

Governing Body: Who Runs City Hall?

Every city is governed or run by a group of people who make and change laws. These people run the city because the people in the city voted in an election to let them do so. The people elected to run the city are usually called mayor, councilmember or commissioner. Most councils have five or seven members. The people adopt a charter, which is like a constitution, and in it the people decide how they will govern themselves. They meet as a council during the month to take care of city business. Anyone can attend these meetings. The meetings are usually held in city hall.

How a city runs depends on what form or type of government is in place. The form of government is stated in each city's charter. There are four basic forms of government in Florida and there are many variations of these forms.



- 📖 **Council-manager form:** This is a very prevalent form of government today. With this form of government, the city council (including the mayor) appoints a city manager who supervises and coordinates the various departments throughout city hall. The manager prepares the budget for the council's consideration and makes reports and recommendations to the city council.
- 📖 **Council-weak mayor form:** This was the original form of city government in America. It is still widely used in small cities. With this form of government, the city council as a whole has control over administration or operation of the city. Many times the position of mayor is rotated from year to year among the councilmembers. The mayor has little authority and usually has no more power than any other councilmember.
- 📖 **Council-strong mayor form:** This form of government was created from the weak mayor form of government. However, it is different because the mayor is actually the chief executive. In other words, the mayor has a lot of power over administration or operation of the city. The mayor has appointing powers and may also veto or vote against the actions of the council.
- 📖 **Commission form:** With this form of city government, each commissioner serves as director of one or more departments. Collectively, the commission adopts policy, and each department implements it. The mayor assumes ceremonial leadership, and the commission collectively governs.

Student Activities

2nd Grade

- 📖 Students can discuss the differences between appointed and elected positions.
- 📖 Introduce and discuss with students the concept of representative democracy (i.e., citizens vote for the people who make policy decisions; the policy makers, in turn, hire workers to implement their policies).
- 📖 Students may get involved in decision-making and rules in their classroom. Relate the process to decisions made at the city level (for example, ordinances or laws).

3rd Grade

- 📖 Students can research how cities have been governed throughout history. They can begin to see different systems of governing. Invite elected city officials into the classroom for presentations and discussions.

4th Grade

- 📖 Invite the county supervisor of elections or city clerk to speak to students about city elections and what is involved. Students can elect their own city officials in the classroom. Campaigns can be run and a mock city council meeting can be held.

5th Grade

- 📖 Students can study the roles of city officials and how a city council meeting is run. Field trips to actual council meetings would be beneficial. Students can conduct their own council meetings dealing with issues that are relevant to their city or school.
- 📖 If there is a city election being held during the school year, students can read and analyze information about the election from the newspaper and discuss the candidates/issues with classmates through class discussion. Then, on voting day, students can vote on the race(s) or issue(s). Compare their results with the actual outcome of the election.

Student Questions:

1. Why is it important to know who your city officials are?
2. Is one form of city government better than another?
3. How often are your city officials elected?
4. How often and where are city government meetings held?