that, like the legislative branch, it is important for citizens to understand how the local executive branch works so they can better research what has been done about their issue in local government.
4. As in Lesson 1, put students into issue research teams to study one of the issues on their Youth Issues Agenda or ask students to research one aspect of an issue that the entire class will study.
 - (If Internet access is available): Have students use the online resources they found in Unit 1 and recorded on their **Research and Resources** handout to find a local government organizational chart or some other description of their local executive branch. In pairs, students should identify where citizens can have an impact about their issue with the local executive branch and whether that area has an online presence. For example, if the students are concerned about the number of potholes on the streets in their community, they should identify what agency or department handles matters having to do with streets, and where they can be found on the Internet.
 - (If Internet access is not available): Distribute your printouts about the structure of the local executive branch to students. In pairs, students should identify where citizens can have an impact about their issue with the local executive branch. For example, if the students are concerned about the number of potholes on the streets in their community, they should identify what agency or department handles matters having to do with streets.
5. Have students get out their **What Has Been Done About My Issue** and **Research and Resources** handouts.
 - (If Internet access is available): Working alone or in pairs, ask students to spend the rest of the class researching the answers to Section 3 of the **What Has Been Done About My Issue** handout, looking for what the local executive branch has done about their issue and quotes from the mayor, department heads, or some



Unit 3 :: Lesson 3 :: How the Executive Branch Works

other representative of the local executive branch about their actions. Remind students to record any resources they use to answer Section 3 in the **Research and Resources** handout.

If students struggle with online research, refer to the tips for getting started that are listed in Unit 3, Lesson 1, “How a Bill Becomes a Law.”

- (If Internet access is not available): Have students get out their What Has Been Done About My Issue and Research and Resources handouts and distribute the printouts you found before class about the issue and the local legislature. Working alone or in pairs, ask students to spend the rest of the class researching the answers to question #1 of the handout, looking for what the local legislative branch has done about their issue and looking for quotes from local legislators about the issue. Remind students to record any resources they use to answer Section 3 in the **Research and Resources** handout.
6. Remind students that searching the Internet is only one way to find out what the local executive branch has done about their issue. Using their **Write Your Elected Officials** template from Unit 3, Lesson 1, instruct students to write letters to the mayor, supervisor, or appropriate agency or department head to find out what the local executive branch has done about their issue.

NOTE: It may take more than one class period for students to complete the section on the legislative branch in their **What Has Been Done About My Issue** worksheet. However, in the long run it will be worthwhile to make sure their research is adequate, as students will need to refer to their findings from this handout throughout the rest of the semester.

Assignment Suggestions

- Complete letters to local agency or department heads using the **Write Your Elected Officials** letter template. Students can use the template to write letters if they were not able to find information about their issue, or to supplement the information they have been able to gather.
- Using research gathered in class, write a 1-paragraph summary of what the local executive branch has done to address the issue.
- Using research gathered in class, write a 1-page essay describing one of the ways that citizens can impact decisions made by the local executive branch.
- Visit the University of Southern California’s Initiative and Referendum Institute’s website at <http://www.iandrinstitute.org/> to fill out the **Understanding Initiative and Referendum: Approaches to Direct Democracy** chart.



Overview

Lesson Objectives

Students will:

- Develop questions for a local official about their issue

Preparation before Lesson 4 – Day 1

- Have one index card available for each student
- Remind students to bring their research from Lessons 1 and 3 of this Unit to class.
- (If Internet access is available): Arrange for Internet access
- (If Internet access is not available): Gather background information on the invited guest, what the community is doing about the students' issue, what other communities are doing about it, or what work their visitor has done on the matter and have copies available for students.



Lesson Plan

1. Tell students that an elected official will be coming to class to speak with them about their issue. As a class, brainstorm what students would like to discuss with the visitor.
2. Allow students to choose one of the brainstormed question areas to research.
 - If Internet access is available: Have students research the invited guest's background, what the community is doing about the students' issue, what other communities are doing about it, or what work their visitor has done on the matter. Encourage students to refer to the research they have already conducted about the local legislative and executive branches of government as well.
 - If Internet access is not available: Distribute the research materials you collected about the guest's background, what s/he has done about their issue, and what their community and other communities are doing about the issue. Encourage students to refer to the research they have already conducted about the local legislative and executive branches of government as well.
3. Using their research, students should develop a question for the visitor on their issue area. Each question should be preceded by a statement to contextualize the question and demonstrate the students' knowledge of the issue.

NOTE: You may want to refer to [Survey Savvy](#) and [Interviewing and Polling](#) handouts from Unit 2, Lesson 3 for more information on asking good questions.

4. Distribute one index card to each student. Have students write their name and question on the card, and collect all cards before the end of the class period.

Assignment Suggestion

- Ask one or two students to write a 1-paragraph introduction of the visitor, explaining his/her background in government and role in addressing the issue



Overview

Lesson Objectives

Students will:

- Understand the role of a local elected official in addressing citizen concerns

Preparation before Lesson 4 – Day 2

- Look over students' questions for content, accuracy, and clarity.
- Confirm the elected official's visit with his/her office.
- Make one copy of [Sharing Information: Students and Community Leaders](#) for each student.



Lesson Plan

1. Prior to the start of the visit, return the index cards to the students and identify one or two students to ask the first few questions.
2. Introduce the elected official to the class or ask the student(s) you identified in the previous class to do so, sharing a description of the individual's job, how long the person has been involved in the community, or an example of leadership in a specific area of interest to the class (for example, education).
3. Ask the guest to introduce him/herself and speak briefly about the work that he/she has done on the issues in the class's Youth Issues Agenda.
4. Open the floor to students' questions. Remind students to take notes on the visitor's answers in the **Sharing Information: Students and Community Leaders** handout.
5. Thank the guest for his/her time and the information he/she shared with the class.

Assignment Suggestions

- Have students write a reflective paragraph on the visit, summarizing what they learned about the speaker's role in addressing their issue.
- Have students write a letter thanking the official for visiting, sharing what they learned, and (if appropriate) how they hope to be in touch in the future.



Local Government Information Search

Use the Student Voices Website or other resources to find the answers to the questions below about your local government. Skip around in the list of questions if you have trouble finding information.

<u>Research</u>	<u>Information on your Local Government</u>
1. What is the form of your local government (for example, mayor-council, council-manager)?	<hr/> <hr/>
2. When and where does your local government meet?	<hr/> <hr/>
3. Are any meetings open to the public? If so, which ones?	<hr/> <hr/>
4. How long is the term of office for the elected officials in your local government?	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
5. Are the members of your local government appointed, elected by district, "at-large," or some combination?	<hr/> <hr/>
6. How many members are in your local government?	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/>



What Has Been Done About My Issue?

1. **What is the issue? Describe the problem and give example. Document why you believe this is a real issue. Be precise.**

2. **What, if anything, has the local legislative body (example – city council, borough council) done about the issue?**

- Has the local legislative body considered or passed a law about the issue? Describe.

- Statement about the issue from a local legislative member (example – city council member, borough council member):

3. **What, if anything, have the top local governing officials (example – mayor, township commissioner), and/or local government departments done about the issue?**

- Has the top local governing official or any local government department considered or taken action on the issue? Describe.

- Statement about the issue from the top local governing official, or a department head:

4. **How has your issue been affected by the local budget process?**

- Has local government raised or cut budget funds to address the issue? Describe.



What Has Been Done About My Issue?

5. What roles have community groups played in the issue?

- Have any community groups done anything about the issue? Describe.

- Statement about the issue from a community group:

6. Are there any other individuals or groups of individuals involved in your issue?

- Have any other individuals or groups done anything about the issue? For example, has the state legislature passed any laws about your issue? Describe.

- Statement about the issue from a group or individual:

7. What has the local media said?

- Has the local media said anything about your issue? For example, has the newspaper written an editorial about your issue? Describe.

