# 4-H Citizenship:

# Government Is *Us!*

*A Civic Engagement Curriculum for Youth Groups*


U of A
DIVISION OF AGRICULTURE
RESEARCH & EXTENSION
*University of Arkansas System*

4-H YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

# *4-H Citizenship: Government Is Us!*

## A Civic Engagement Curriculum for Youth Groups

## Table of Contents

# Acknowledgments

This curriculum adapted from Michigan State University Extension.
Editor: Patricia Adams
4-H Youth Development
Michigan State University Extension

Authors:
Cynthia Mark, Ph.D., Adam Voight & Marian Reiter
4-H Youth Development
Michigan State University Extension

# Introduction

## What is Arkansas 4-H?

Arkansas 4-H Youth Development is the youth program of University of Arkansas Extension. 4-H staff members work at the University of Arkansas and in every Arkansas county with local volunteers to bring the knowledge of the state's land-grant university to the citizens of Arkansas. This work is done in partnership with and uses funding provided by local quorum courts, the state of Arkansas and the federal government through the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Additional intellectual and programming support and funding is provided by a variety of public and private partners – both at local and state levels – to increase our impact on youth in Arkansas communities.

## Purpose of this curriculum

This curriculum is designed for an adult facilitator, though teens could be trained in the design and content and teach the sessions with an adult advisor. It was created to help 4-H members and other youth groups experience citizenship and civic education. The goal is to have teens develop the attitudes, knowledge and skills necessary to be active citizens and practice what they learn in their local communities. Citizenship is not a spectator sport, and the learning activities included here get youth and adults more involved, cause them to think critically about their values and beliefs and prepare young people to want to be active citizens in the future. The activities have been designed for use with 13- to 19-year-old youths. Each activity specifies the age group that it is intended for. Some activities may be adapted for use with younger participants.

## The issues of citizenship and civic engagement

This curriculum represents a new direction in youth civic engagement. Civic education has long been seen as a means for strengthening our democracy, and educators are increasingly pursuing programs to deliver this content to young people. The results, thus far, are mixed: youth participation in community service is high; yet youth interest in politics is at an all-time low. This phenomenon can partly be explained by the focus of most civic education programs, which often emphasize character building, leadership training and volunteering in community activities. These areas are important pieces of becoming an active, responsible citizen, and many young people have benefited from them. Often missing from these programs, however, is a look at the broader perspective – helping youth understand how their volunteerism addresses a public issue and how that issue is dealt with on a political level. This requires youth to take a deeper look at the underlying causes behind the issues they deal with, and it encourages them to work towards a sustainable solution via the political process. For example, traditional civic education programs might encourage youth to donate canned goods to a food drive for the impoverished. While this is a fine example of civic engagement, this curriculum would additionally help youth explore the issue of poverty in their community and guide them in addressing this issue at the public policy level. Having this in-depth understanding of community issues and the political process gives young people a sense of empowerment and motivation to make change.

Research has shown that civic engagement not only empowers young people and improves their motivation to make change; it also improves their academic performance and career development. A commitment to helping others and involvement in community groups have been associated with gains on achievement tests, school engagement, higher career goals and actual attainment of more prestigious jobs and higher salaries in adulthood for young people. Instilling the knowledge, skills, and attitudes of civic engagement at an early age is a good way to ensure a continued sense of empowerment. In this way, young people may advance their academic success and their career development as they learn to become more civically engaged.

## History of Arkansas 4-H Citizenship

4-H has a long history of helping young people gain citizenship skills. The section of the 4-H pledge that dedicates "my hands to larger service" encourages all members to be actively engaged in their communities. 4-H members have some of their first experiences learning about being a president, vice-president,

secretary and treasurer in their 4-H clubs and learn about parliamentary procedure, skills that can be used on community boards and in local, state and federal government. 4-H members practice giving back to their communities and caring for others by doing community service activities. They learn and practice leadership skills through demonstrations and public speeches. Arkansas 4-H has taught thousands of teens about state government and has had trips to Washington D.C. to learn about the federal government.

