



Lesson 5: Getting Involved with Local Government

Objectives Students should understand how to become involved in local government.

Strategies  If possible, end the week with a visit from a city official. This will require advanced planning to contact an official and make arrangements. To maximize the visit time, you may want to combine classes or request visits from two different officials, one for a morning session and another for an afternoon session. Be sure to tell the official the age group he or she will be speaking to as well as time limitations. Ideal officials include the mayor and/or council, city clerk, city attorney or city manager. Also, if the city offers these services: police chief, fire chief and public works or parks and recreation directors.

Throughout the week of city government study, keep a record of questions the class raises to ask your visitor. Those questions along with others can be sent to the official ahead of time. You or the class may choose a particular area you are interested in having the official address. One key question you may wish to ask about is how an issue becomes an ordinance and the role of citizen involvement in that process. Other examples may be a general description of how city government operates, a discussion of services the city provides, how the city pays for services and the issues city government faces in providing those services, or a discussion of how citizens are and can get involved in city government. Depending on the group size, you may want to select a panel of students to ask already prepared questions of the official during the visit. At the conclusion of the visit, designate a student to thank him or her and have the class follow up with a written thank you.

 If a visit by a city official does not work out, the final day is an opportunity to review the material covered during the week and check students' understanding of city government. Students can be asked to look at newspaper photographs and articles about city government and describe what is happening in city government.