- Statement about the issue from a member of the media:

(Date) _____



Write Your Elected Officials Template

(Title)ELECTED OFFICIAL _____
(Address) _____
(State/City/Zip) _____

Dear **Title and Name** _____

I am a student in the _____ grade at _____ High School, participating in the Student Voices project. My family and I are also your constituents.

I am a member of a team that is researching the issue of _____. Our team thinks this is an important issue because _____

_____.

We are researching the background of the issue and have several questions for you.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

Have you done anything about this issue in the past? Do you or other members of the (**Local Government**) have any action pending, or do you have plans to address it in the future?

Thank you,

(**Your name**)

(**Your home address**)

Name of organization you are observing: _____

Date of meeting: _____



Members in attendance: _____

Location: _____

- Is this a regular meeting or a special hearing?
- Is there an agenda available? If so, staple a copy with this observation. If not, why not?

As you watch the meetings, note the following:

Who is in charge of the meeting?

Does this person decide who speaks?

How many citizens were in attendance?

What was the role of citizens in the meeting?

How did the meeting begin?

Who introduced the resolutions and bills? (clerk, legislator...)

How is a vote conducted?

Did the meeting involve testimony from any outside agency or expert?

How was the meeting concluded?

- Summary of the Meeting

- Sketch of the room layout (draw in the space provided or on the back)

Directions:



Observing Local Government in Action – Analyzing What You Saw

Now that you have completed the “Observing Local Government in Action” handout, use the information that you collected to answer the following questions.

1. Would you describe the meeting as formal or informal? Do you agree with this style?
2. Is there significance to the layout of the room? Does the layout indicate positions of importance? For example, do more senior members of the government have more desirable seating locations, or do members sit alphabetically?
3. Describe how one issue/topic was discussed. What did you agree should be included in the discussion? What do you think was missing? Was every voice heard? What voices were missing?
4. Do you think that the style of government you observed gives fair access to citizens? How would you change it if you could?
5. The federal government’s “Freedom of Information Act” and individual states’ “Sunshine Laws” require that citizens have access to all open government meetings. Does the public have access to the meeting you observed? If not, how can this be improved?
6. The federal government’s “Freedom of Information Act” and individual states’ “Sunshine Laws” require that citizens have access to all open government records. Does the public have a way of finding out what will be discussed at the meeting? How can this be improved?

Directions: *Please complete the chart based on the information found on the Initiative and Referendum Institute website.*



Understanding Initiatives and Referenda: Approaches to Direct Democracy

Concept	Description	Allowed in Your State Y/N
Initiative Process		
Direct Initiative		
Indirect Initiative		
Referendum Process		
Popular Referendum		
Legislative Referendum		

1. Which process is considered to be more powerful: the initiative or the referendum? Why?
2. What is the difference between the direct and indirect initiative? Which gives the people more power? Why?
3. How many states have the legislative referendum? When was it first proposed?
4. Why do you believe that there is no national initiative or referendum process?
5. Why do you believe that local government officials will often propose the referendum instead of passing legislation without the direct involvement of the people?

Name: _____

Date: _____



Sharing Information: Students and Community Leaders

The opportunity for students to meet with government officials and community leaders is an important part of the Student Voices project. Officials need to have an understanding of the issues that concern students. At the same time, students can add to their understanding of the issues by speaking with someone who is directly involved in the government. Take notes on the visitor's answers to your questions in the space provided below.

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

7.

8.

9.

10.



Unit 4

Issues and the Local Budget

Unit Overview

Introduction

This unit is designed to help students understand their local budgeting process. They will consider the role of budgeting in public policy decision-making and discover how budgets are another arena in local government where they can have an impact on issues that concern them.

Lesson 1: Budget Basics

Students think about the goods and services offered by their local government and make estimates of how they think their own local government budget “pie” is divided among categories of expenditures. Using the most recent budget or proposed budget for their communities, students compare their own ideas about local government expenditure with real numbers.

Lesson 2: Budget Simulation

Students conduct a simulation of the local government budget process. Through the simulation, they will experience the concepts of scarcity and resource allocation firsthand, as well as the role of constituencies/ special interest groups on local budget decision-making.

Lesson 3: The Budget Process in Your Community

Students learn how the budget for their community is created. They research when the budget process takes place, who proposes the budget, who passes the budget, and where citizens can have an impact in that process. They research whether local government has raised or cut funds from the budget allocated to address their issue in recent years. They consider whether they would like to see more funds allocated to address their issue and, if so, where funding might be cut to offset this cost.



Overview

Objectives of the Lesson

Students will:

- Define government budget terminology including: goods and services, operating and capital budgets, revenue, expenditures, budget deficits and budget surpluses
- Learn to create and interpret budget pie charts
- Understand the relationship between tax revenue and government expenditure
- Analyze local government revenues and expenditures
- Understand the concept of balanced budget laws

Preparation before Lesson 1

- Make one copy of **City Operating Budget** handout for each student.
- Locate a pie chart of your local government's budget, showing expenses by category if available, and make one copy for each student. (If a pie chart is not available, try to find a data or a summary table that describes expenses by category.)
- (Optional) Make copies of **City Operating Revenue** handout for each student in the class.
- (Optional) Locate a pie chart of your local government's revenues, showing income by category if available, and make one copy for each student.



Lesson Plan

1. Ask students to form pairs and ask each pair to create a list of goods and services that their local government provides. **Goods** are a physical product that can be delivered to whoever buys them and can be sold to someone else. Water is an example of a good provided by local government. **Services** are things that have benefit for citizens but are not a physical item and cannot be owned. For example, snow plowing is a service provided by local government.
2. Students should share their thoughts with the class to create a class list of ideas.
3. Explain the concept of **Operating Budget** vs. **Capital Budget**
 - **Operating Budget:** Yearly budget that is used to pay for annual services, salaries, and operations of the city government.
 - **Capital Budget:** Source of funds for large one-time projects, such as building new recreation centers or schools, upgrading the airport, or improving a city's water treatment plant.

NOTE: To help students understand the difference between a capital and an operating expense, you may want to take a single department and discuss what part of its expenses fits into the capital budget and which part fits into the operating budget. For example, police officer salaries are in the operating budget, while renovation of a police station would be in the capital budget.

4. Ask students to mark each of the items on their class list of government goods or services as either Capital or Operating costs.
5. Ask the class as a whole to group the individual items on the list into larger categories.

NOTE: If possible, use the categories on the actual city budget pie chart as a guide for students.

6. Distribute **City Operating Budget** worksheet. Ask students to copy the list of all the items in the Operating Budget from the class list to the box in their handout.
7. Using the circle diagram in the handout, ask students to create a pie chart of what they think the division of items will look like in the actual city operating budget. The goods and services they include in the pie chart are also known as **expenditures**, or things that cost the local government money to provide. In the budget process, expenditures are paid for with **revenues**, or government income that comes from taxes, state and federal aid, fines, donations from charities and foundations, and other sources. Encourage students to create a key for the items so that they can share their charts.
8. Share a copy of the actual city operating budget pie chart (if available) with students. (If a pie chart is not available, provide students with data or summary tables on the budget that is available.) Ask students to identify similarities and differences between their chart and the actual one.



Unit 4 :: Lesson 1 :: Budget Basics

9. (Optional) Ask students to create a list of revenue sources for their city's operating budget. Using the student-created list, have students use [City Operating Revenue](#) worksheet to create a pie chart based on what share that they think each category of revenue contributes to the local government budget. Compare students' projections with actual budget revenues.
10. Explain to students that most local governments have **"balanced budget" laws**, meaning that the amount of money spent by local government to provide goods and services to the community must equal the amount of revenue collected by local government in taxes, state and federal aid, and other sources of money. Generally, local governments only allow **budget deficits**, or a situation where the local government spends more than it takes in, in extreme situations, such as for disaster relief. **Budget surpluses** occur when the local government takes in more money than it spends. Budget surpluses can be used to increase government services, cut taxes, or they can be saved in a "rainy day fund" to be used if the local government is faced with a budget deficit in a future year.