## Why should Arkansas 4-H be involved in civic engagement?

There are a variety of reasons that make Arkansas 4-H a natural leader in this brand of civic engagement. First, being included and involved in one's community is a fundamental piece of the philosophy of Arkansas 4-H. Our three core initiatives are Healthy Living, STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering & Math) and Community Service.

Furthermore, the status of 4-H as an independent extracurricular education program helps to address the challenges that civic engagement faces in formal education. According to the Carnegie Corporation of New York and the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement, civic education in high schools is usually confined to a single government class, the focus of which is mostly structures and functions, with little discussion of the citizen's role. This de-emphasis on citizenship and civic education in schools is attributable to a number of factors: avoidance of topics that may seem controversial or political, lack of opportunity to experiment with alternative approaches to civic education and budget cutbacks from extracurricular programs such as community service projects. Additionally, high-stakes testing in reading, writing and mathematics can divert resources away from civic education. Even when civics is included as a content area in standardized testing, performance is often measured only in terms of knowledge – skills and attitudes are ignored. In this way, the high-stakes testing movement can serve as a disincentive for schools to implement effective civic engagement programs. For these reasons, it is all the more important for organizations like 4-H to supplement civic education in the schools by providing experiential learning opportunities.

## Creating a space for citizenship and civic engagement

There are a variety of ways to introduce young people to concepts of civic engagement or strengthen the citizenship skills that they already practice. 4-H traditionally employs "club" programs to support the development of youth participants in their areas of interest, and citizenship and civic engagement principles can grow within the club structure. The most direct way to expose young people to these concepts is to create a citizenship club, the central focus of which is exploring issues of citizenship and civic engagement and becoming socially and politically active in the community. Clubs of this nature can meet continuously, on a permanent basis, or for limited periods to cover specific topics. Alternatively, already existing clubs with a focus other than citizenship and civic engagement can incorporate these ideas into their activities. Indeed, one of the components of a model 4-H club is involvement in the community. For more information on club development, visit the Arkansas 4-H Youth Development web site at http://www.uaex.edu/4h-youth/about/clubs.aspx. Other avenues for incorporating citizenship and civic engagement content are through the formal school curriculum and extracurricular after-school programs. Recently, experts in the field of civic education have made calls to include a more experiential aspect to traditional civics programs in the schools

***"A youth is to be regarded with respect. How do you know that his future will not be equal to our present?"***

***-Confucius***

## The political role of youth organizations

Youth clubs and organizations inevitably have a political role. Whether intentionally or not, youth clubs encourage and reinforce a certain set of values and morals. Young people learn about citizenship and character according to the group's principles. For example, 4-H members make the 4-H pledge at every club meeting: "I pledge my head to clearer thinking, my heart to greater loyalty, my hands to greater service, and my health to better living for my club, my community, my country and my world." Additionally, the governance of the club serves as a sort of microcosm for our federal, state and local governments, and club officer training helps to teach the skills, knowledge and attitudes needed for future government involvement. In

these ways, youth learn how to function in a community and conform to a certain definition of citizenship, providing a solid foundation for the political system. That is, even if a youth group is not founded around the idea of civic engagement, it still has a uniquely civic role in the lives of its members.

It is therefore the responsibility of youth organizations to define a responsible version of citizenship. The norms that are established and promoted by the organization should encourage good character, tolerance and participation. These are important considerations regardless of the type of youth organization; from rabbit raising clubs to theatre troupes – groups are political by nature, and group membership teaches young people political attitudes. Incorporating activities into the program that highlight responsible citizenship is a way to ensure that the youth organization is sending the right message about citizenship.

## Recruiting young people

Identifying and engaging participants in civic education are important steps in the process of implementing a program. Programmers in this field can benefit from the recent trend in many high schools that requires student participation in community service projects. Even in the absence of this requirement, establishing a relationship with schools is often the most effective way of recruiting young people. Working with principals, teachers and school counselors to identify candidates and distribute marketing materials and/or applications has proven to be a successful method. This requires an active effort on the part of the programmer in order to reach out to school officials and establish cooperative relationships. Other avenues of recruitment include web-based marketing, posting flyers in public places, news articles, recruiting youth from other youth organizations and directly contacting parents.