NOTE: The Capital Budget revenue is usually allocated from loans, in the form of bonds. You may wish to discuss this with your students. Information about your city's capital budget and bond issues may be available online.

Assignment Suggestions

- Write a summary of local government's expenditures and revenues over the past year. Students should include what they think of local government's spending priorities and, if they think more money should be spent in one area, where they think money should be cut from the budget to pay for this.
- Examine the more detailed part of the local budget and write a 1-paragraph description of the goods and services provided by that part of the budget.
- Write 3-5 questions about the budget process, based on the information found online.
- Write a 1-paragraph description of a situation where local government might approve a budget deficit.



Overview

Lesson Objectives

Students will:

- Simulate a local government budget process
- Understand the relationship among interest groups, an elected official's own agenda, and scarcity on resource allocation

Preparation before lesson 2

- Make two copies of the [New Columbia Budget Expenditures](#) for each student.



Lesson Plan

1. Inform students that they will be participating in one of the most difficult government processes – creating a local budget for the mock city of New Columbia. Provide the students with a brief explanation of the politics of public budgeting.
 - Since a city’s budget ultimately determines the funding for local government programs and services, many groups will do what they can to ensure funding to programs that are important to them by protesting cuts or writing letters to the local officials involved in the local budget process. These groups are called constituencies or groups with similar interests. Very vocal constituencies can complicate the budget writing process, especially if cuts are needed to balance the budget.
 - Local officials in charge of creating the local budget may have an interest in particular programs, which makes it harder to implement any budget cuts in that area. For example, if an elected city council is the body responsible for budgeting, it could be expected that council members will do what they can to protect the interests of their voters and campaign contributors.
 - As mentioned in Unit 1, scarcity (or the basic problem that people will always have unlimited wants while resources such as money are always limited) means that to create a budget for the community, local officials and local constituencies must often compromise on what they want.
2. Divide the class into groups of 3-5 students. Hand out **New Columbia Budget Expenditures** to each student. Using the handout, have each student group set a budget for New Columbia. Remind students that their budgets must be balanced and that they cannot raise taxes to create more revenue for the city. Note that because the city of New Columbia is facing a budget deficit, the amount of budget revenue that can be spent the next year is \$2 million less than what was spent the previous year.
3. Write the budget categories listed in the handout on the board. Have each student group share their budget plans with the class. Keep track of each group’s dollar amount for each category. As a class, briefly discuss where groups’ plans differ.
4. Assign each group one of the special interest identities listed below. Hand out a second copy of **New Columbia Budget Expenditure** to each student and have groups reconsider their budgets in light of their new identities. Would they increase the amount they allocated to the area related to their special interest identity? Whose funding would they decrease to offset the increase in their own area?
 - **Senior Citizens:** This group of citizens is usually very active in politics and had a high voter turnout. Some local issues important to many senior citizens may include public and para-transportation costs, taxes, safe streets, low cost utilities, social services and public health policies such as free flu shots.
 - **Parents with school age children:** Some local issues important to the members of this group include basic city services (trash pick-up, police, fire, libraries, etc), safe streets, recreation center availability, taxes, school funding and education issues.
 - **City Employee Union:** Main goal is to protect the jobs, wages, and benefits of city employees. Budget cuts may result in the loss of jobs or benefits in future contracts



Unit 4 :: Lesson 2 :: Budget Simulation

as well as city services. The latest labor contract will expire soon and a new one must be negotiated. This is also an election year and the union is hoping the city council members running for reelection will not want to implement cuts in the current contract to keep the support of the city workers.

- **Department of Streets:** This group is in charge of the city's recycling programs, trash removal, road quality, and snow removal.
 - **Local Civic Association:** Citizens who advocate for quality of life issues - usually things such as safe streets, street signs and road maintenance, street cleaning, recreation centers, economic development, neighborhood revitalization, and blight removal.
 - **Department of Tourism:** This group is in charge of representing New Columbia to the public and making it seem like an attractive destination for tourists.
5. Have each group share what they changed in their budget to reflect the concern of their special interest identity. As a class, discuss how the new budgets compare to the budgets the students created before they had been assigned a special interest identity.
 6. Explain to students that local elected officials may have their own interests or **agendas** that compel them to support or oppose particular budget measures. For example, a city council member who represents an especially touristy area of New Columbia may think that the Department of Tourism should receive more funding next year, while a city council member who represents a district with a large senior citizen population might want more funding to support free flu shots or para-transportation.
 7. Erase the dollar amounts from the board, leaving only the categories for each group to view. Ask each group to maintain their special interest identity and work out a final budget for New Columbia as a class. Suggest that groups with similar interests work together to advocate for their issues. Ensure the total expenditures are equal to or less than \$1.8 billion.
 8. If students disagree about a dollar amount suggested by one of the groups, put the suggestion to a vote, with each group casting one vote. Or, complete a budget that is equal to or less than \$1.8 billion and have all the student groups vote on the completed budget. If the budget is not passed, return to the board and reassign dollar values until the budget passes.

NOTE: You may want to require that a budget be worked out by the end of class.

Assignment Suggestions

- Have students complete the **Budget Simulation** worksheet to debrief about their experiences making a local budget. Discuss their answers during the next class session.
- Have students construct two pie charts that graphically represent the first and second budgets they came up with in their groups and write a paragraph explaining why there are differences between the two.



Overview

Lesson Objectives

Students will:

- Become familiar with the process and people involved in the budgeting in their local government
- Identify where citizens can have an impact in the budget process
- Examine how the budget process might be used as a forum in which citizens can have their issue addressed by local government

Preparation before Lesson 3

- Make one copy of **Local Budget Information Search** handout for each student in the class.
- Remind students to bring their **What Has Been Done About My Issue** handout and **Research and Resources** worksheets to class.
- (If Internet access is available): Arrange for Internet access for the class, or use a single computer with digital projector.
- (If Internet access is not available): Print out materials for the students to use to complete the **Local Budget Information Search** and **What Has Been Done About My Issue** handouts.
- (Optional assignment): Make one copy of **Write Your Elected Officials** template (from Unit 3) for each student.



Project Ideas

- Create a website describing the local budget process if information is not available online.
- Petition local government to put budget information online for citizen use.
- Create a timeline tracking the budget trends in areas of local government related to the students' issue and compare this trend to that of other areas of local government.



Lesson Plan

1. Tell students that the local budget process provides citizens with an additional outlet for influencing policy on issues they care about.
2. Hand out a copy of **Local Budget Information Search** worksheet to each student.
3. Working alone, in pairs, or in their issue research teams, have students conduct the research needed to fill in answers to the handout. Remind them to keep track of the resources they find on their **Research and Resources** handout.
 - If Internet access is available: Instruct students to use online resources to find one or more of the answers to the questions on the worksheet.
 - If Internet access is not available: Distribute the materials you printed prior to class for students to use to complete the worksheet.
4. Ask students to share their answers to the questions on the handout and discuss how the budget process compares to the local legislative process. As a class, discuss how citizens can have an impact on the budget process, and how this compares to citizens' impact on the local legislative and executive branches' decision-making process.
5. Using Section 4 of the **What Has Been Done About My Issue** handout, have students research what has been done about their issue in the local budget process.
 - If Internet access is available: Instruct students to use online resources to determine whether their issue has received more or less local budget funding in recent years.
 - If Internet access is not available: Distribute the materials you printed prior to class for students to research whether their issue has received more or less local budget funding in recent years.
6. As a class, brainstorm how the local budgeting process could be used to address the Youth Issues Agenda. Encourage students to discuss whether addressing the issue through the budget process would cost the city additional money and if so, where that money would come from.

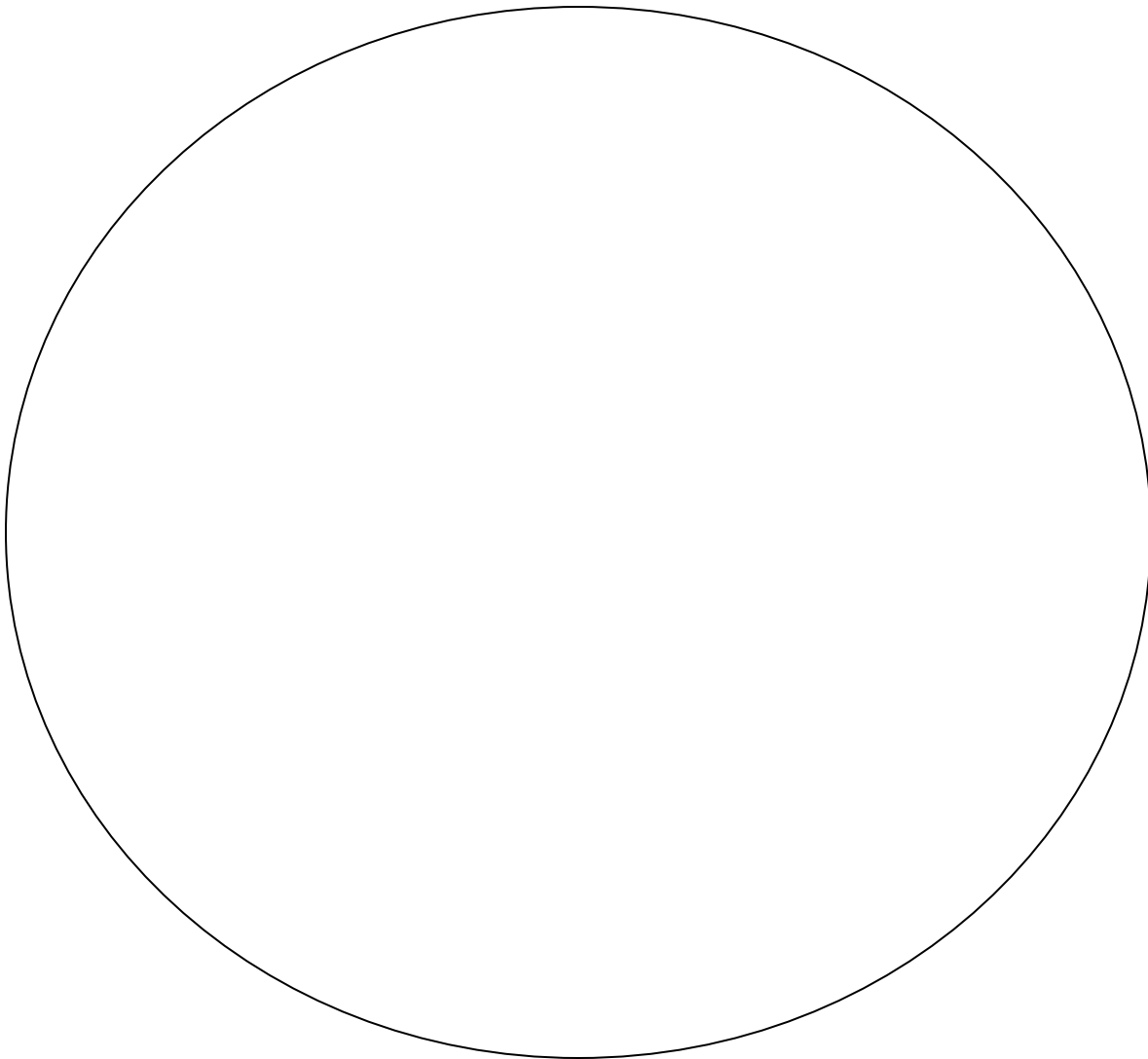
Assignment Suggestions

- Write letters to local officials involved in the local budget process using the **Write Your Elected Officials** letter template. Students may want to write letters if they were not able to find information about how their issue has been dealt with in the local budget process, or to supplement the information they have been able to gather. Use traditional mail or email.
- Using research gathered in class, write a 1-paragraph summary of what the local legislature has done to address the issue in the local budget process.



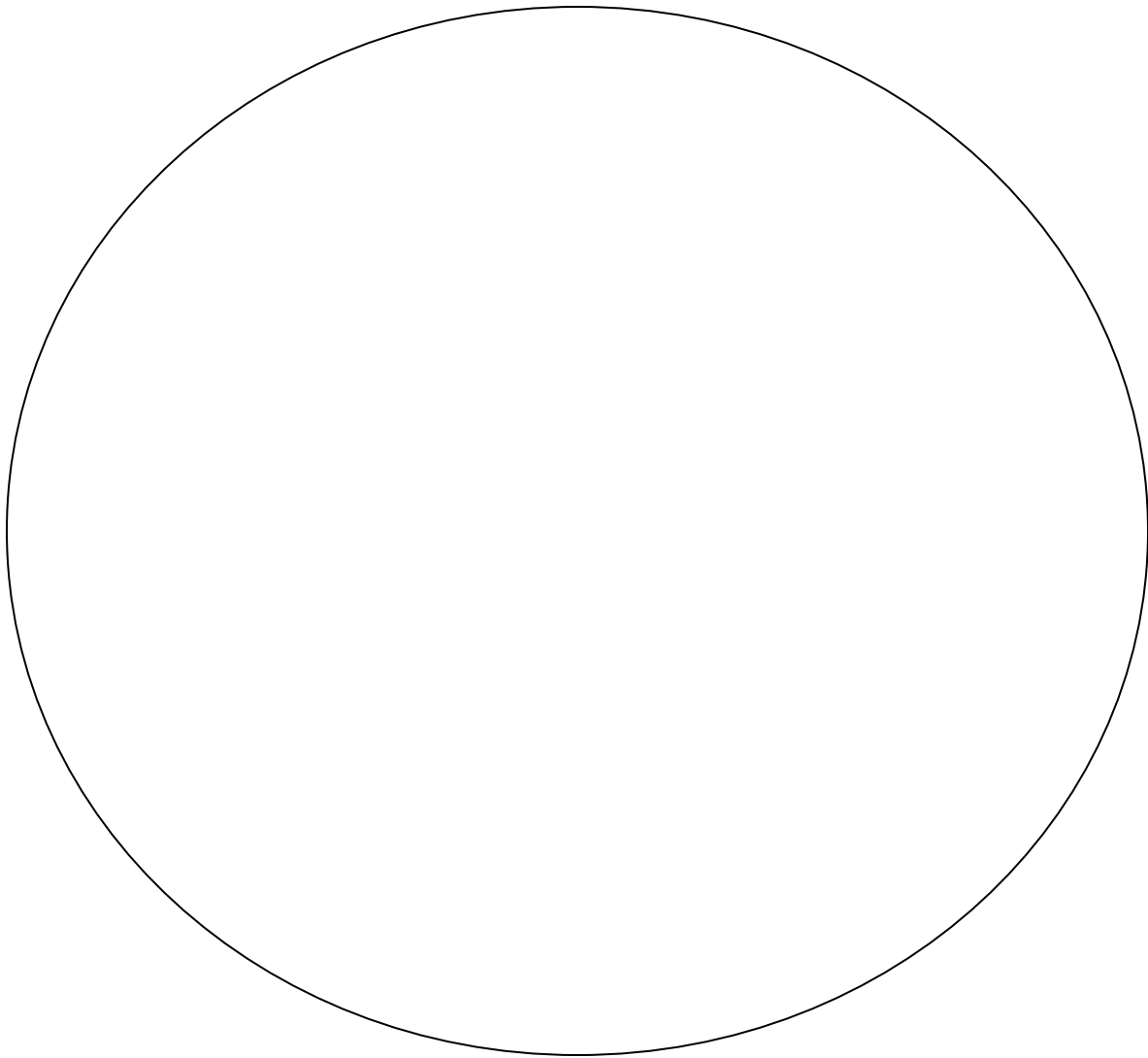
Unit 4 :: Lesson 3 :: The Budget Process in Your Community