As one of the major goals of civic education is to help young people understand a more inclusive definition of citizenship and of "the common good," it is important to consider a diverse, inclusive group of participants, facilitators and guests for any civic engagement program. This emphasis on diversity should be present at all stages of the program – planning, implementation and evaluation – for the benefit of youth involved.

## Forming partnerships

Youth civic engagement requires collective action. Young people will not learn what it means to be part of their democracy by working alone. A highly effective form of partnership is one between youth and adults. This can encompass one or several adults providing guidance and support to a youth group or a youth group co-operating with an adult organization. Adult groups are often open to youth involvement for the unique perspective that young people bring. The youth group or the programmer should actively seek out individual adults or organizations that are affected by the same problems or that are interested in the same issues.

A particularly effective youth-adult partnership is one that links youth to an official governmental body. There are several examples in this curriculum of youth working with government officials – including the preceding Citizenship Academy example – and this provides a unique opportunity for young people to be involved in the political process. It is recommended that the programmer contact local government officials prior to beginning the program to determine if there is interest in collaboration. Indeed, the programs mentioned here are founded on such collaboration. Attending local government board meetings or scheduling appointments with individual board members are both effective ways to introduce the idea to government officials.

## How to use this curriculum

This curriculum is arranged in such a way as to provide a coherent plan for anyone interested in starting a youth group with a local citizenship focus. It consists of six units: "Citizenship Defined," "Diversity and Inclusion," "Issues Identification," "Local Government Knowledge," "Taking Action" and "Finishing Strong." These units are arranged sequentially, and each contains user-friendly activities and materials designed to lead youth through the process of becoming active in the local political process. The activities included in this curriculum can be used several different ways. The activities can be done individually or in a series. They can be combined in a series of special group sessions, as part of a regularly scheduled meeting or a one-day workshop. Non-4-H groups will find the material helpful when planning civic education projects.

Table 1 below shows the scope and sequence of the curriculum.

Although the curriculum is designed to be used as a whole, specific materials may be useful as a supplement to any civic education program or as an introduction to citizenship for groups not working directly with civics. Youth groups interested in citizenship, leadership and service activities may find pieces of the curriculum useful in working toward their goals.

## Reflecting on what has been learned

An important element of any citizenship and civic engagement activity is to make time for reflection and sharing. Each activity in this curriculum is concluded with a series of reflection questions to help youth participants think critically about what they have learned and how it is important in a broader social context. This process of reflection is equally important after taking action in the community.

Whether engaging with community leaders, performing a community service activity or writing letters to your U.S. congressperson, it is important to make time for the group to share, process and think about how what they have leaned and accomplished fits into the bigger social picture. Unit 6 focuses further on reflection and provides an activity to carry out a reflection project.

## Life skills

Life skills are defined as skills needed for effective living. Youth development programs can and should actively promote the acquisition of these skills that help individuals achieve success and satisfaction in their lives. Examples of life skills include communication, problem-solving, healthy lifestyle choices and goal setting. Young people often learn life skills from parents, peers and their communities in non-formal settings; youth development programs can supplement and enhance these lessons with carefully planned, high quality experiences that give youth an opportunity to learn and practice life skills in an intentional way. Citizenship and civic education training is a natural space for learning life skills. Learning to be a good citizen requires competency in many of the life skills, and each of the activities in this curriculum state which of these skills are addressed and practiced. For more information on life skills, visit the Iowa 4-H Youth Development web site, where they present their Targeting Life Skills Model: http://www.extension.iastate.edu/4H/lifeskills/previewwheel.html.