- Using research gathered in class, write a 1-page essay describing one of the ways that citizens can have an impact on the budget process.
- Have students write a paragraph about which budget proposal they favor to address their issue and why. Prompt: *To address my issue, I would increase funding for _____ and cut funding from _____ in the local budget.*



Budget Items

--



Revenue Sources

--



New Columbia City Budget Expenditures

	\$2,000,000,000	100%	\$1,800,000,000	100%
Category	Current Budget	% of Budget	Next Year's Budget	% of Budget
Public Safety: (Police, Fire, EMS, Prisons, Emergency Demolition to Dangerous Buildings)	500,000,000	25%		
Justice System: (Courts, District Attorney, Legal Services)	100,000,000	5%		
Social Services: (Public Health Department, Human Services, Dept. of Recreation, etc)	480,000,000	24%		
Other Services: (Libraries, Parks, Sanitation, Street Repair, Records Department)	100,000,000	5%		
Economic development (Commerce Department, Dept. of Tourism, Museums, Convention Bureau)	60,000,000	3%		
Education (Community College, Public Schools)	40,000,000	2%		
Administrative supports (Personnel Office, Dept. of Revenue, Treasurer, Law department, Fleet management, etc)	140,000,000	7%		
Other Support Costs (Space Rental/Leases, Telecommunications, Utilities)	140,000,000	7%		
Employee Benefits (pensions, medical insurance, vacation)	440,000,000	22%		



Budget Simulation Worksheet

Name: _____

Date: _____

1. In your opinion, why did the class make the decisions it made?

2. If the decisions were left solely to you, what choices would you have made differently?

3. What were the most difficult choices each group faced?

4. Were there unexpected alliances or disputes?

5. What is your opinion of this process as a whole? What (if anything) could or should be done to improve it?



Local Budget Information Search

Directions: Use the Student Voices Website or other resources to find the answers to the questions below about your local budget process. Skip around in the list of questions if you have trouble finding information.

Research	Information on your Local Budget
1. When does the budget process take place in your community?	<hr/>
2. Who proposes the budget?	<hr/> <hr/>
3. Are there budget meetings open to the public? If so, who holds these meetings?	<hr/>
4. Who is allowed to revise the budget proposal? How does the revision process work?	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
5. Can citizens influence the local budget process? If so, how?	<hr/>
6. Who passes the budget? When does this take place?	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
7. Who monitors how budgeted funds are spent?	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/>



Unit 5

The Role of the Media

Unit Overview

Introduction

This unit is designed to help students understand the role of the media in local government. They will consider the role of media in a democratic society, examine how each form of media fulfills these roles, and identify ways that citizens can work with media to communicate about issues of concern to them.

Lesson 1: Media in a Democratic Society

Students reflect on what information is needed by citizens in a democracy, and what roles the media play in a democracy. They consider how the five freedoms guaranteed in the First Amendment make these roles possible, and examine how news might be different under different forms of government.

Lesson 2: Media and Citizens

Students research what has been said about their issue in the local media and what roles the local media have played regarding their issue. They consider where they get their news, then identify the ways that citizens can use the various forms of media to communicate about their issue, either by working with local media or creating their own communication.



Overview

Objectives of the Lesson

Students will:

- Examine citizens' informational needs in a democratic society
- Identify the media's roles in a democratic society
- Understand the role of the First Amendment in ensuring access to information about government

Preparation before Lesson 1

- Make one copy of [Roles of the Media in a Democracy](#) handout for each student
- Have copies of local newspapers available for students



Project Ideas

- Students compare the freedom of speech and press in other countries with how these freedoms are exercised in America
- Students create a poster or photo exhibition tracking how they exercise their First Amendment rights in their daily lives



Lesson Plan

1. Have students write down three things they learn by following the news (for example, information about local government decisions, the weekend weather forecast, celebrity gossip, etc). Go quickly around the room, having each student share what they think is the most important information they get from the news.
2. Discuss which items on the list are necessary for a democracy to work, and which are for entertainment or some other purpose.
3. Share with students that the media provide information for many different purposes, but that they serve five functions that are important for a healthy democracy. These roles are:
 - **Presentation of ideas:** The media provide a place for citizens and leaders to discuss ideas and resolve disagreements. For example, the op-ed page and letters-to-the-editor section of a newspaper give citizens a place to share their suggestions on how local government should address issues of concern to them.
 - **Agenda-setting:** By choosing to cover some stories and not others, the media help determine what problems citizens and leaders think are the most important to address in their community. For example, local television news might cover two robberies in the community, but not the closing of a local pool. This may lead to a public discussion about increasing the number of police on the streets, but no similar discussion about how to increase the number of recreation facilities for young people.
 - **Watchdog:** The media should document what happens in government and asks tough questions of elected officials about their decisions and behavior. This watchdog role gives elected officials an extra incentive to be ethical and act in the best interest of citizens. For example, a local blogger might write about a city council member's involvement in a real estate development company that is being considered for a city building contract, causing the city council member to withdraw the company from consideration.
 - **Information sharing:** The media help citizens become educated about an issue by providing the facts of the matter. Citizens can then use these facts to make up their own minds about what should be done. For example, the local newspaper might post standardized test results for each high school in the areas on its website, along with other information about each school. Citizens can look at this information to see what factors might contribute to high test scores.
 - **Mobilizing:** Once the media provide citizens with the facts about an issue, citizens can use these facts to determine a course of action and advocate for it in the community. Using the example from the section on "information sharing," citizens might find that schools with higher test scores have better teacher-student ratios. Based on this information, they might decide to petition the School Board requesting more teachers be



Unit 5 :: Lesson 1 :: Media in a Democratic Society

hired at their local high school, or to support candidates for office who have made putting more teachers in schools part of their platforms.

Source: Cook, T. (2005). *The Functions of the Press in a Democracy*. In G. Overholser and K.H. Jamieson (eds). *The press*. New York: Oxford University Press.

4. Return to the list on the board. As a class, discuss which function the media fills in each of the items the class identified as important to democracy.
5. Put students in groups of 3-5. Distribute **Roles of the Media in a Democracy** to each student and 1-2 local newspapers to each group. Working in their groups, have students go through the paper and find examples of the five functions outlined above. Discuss their examples as a class.
6. Introduce the First Amendment to the Constitution, which reads:

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.

Remind students that the First Amendment was written because the framers of the Constitution understood the importance of those five freedoms – freedom of religion, speech, press, and the right of citizens to assemble and petition – to the success of a free society. Without the First Amendment, there would be no free press to serve the five functions of media in a democracy.

7. Remaining in their groups, have students return to the examples they found in Step 5 and identify how the First Amendment is exercised in these examples. If time remains, have students look for other examples of the five freedoms in the paper.

Assignment Suggestions

- Create a poster about one of the functions of the media in a democracy, using examples from local newspapers, websites, quotes from television broadcasts or radio programs, or any other form of media.
- Monitor a local newspaper, television program, news website, or some other form of media to find examples of each of the media's roles in a democracy being demonstrated.
- Monitor a local newspaper, television program, news website, or some other form of media to find examples of the First Amendment in action.



Overview

Lesson Objectives

Students will:

- Identify past media coverage of their issue
- Determine what roles the local media have played in covering their issue
- Determine where citizens can have an impact on media coverage of issues
- Understand which media roles citizens can affect in public discussion about their issue

Preparation before Lesson 2

- Remind students to bring their **What Has Been Done about My Issue** worksheet, as well as their **Roles of the Media in a Democracy** and **Research and Resources** handouts to class.
- (If Internet access is available) Arrange for Internet access for the class or for equipment to project the Internet.
- (If Internet access is not available): Gather materials from media sites about the students' issue. (You may be able to use some of the materials you found for use in Unit 3.)



Project Ideas

- Students create a poster comparing the strengths and weaknesses of each form of media (newspapers, television, websites or other electronic media) in providing information citizens need in a democracy.
- Students write a letter to the editor or op-ed about their issue.
- Students create a weblog or website tracking what local government has done about their issue and what they would like to see done.
- Students work with their own school newspaper or television program to publicize their issue.
- Students create editorial cartoons about their issue for a local or school newspaper.
- Students work with their local public access TV channel as a forum to discuss their issue.



Lesson Plan

1. Ask students to look at the sources they recorded in their **Research and Resources** handout to complete Sections 2 and 3 of the **What Has Been Done About My Issue** handout. Ask students how many of the sources they found came from the local media.
2. Remind students of the five functions of media in a democracy discussed in the previous class. Tell them that when local media fills the “information sharing” role, it does so by providing citizens with information about the local legislative and executive branches of government and the local budget process, as they learned in their research for Unit 3. But, these are only some of the institutions the media covers as it fills these roles. The media might also cover what local community groups are doing or saying about an issue, or what the state or federal governments have done or said.
3. Explain to students that members of the media share their own ideas through columns or editorials to fill the other 4 functions of media in a democracy. Students might write editorials, host forums, or post endorsements of particular plans on their websites.
4. Alone or in pairs, have students fill out sections 5, 6, and 7 of the **What Has Been Done About My Issue** handout. You may want to assign each group a section and have all students share their findings at the end of class.
 - If Internet access is available: Have students use local media sites to determine what community groups, other interested parties (such as the state legislature) and the media have said about their issue.
 - If Internet access is not available: Have students work in pairs and use the materials you collected to complete one or more sections of the handout. Have each pair share their findings with the class to fill out the rest of the handout.
5. As a class, discuss what information the students found to complete sections 5, 6, and 7 of the handout. If they were not able to find much information, discuss possible reasons why the media did not cover these areas. For example, it is possible that the local newspaper does not perceive the size of the group affected by the issue as being large enough to warrant coverage.
6. Have students look at their completed **What Has Been Done About My Issue** handout. Tell students that while it is the media’s job to cover what happens in a community, citizens can also work with the media in the same way they work with the legislative or executive branches of government to communicate about their issue.
7. Using their **Research and Resources** and **Roles of the Media in a Democracy** handouts as guides, ask them to identify how citizens can have an impact on media’s coverage of their issue. They should consider print, electronic, and digital forms of media and think about how citizens might affect how the local media covers their issue. Have them write their ideas next to each of the media roles listed at the top of their **Roles of the Media in a Democracy** handout.



Assignment Suggestions

- Write a paragraph about a media role in a democracy that your local media have played in covering your issue. Use examples from your research to support your claims.
- Using research gathered in class, write a 1-paragraph summary of how the local media have addressed the issue.
- Using research gathered in class, write a 1-page essay describing one of the ways that citizens can impact media coverage of their issue.



Roles of the Media in Democracy

The media serves many purposes in society, but there are five that are especially important to keeping democracy running smoothly. Look through a local newspaper to find examples of each of the roles outlined below. Describe your findings in the space provided. Give the title, the subject, and whether it is an article or opinion piece.

- **Presenting ideas:** The media provides a place for citizens and leaders to discuss ideas and resolve disagreements.
- **Agenda-setting:** By choosing to cover some stories and not others, the media helps determine what problems citizens and leaders think are the most important to address in their community.
- **Acting as a watchdog:** The media documents what happens in government and asks tough questions of elected officials about their decisions and behavior. This watchdog role gives elected officials an extra incentive to be ethical and act in the best interest of citizens.
- **Information sharing:** The media helps citizens become educated about an issue by providing the facts of the matter. Citizens can then use these facts to make up their own minds about what should be done.
- **Mobilizing:** Once the media provides citizens with the facts about an issue, citizens can use these facts to determine a course of action and advocate for it in the community.

Example #1: _____

Example #2: _____

Example #3: _____

Example #4: _____

Example #5: _____



Unit 6

Developing Alternatives to Address Your Issue

Unit Overview

Introduction

This unit provides students with the structure to explore ways to address their issue. They develop a presentation about possible solutions and present it to the class for feedback before choosing one approach to support.

Lesson 1: Three Approaches to Addressing Your Issue

Students develop three alternative ways to address their issue in the community. They consider possible legislative, executive, and budget alternatives, as well as how citizens can work with government or the media to address the issue.

Lesson 2: Oral Presentations and Feedback

Research teams present their research on how to address their issue to the class. Other students in the class provide structured feedback about the team's research and the approach they think is the best way to address the issue. Based on this feedback, students choose the approach they think will have the best results.



Overview

Objectives of the Lesson

Students will:

- Define public policy
- Identify three ways to address their issue
- Determine pros and cons for each approach
- Consider the role of interest groups and constituencies in finding solutions to public policy issues
- Identify the political actors who may support or oppose their three approaches
- Determine how citizens can work with government to address their issue

Preparation before Lesson 1

- Make one copy of **Three Ways to Address Your Issue** for each student.
- Remind students to bring their **What Has Been Done About My Issue** worksheet, as well as their Roles of the Media in a Democracy and Research and Resources handouts to class.
- (If Internet access is available): Arrange for Internet access if students need to supplement the research they have already collected about their issue.
- (If Internet access is not available): Print out additional resource materials if students need to supplement the research they have already conducted about their issue.



Lesson Plan

1. Hand out the **Three Ways to Address Your Issue** worksheet.
2. Place students in research teams of 3-5. Ask them to refer to their research for the **What Has Been Done About My Issue** worksheet as well as their **Roles of the Media in a Democracy** and **Research and Resources** to identify possible approaches to solving their issue.
3. If necessary, give students time to collect more research on possible approaches.
 - (If Internet access is available): Have students use local websites to find additional ideas for how to address their issue in the community.
 - (If Internet access is not available): Have students use the additional resource materials you provided to find additional ideas for how to address their issue in the community.
4. Ask students to fill out the **Three Ways to Address Your Issue** worksheet using the alternative approaches they found in their research. When they are finished, have them discuss the alternatives as a team and come up with a consensus of the three best alternatives. If teams have difficulty choosing three alternatives, have each student present his/her reasons for supporting one alternative over another. Encourage teams to come to a consensus of three alternatives, putting the decision to a vote if necessary.
5. Explain to students that the approaches to address their issue are actually suggestions for how local government can change **public policy**, or the system of laws, regulatory measures, courses of action, and funding priorities for a given issue.
6. Explain to students that each alternative they consider will have support from some members of the community, but not others. As discussed in the budget simulation in Unit 4, these groups are called **interest groups** or **constituencies**, or groups of people who share similar concerns. When making decisions about public policy, it is important to consider which constituencies will support a particular plan and which might oppose it. For example, if a city considers banning smoking in restaurants, one constituency that might support the ban is restaurant workers who don't like working in a smoky environment. However, restaurant owners who are concerned that they will lose customers if smoking is banned are a constituency that might not support the ban.
7. Ask students to think about what constituencies in their community might support each of their alternatives and what constituencies in the community might not support their ideas.



Unit 6:: Lesson 1 :: Three Approaches to Addressing Your Issue

8. Explain to students that each team will make a 5-minute oral presentation in the next class about the approaches they favor. The teams should decide in advance which part of the presentation each member will deliver. Each presentation should include:
 - background information on the issue and why it is important
 - a description of alternative #1 for addressing the issue, its pros and cons, and what constituencies might support or not support the alternative
 - a description of alternative #2 for addressing the issue, its pros and cons, and what constituencies might support or not support the alternative
 - a description of alternative #3 for addressing the issue, its pros and cons, and what constituencies might support or not support the alternative
 - which alternative the team thinks is best and why
9. Allow students to use the rest of the class to prepare outlines of their presentations.

Assignment Suggestions

- Finish preparing for presentations.
- Write a paragraph about each of the approaches that the group will present in the next class, identifying which constituencies are likely to support the approach and which are likely to oppose it.