**Table 1: Scope and sequence**

| ***Content area*** | ***Corresponding Activities*** |
|---|---|
| ***Unit 1: Citizenship defined*** | "What Is Citizenship?"<br>"Five Easy Pieces of Citizenship"<br>"Government Is Us" |
| ***Unit 2: Diversity and inclusion*** | "Walk the (Trust) Walk"<br>"Communicating Through Conflict"<br>"Exploring And Challenging Stereotypes"<br>"A Class Divided" |
| ***Unit 3: Issues identification*** | "It's My Right!"<br>"Agree To Disagree"<br>"We Have Issues"<br>"Cause And Effect" |
| ***Unit 4: Local government knowledge*** | "The 'Invisible' Government"<br>"Behind-The-Scenes Of Local Government |
| ***Unit 5: Taking action*** | "Board Meeting"<br>"Guide: Writing A Petition"<br>"Guide: Writing A Policy Brief" |
| ***Unit 6: Finishing strong*** | "Put on Your Reflecting Cap" |

## Notes to classroom teachers

High school and middle school teachers may use the materials in the curriculum to provide an experiential learning component to support formal education in social studies, in general, and civics and government, in particular. Half of all public schools currently have service-learning programs as part of their curricula, and this curriculum can function as a guide for implementing a service-learning program that is connected to classroom learning in civics and government. Shelley Billig of RMC Research Corporation has documented the benefits of service-learning programs for both the student and the school; some examples are improved grades and standardized test scores, improved overall school climate, increased mutual respect between teachers and students and a higher rate of student attendance.

***"Education is not preparation for life; education is life itself."***

***-John Dewey***

## Notes to advisors

Due to the multicultural nature of the material in this curriculum, and the inclusive definition of the "common good" that the curriculum encourages, it is important for the user of the curriculum to have a good understanding of his or her own cultural values and assumptions. A good place to start is by looking at our own cultural heritage and determining how it affects our present biases and ideas of right and wrong. An understanding of how discrimination, stereotyping and oppression play out in society – and how we affect and are affected by them – is also a key part of being multiculturally sensitive. Ultimately, users of this curriculum should feel comfortable with differences that exist between themselves and others in terms of race, gender, class, ethnicity, culture and beliefs. It is equally important to recognize the limits of our cultural sensitivity and, where appropriate, seek out opportunities to improve our awareness through trainings, consultations, or by talking with more qualified individuals.

## References


Billig, S.H. (2000). Research of K-12 school-based service-learning: The evidence builds. *Phi Delta Kappan, 81*, 658-664.

Carnegie Corporation of New York and The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement. (2003). *The Civic Mission of Schools.* New York: Carnegie Corporation.

Diemer, M.A., & Hsieh, C. (in press). Sociopolitical development and vocational expectations among lower-SES Adolescents of Color. *Career Development Quarterly*.

Flanagan, C., & Van Horn, B. (2003). Youth civic development: A logical next step in community youth development. In F.A. Villarruel, D.F. Perkins, L.M. Borden, & J.G. Keith (Eds.), *Community youth development: Programs, policies, and practices* (pp. 273-296). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Hendricks, P.A. (1996). *Targeting life skills model: Incorporating developmentally appropriate learning opportunities to assess impact of life skill development.* Ames, IA: Iowa State University Extension.

Michigan Department of Education. (2007). *High school social studies content expectations.*

Sue, D.W., Arredondo, P., & McDavis, R.J. (1992). Multicultural counseling competencies and standards: A call to the profession. *Journal of Counseling and Development*, 70, 477-486.

Westheimer, J., & Kahne, J. (2004). What kind of citizen? The politics of educating for democracy. American Educational Research Journal. Vol. 41(2). 237-269.

# *UNIT 1: Citizenship Defined*

Active citizens are the building blocks of our democracy, and Arkansas 4-H recognizes the importance of developing good citizens among our youth. A democracy is only as strong as the citizens that make it up, and strength comes from having the knowledge, skills and attitudes to work for a common good.

## Citizenship means responsibility

Citizenship means enjoying certain rights and accepting certain responsibilities. As citizens in the United States, we all benefit from the freedoms provided to us by the Constitution. But enjoying these privileges is only part of being a citizen. We also have to give back to ensure that our rights continue to exist. As John F. Kennedy said, "Ask not what your country can do for you – ask what you can do for your country."

An important part of good citizenship is asking what you can do for your country, as well as your school, your neighborhood, your town and your county. In other words, good citizenship means having responsibility to a larger group of which you are a member. We are all responsible for upholding our democracy and making life better for ourselves and for others.

There are certain mandatory responsibilities that all of us, as Americans, are required to fulfill. These include obeying laws, paying taxes, doing jury duty, serving as a witness in a trial and registering for the draft. Voting in elections is also an expectation, though not required. These are the bare minimum responsibilities of citizens. In a deeper sense, citizenship involves much more. Good citizenship demands learning and action. It is this commitment to learning and action that is implied by "citizenship" in 4-H Youth Development. What specifically does this type of citizenship entail?

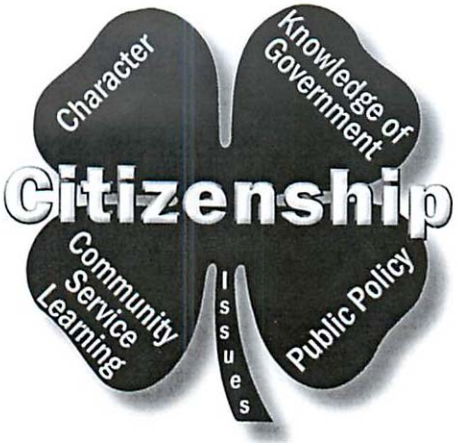
## What makes a responsible citizen?

Being a responsible citizen means different things to different people. Some consider a good citizen to be someone who has strong character, donates to charity and volunteers to help others; others say a good citizen is one who takes an interest in understanding social issues and concerns; and still others would describe a good citizen as one who has the skills and knowledge to actively influence decision-making and public policy. Because of these diverse ideas of what it means to be a good citizen, it is important to consider a broad definition of citizenship, including the knowledge, skills and attitudes that a good citizen should have. Therefore, we can say that a good citizen is competent in the following areas:

- **Character –** moral and civic virtues, such as a concern for the rights and welfare of others and appreciation of diversity;
- **Knowledge of government –** an understanding of the structure and processes of government and community organizations;
- **Community service learning –** an awareness of public and community issues, and participation in service to address problems;
- **Public policy –** the skills, knowledge and commitment to influence decision-making and public policy; and
- **Issues –** an awareness and understanding of public issues, how they are connected across local, national and global levels, and how one affects and is affected by them.

## Citizenship is learned

These criteria for citizenship are not easily met. It takes courage, hard work and commitment to be a good citizen. But even the most courageous, hardworking and committed people still must have educational experiences that help them develop the knowledge, skills and attitudes that are necessary for putting citizenship into action. Young people learn good citizenship through classroom instruction and simulations of civic processes, watching the news, discussing current events, engaging in service learning to work on local problems and participating in school or organizational government.




These are examples of how citizenship is learned. Now we turn to what needs to be learned in order to meet our definition of citizenship. It helps to think of competencies – or specific learning outcomes – that youth development programs can encourage. Some examples of citizenship competencies are given in the following table. The five parts of our definition of citizenship are inserted into Table 2 as categories of content, and the areas of competency – knowledge, skills and attitudes – are listed as column heads to create a framework for thinking about what responsible citizens should be learning.

**Table 2: Competencies for Civic engagement**

| ***Five Principles of Citizenship*** | ***A. Knowledge*** | ***B. Skills*** | ***C. Attitudes*** |
|---|---|---|---|
| ***1. Character*** | Understanding of self-identity | Dialogue with others about different points of view | Concern for the rights and welfare of others |
| ***2. Knowledge of Government*** | Knowledge of government structure | Ability to locate information on local government | Appreciation of the importance of voting |
| ***3. Community Service Learning*** | Awareness of community issues | Assets and problems assessment in the community | Trust in the community |
| ***4. Public Policy*** | Understanding of policy-making process | Policy and petition writing | Confidence in ability to make changes |
| ***5. Issues*** | Knowledge of how one affects and is affected by an issue | Ability to locate information on local issues | Respect for multiple perspectives on an issue |

The competencies provided in Table 2 are just a few examples of the knowledge, skills and attitudes that go into becoming a good citizen. All of these things may seem overwhelming. But an effective citizenship and civic engagement program can encourage all of these competencies and more, and make it fun in the process. By looking at Table 2, we see that citizenship and civic engagement involve both learning and doing, and 4-H believes that it is very important for youth to experience the ideas and principles that they learn. These five principles of citizenship recur throughout the curriculum. The principles addressed within a unit are stated at the beginning of that unit.