Overview

Lesson Objectives

Students will:

- Present their approaches for addressing their chosen issue
- Provide feedback to other groups about their ideas

Preparation before Lesson 2

- Bring enough 3x5” cards for each student to use one per group that presents in class.
- (Assignment option): Make one copy of the [Writing a Position Essay](#) handout for each student.
- (Assignment option): Make one copy of the [Writing an Action Plan](#) worksheet for each student.



Lesson Plan

1. Hand out 3x5" cards so that each student has one card for every group that will present in class. For each group that presents, students should write the names of the group members on the card, which of the three approaches they prefer, and why. They will hand these cards to the groups at the end of their presentations.
2. Have each team present the three ways they identified to address their issue. Remind students that each presentation should include a description of the approach, its pros and cons, and the constituencies that might be for and against the idea.
3. Ask students to hand their feedback cards to the appropriate presentation groups. Groups should look over the cards and, using feedback from their classmates, choose the approaches they favor most of the three they presented.

Assignment Suggestions

- Using the feedback they received from their classmates have students write a 1-page essay about which approach they favor of the three they presented and why. Have students use the [Writing a Position Essay](#) handout to help them write. (Teachers may refer to the [Position Essay Grading Rubric](#) to evaluate students' essays.)
- Have students use the [Writing an Action Plan](#) worksheet to write out the steps that local government, community groups, or citizens need to take to put their chosen approach into action.



Position Essay Grading Rubric

The following criteria will be used to evaluate essays that summarize research and express a viewpoint about an issue.

<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>5</u>
Basic	Adequate	Competent	Very Good	Outstanding

	Circle One
1. The essay has a title to identify the issue/problem.	1 2 3 4 5
2. Paragraph 1 clearly introduces and describes the problem/issue.	1 2 3 4 5
3. Paragraph 2 provides background about the issue — its history, who is affected, solutions already tried, whether the issue is local, state or national in scope.	1 2 3 4 5
4. Paragraph 3 explains various points of view about how best to address the issue — including key pros, cons, and consequences of each position.	1 2 3 4 5
5. Paragraph 4 explains the position the writer favors and includes reasons and examples to support that position.	1 2 3 4 5
6. Paragraph 5 is the summary — including key findings from research that led to the conclusion explained in paragraph 4.	1 2 3 4 5
7. The writing is accurate and clear — sentence and paragraph structure, grammar, and spelling are correct.	1 2 3 4 5

TOTAL: _____/35



Three Approaches to Addressing Your Issue

In researching your issue, you have been looking for information on how other people — both inside and outside local government — have thought about solving it. In this worksheet, you will come up with three different alternatives to solve the issue. These alternatives can be drawn from someone else’s proposal you have read about, or they can take pieces of ideas you have come across in different places to form your own idea. The alternatives can also be an idea you come up with yourself.

Name of the issue: _____

Alternative #1 _____

Pros

•
•
•

Cons

•
•
•

Alternative #2 _____

Pros

•
•
•

Cons

•
•
•



Three Approaches to Addressing Your Issue

Alternative #3 _____

Pros

•
•
•

Cons

•
•
•

Which viewpoint do you select as the best to address the issue and why?





Writing a Position Essay

You have been researching and studying an issue from several perspectives. You have researched the issue's background, looked at three points of view for how to address the issue, and decided what course(s) of action you consider best. Now it is time to write an essay describing the plan you support.

(TITLE) Taking and Defending a Personal Point of View

Paragraph 1: Introductory Paragraph — State the Problem/Issue: Briefly describe the issue in a few sentences. What is the problem; why is it important?

Paragraph 2: Background about the Issue: In a few sentences explain such things as how this came to be an issue, who is affected by the issue, any past attempts at solutions. Draw this information from the [What Has Been Done About My Issue?](#) worksheet.

Paragraph 3: Explain Viewpoints: In this paragraph describe EACH viewpoint you researched and considered. Use two or three sentences for each viewpoint, just to give the reader of your essay an idea of the different ways people view the issue. You have notes on these views from the [Three Approaches to Addressing Your Issue](#) handout.

Paragraph 4: The Viewpoint You Favor and Why: In this paragraph, reveal to the reader of your essay which plan you favor, what courses of action you believe best address the issue, and why. You might use a structure like the one below in developing this paragraph.

After discussing the pros and cons of each point of view, I believe that the best solution is... _____.

[Reasons with examples]

First, _____.

A second reason is _____.

Finally, _____.

Paragraph 5: Summary. In the final paragraph summarize your findings and conclusions. Show how key findings led you to support the viewpoint you selected as best in paragraph 4. You might use a structure such as the one below.

Key findings that have influenced me most in selecting the courses of action I propose are _____. *After thinking about the issue, weighing the pros and cons of various solutions and courses of action related to the issue of* _____, *I think* _____.

References: You may want to cite the references you used in your research — books, articles, Web sites.

An “**Action Plan**” is simply the set of steps needed to put your approach for addressing your issue into “action.” In Sections I. and II. below, name your issue and describe the approach to addressing your issue you like best.



Writing an Action Plan

I. Name of the Issue _____

II. Describe your approach to solving your issue: _____

III. Actions needed: In the chart below, list what actions need to be taken by government officials, community groups, or citizens (including students) to put your plan in place.

<u>Who</u>	<u>Action</u>





Unit 7

Making Your Voice Heard

Unit Overview

Introduction

Students have several ways to communicate what they have learned about local government and their issue, depending on the project they chose in Unit 2, Lesson 5 and their findings over the course of the semester. Suggested ways to make their voices heard are listed below.

NOTE: Students and teachers may come up with additional methods of making their voices heard not listed below.

Option 1: Town Hall, Issues Expo, or Community Meeting

Students hold a town hall, issue-expo, or community meeting to encourage public debate about their issue, inform the community about their issue, or share approaches to addressing the issue.

Option 2: Letter to a Public Official or Testimony for a Public Hearing

Students communicate their research on their issue to the local legislative or executive branch of government through a letter, PowerPoint presentation, or by giving written or oral testimony at a public hearing.

Option 3: Op-Ed, Letter-to-the-Editor, or Editorial Cartoon

Students communicate their thoughts on how their issue is currently being addressed (or how they would like to see it addressed) to the local media or school newspaper.

Option 4: Website, Video, or Brochure

Students communicate their research on their issue or what they've learned about the structure of local government and how citizens can participate in local government decisions by creating their own communication vehicle dedicated to this topic.

NOTE: You may need to review parliamentary procedure or your local legislative branch's rules of order with students so they can better follow what happens at the meeting. Below are a few suggested web resources on parliamentary procedure.

- University of Kentucky's College of Agriculture Cooperative Extension Advisory System offers a 12-page [Simple Parliamentary Procedure guide](http://ces.ca.uky.edu/advisorycouncil/Tools.htm) (PDF). Go to the URL below and click on "Meeting Procedure Materials."
<http://ces.ca.uky.edu/advisorycouncil/Tools.htm>
- Page 13 of the National Forensics League's 21-page Student [Congress Manual](http://www.nflonline.org/AboutNFL/LeagueManuals) (PDF) contains information about parliamentary procedure. Go the URL below and click on "2004-2005 Student Congress Manual."
<http://www.nflonline.org/AboutNFL/LeagueManuals>



Unit 7 :: Making Your Voice Heard

In addition, you may find some of the following definitions useful:

- **Code:** the permanent laws of a city, county, state, or nation, as in, “the Pennsylvania state code prohibits singing in the bathtub.”
- **Resolution:** a formal statement or expression of opinion by the legislative body, as in, “a resolution declaring September 17 *National Constitution Day*.”
- **Ordinance:** a law or regulation generally passed by city governments, as in, “an ordinance to amend the code to permit building at the corner of State and Main Streets.”



Overview

Objectives of the Lesson

Students will:

- Hold a town hall, issue-expo, or community meeting to encourage public debate about their issue, inform the community about their issue, or share approaches to addressing the issue

Preparation before Option 1

- Invite local experts and the community to attend the event.
- Locate space to hold the event.
- Identify a moderator for the event.
- Work with students to prepare an agenda for the event.
- Invite local media to cover the event.