## Citizenship in our communities

Helping youth experience citizenship in their towns, cities and counties is a special focus of 4-H Youth Development. This local perspective allows youth to see how citizenship works in their area and how they can participate in community issues. At the local level, youth have the regular opportunity to meet with public officials, visit local

government buildings, and be connected to the issues in their communities. By using the knowledge, skills and attitudes of a good citizen in their own communities, youth can take action to make real changes. Seeing the results of their active citizenship is a fun and empowering experience! It shows youth that they can make a difference by influencing public policy, and at the same time, it prepares a next generation of good citizens to safeguard our democracy.

***"Let us never forget that government is ourselves and not an alien power over us. The ultimate rulers of a democracy are not a President and senators and congressmen and government officials, but the voters of this country."***

**— Franklin D. Roosevelt**

# References


Carnegie Corporation of New York and The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement. (2003). *The Civic Mission of Schools*. New York: Carnegie Corporation.

Education Commission of the States. (2006). *Developing Citizenship Competencies from Kindergarten through Grade 12*. Denver, CO: Education Commission of the States.

Westheimer, J., & Kahne, J. (2004). What kind of citizen? The politics of educating for democracy. American Educational Research Journal. Vol. 41(2). 237-269.

## ACTIVITY:

# *What Is Citizenship?*

***Description:***
Youth explore the concept of "citizenship" by examining several different definitions of citizenship and finally creating their own meaning.

***Participant Age:***
16–19

***Activity Objectives:***
The participants will:
- Discuss the meaning of citizenship.
- Examine different definitions of citizenship.
- Define "citizenship" and "good citizenship" and communicate the importance of citizenship.

***Learning and Life Skills:***
Critical Thinking; Communication

***Materials, Equipment, Handouts:***
- Sheets of paper and pencils or pens
- Newsprint and markers
- Easel or tape for recording on newsprint
- Handout: "U.S. Citizenship Test"
- Handout: "Oath of Citizenship"
- Video: *Citizenship & Civic Engagement,* (approximately 13 minutes long) available online at *http://av.anr.msu.edu/4h*.

***Time:***
90–120 minutes, broken up into four parts

***Setting:***
Indoors with tables and chairs

## Procedure:

### Before the meeting:

- Review activity directions and materials and the five principles of citizenship in the introduction to this unit and also appended to this activity.
- Print out the "U.S. Citizenship Test" handout or visit the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services web site at http://www.uscis.gov/natzpilot to create your own list of ten questions from the full U.S. Citizenship Test.
- Make sure that all participants have a writing utensil and blank sheet of paper for the U.S. Citizenship Test that is administered in Part I.
- Print one copy of the handout, "Oath of Citizenship," for each participant.
- Prepare five sheets of newsprint, each with one of the five rights described in the Preamble of the Constitution written at the top (see Part II, Steps 3 and 4).
- Make sure all participants have newsprint and markers or other writing utensils for depictions of good citizens as described in Part IV, step 2.
- Consult the U.S Citizenship and Immigration Services web site (http://www.uscis.gov) for background information on U.S. Citizenship requirements.

### During the meeting:

### Part I

1. Once everyone is seated in the semicircle, tell participants that the purpose of today's meeting is to talk about and define "citizenship." Explain that there are a lot of different definitions of citizenship, and today will be spent thinking about what it means to each of us as individuals and what it means to the group. Begin by asking individuals to share what they believe "citizenship" means in the United States. Encourage participants to use examples. Recording responses is optional.

2. Explain that to become a U.S. citizen, one must either be born into it (have an American parent) or become naturalized. In order to become naturalized, one must pass a U.S. Citizenship Test to determine whether or not he or she has the knowledge necessary to be an American citizen. Tell the participants that they are going to go through some of the procedures for a foreigner to become an American citizen (be sensitive to any participants who may be naturalized citizens

or non-citizens). Tell participants that the requirements of citizenship are:

- a period of continuous residence and physical presence in the United States;
- residence in a particular USCIS district prior to filing;
- an ability to read, write and speak English;
- a knowledge and understanding of U.S. history and government;
- good moral character;
- attachment to the principles of the U.S. Constitution; and,
- favorable disposition toward the United States.