Overview

Lesson Objectives

Students will:

- Communicate their research on their issue to the local legislative or executive branch of government

Preparation before Option 2

- Work with students to prepare their letters or materials for testifying. You may want to have students refer to the Making Your Issue Visual handout for tips.
- (If participating in a hearing): Contact the local legislative or executive branch of government to arrange students' participation in the hearing.
- Alert local media to your activities (see "Press Kit" for information on how to work with media).



Overview

Lesson Objectives

Students will:

- Communicate their thoughts on how their issue is currently being addressed (or how they would like to see it addressed) to the local media or school newspaper.

Preparation before Option 3

- Work with students to prepare their op-eds, letters-to-the-editor, or editorial cartoons. You may want to have students refer to the [Tips for Writing an Op-ed](#) handout for tips.
- Contact the local media or school newspaper about publishing the students' work.



Overview

Lesson Objectives

Students will:

- Communicate their thoughts on how their issue is currently being addressed (or how they would like to see it addressed) to the local media or school newspaper.

Preparation before Option 4

- Work with students to create their website, video, or brochure on their issue or what they have learned about local government.
- Identify community partners (local businesses, community groups, local officials) to help distribute and publicize the students' project.
- Contact the local media to let them know about the students' work.



Tips for Writing an Op-ed

“Op-eds” are opinion essays that get their name from being placed in a newspaper “opposite” the editorials, which state the newspaper’s position on an issue. They give people who are NOT on the staff of the newspaper a chance to have their say about something that concerns them. To write an effective op-ed, try to:

- Make your op-ed about one thing and one thing only.
- Make a point that you think others have ignored.
- Use your perspective as a high school student to make your point.
- Make it timely—about something happening NOW.
- Keep it between 500 and 700 words.

Try using the format below to write your op-ed:

1. **HEADLINE:** Write a headline for your op-ed using SIX to EIGHT words

2. **GRAB THEIR ATTENTION:** Tell a story about the issue that concerns you — something that happened or that you witnessed RECENTLY.

3. **STATE YOUR POINT:** (In one sentence state the issue and where you stand.)

4. **SUPPORT YOUR POSITION** (with statistics, quotes from experts, results of a study)

5. **HAMMER IT HOME** (Briefly summarize your point):



1. HEADLINE

Young people are losing recreation options

2. GRAB THEIR ATTENTION

“What do you want to do?” My friends and I were asking each other that question all summer. We’ll be riding our bikes in the neighborhood on the days some of us don’t have to work at the mall and we try to figure it out. Should we go swimming? Oh yeah, the city closed our neighborhood’s pool and the rec center attached to it. What about the library? Our local branch was also shut down and we would have had to either catch a bus or get a ride to get to the nearest one. Go downtown or the mall? Sure, if we want to spend money on junk food, video games, clothes or other stuff we really don’t need. It’s a lot easier to find something to do during school since we have plenty of after school activities there or we can stop at the library on the way home. But what are teenagers like my friends and me supposed to do during the summer?

3. STATE YOUR POINT

With all the talk in the news about children and obesity or kids and drugs, our elected officials need to work on bringing back the pool, the rec center and the other recreation options that have been taken away from our community’s young people over the years.

4. SUPPORT YOUR POSITION

Last year, San Diego State University researchers found that the lack of physical activity was the most significant obesity risk factor contributing to obesity in 11- to 15-year-olds. I think that if the pool and the recreation center we had in our neighborhood was still there, there would be a lot more kids swimming and being active in my community. But don’t take my word for it. “Daily activities such as walking to school, physical education classes, after-school activities, chores and general playing have been replaced with a sedentary lifestyle in front of the TV, computer, or video games,” said Ken Germano, president of the American Council on Exercise. “This study highlights the need for effective physical activity programs targeted at young people. It is important for us to teach our kids to lead healthy and active lives now so they can avoid serious health problems in the future.” But obesity is not the only health issue that should push our local leaders to act. According to the National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University, teens who are often bored are 50 percent likelier than teens who are not often bored to smoke, drink, get drunk and use illegal drugs. Those illegal activities not only lead to addiction and bad health, they are also often the cause of other issues, such as dropping out of school or teen pregnancy. According to the National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, teens 15 and older who use drugs are 5 times more likely to have sex than are those teens who do not use drugs.

5. HAMMER IT HOME

I think our community’s elected leaders need to see that cutting programs and recreational opportunities for young people is not just a money issue. The lack of programs can lead to health issues as well as social problems. They should realize that they can make a difference in the lives of many young people and help the community at the same time. So, “What do you want to do?”



Making Your Issue Visual

In preparing for a presentation to a local government official or government body, or to a community of interested citizens, students will work to create a visual display that helps convey the plan they are supporting.

Tips for Creating a Three-Panel Poster Display

- Panel 1 — Title: Provide a title for the issue and bullet points for background information.
- Panel 2 — Describe Your Action Plan.
- Panel 3 — Implementation: List the actions government officials, agencies or bodies, community groups, or individual citizens must take in order for the plan to be a success.

Add visuals, drawings, pictures, or illustrations to any of your panels to make the visual easy to read and understand.

Consider a PowerPoint Presentation

Another visual way to support your action plan is to put together a PowerPoint presentation on the computer. A PowerPoint presentation focuses an audience on your main points with the use of bullet points. You can also put photographs and other visuals in your PowerPoint “slides.” Some students have even put sound and music in their PowerPoint presentations – adding a rap song to get their message across.



Unit 8

Reflection

Unit Overview

Introduction

In this final unit of Local Government, students reflect on the work they have done over the course of the semester.

Lesson 1: The Civic Actions Continuum and the I-Search Essay

Students revisit the [Civic Actions Continuum](#) to see what activities they have completed and how their attitudes may have changed from the beginning of the semester. They also summarize what actions have been taken in the community with regard to their issue and reflect on the impact their work with Student Voices may have had on the community. The assignment, titled the “I-Search essay,” asks them to write a narrative summary of their work and challenges them to continue to be active citizens in their local communities even after their time with Student Voices has ended.



Overview

Objectives of the Lesson

Students will:

- Examine their civic activities over the course of the semester and see how their attitudes may have changed from the beginning of the semester.
- Summarize what actions have been taken in the community with regard to their issue.
- Reflect on the impact they may have had on their issue.
- Write a narrative summary of their work and how they will remain active citizens in their local communities.

Preparation before Lesson 1

- Remind students to bring in their **Civic Actions Continuum** worksheets from Unit 1.
- Make one copy of the **Civic Actions Continuum** worksheet from Unit 1 for each student.
- Make one copy of the **I-Search Essay** handout for each student.



Lesson Plan

1. Hand out a **Civic Actions Continuum** worksheet to each student. Have each student fill out the worksheet.

NOTE: Student should not compare their answers to their worksheet from Unit 1 as they fill out the new sheet.

2. Ask students to take out their completed **Civic Actions Continuum** worksheet from Unit 1 and compare their answers. As a class, discuss which of the students' attitudes toward or (experience with) civic actions have changed over the course of the past semester.
3. Distribute copies of the **I-Search Reflection Essay** worksheet.
4. Ask students to begin thinking about answers to each of the questions on the sheet. Instruct them to take notes on their answers in the blank space of the worksheet.
5. Have students gather in groups of 3-5. Ask them to share their answers to each question and discuss how they plan to write their essays.
6. Begin writing essays.

Assignment Suggestion

- Complete I-Search essay.



Write a narrative essay that reflects on all that was accomplished during the Student Voices Project. The I-Search essay should not just answer what conclusion you came up with, but also the process that you went through to arrive at your conclusion. The I-Search essay should answer the following questions:

- It may be necessary to talk with members of your group and to consult your portfolio of Student Voices materials for guidance. Begin to outline your essay or jot down some ideas in the space below.

[illegible]