Give participants the chance to ask for clarification on any of these points.

3. Say that the participants are going to take the U.S. Citizenship Test. Consult the "U.S. Citizenship Test" handout, read the instructions on the test and administer it. Use the 10 questions given or choose 10 questions from the official list of *142 Questions and Answers for New Pilot Naturalization Test* from the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services at http://www.uscis.gov/natzpilot. Emphasize that this is the actual test that immigrants desiring naturalization must take. Afterwards, review the answers so that everyone can indicate how many correct answers they had. Explain that in order to become a U.S. citizen, most regional offices require a score of six (6) out of ten (10) to pass.

## Reflection Activities and Ideas:

Give participants a moment to consider what they now know about the U.S. Citizenship Test, and then ask the following questions:

- Do these questions determine whether or not one is a good citizen?
- If you answered all of the questions correctly, does that make you a good citizen? Why?
- If you answered some questions incorrectly, does that mean that you're not a good citizen? Why?
- What else needs to be asked to truly determine whether or not someone is a good citizen?

## Part II

1. Distribute the "Oath of Citizenship" handout. Explain that every naturalized citizen must take this oath. Read the oath and give participants the option of repeating after you in order to simulate the experience of taking the oath.
2. Go through the oath with participants and identify each of the responsibilities indicated for citizenship: (a) renunciation of foreign allegiance, (b) support and defense of the Constitution and laws, (c)

allegiance to the Constitution and laws and (d) service in the armed forces when required by law.

3. Point out the second responsibility in the oath – support and defense of the Constitution – and ask participants to tell you what they know about the Constitution and the rights it guarantees.

Read the Preamble to the Constitution:

> *"We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, (1) establish Justice, (2) insure domestic Tranquility, (3) provide for the common defence, (4) promote the general Welfare, and (5) secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America."*

4. Break participants into teams and give each team a piece of newsprint with one of the five rights described in the Preamble written at the top: *(1) establish justice, (2) insure domestic tranquility, (3) provide for the common defense, (4) promote the general welfare, and (5) secure the blessings of liberty*. Have each team brainstorm and write (a) a definition of the right in their own words and (b) a list of ways to support or defend this right.

## Reflection Activities and Ideas:

After giving the group a moment to consider the oath of citizenship and the Preamble, ask the following:

- What do you think about the requirements for citizenship outlined in the oath? Is there anything you disagree with? Is there anything else that you think needs to be added?
- What do you think about the rights outlined in the Preamble? Which of these five rights would you support and defend? Can you be a good citizen if you do not support or defend all of these rights?

## Part III

1. Explain to the group that they have looked at several different ideas of citizenship. Tell them that they are going to watch a video that depicts another idea of what citizenship is. Play the *Citizenship & Civic Engagement* video (approximately 13 minutes long).

## Reflection Activities and Ideas:

After watching the video, ask the group the following questions:

- How is citizenship portrayed in the video?
- What did the young people in the video do to demonstrate good citizenship? How did their discussions relate to citizenship?
- What are other ways that young people can demonstrate good citizenship?

## Part IV

1. Tell participants to consider the different ideas of citizenship that have been discussed up to now, and ask the question again, "What is citizenship?" Accommodate any responses and discussion.

2. Ask participants to think about examples of when they or somebody they know has been a good citizen. Finally, give participants newsprint and markers or other writing utensils and ask them to (a) write a definition, (b) write a story or (c) draw a picture of what a good citizen looks like. Encourage them to be creative. Give everybody time to complete their chosen activity (15 minutes). As the facilitator, work with participants to help generate ideas.

3. Ask everyone to share their respective constructions of a good citizen. Record items from everyone's definition on newsprint. As you field responses, try to categorize them into five different unlabeled columns based on the five principles of citizenship outlined in the introduction to this unit and also appended to this activity: (1) character, (2) knowledge of government, (3) community service learning, (4) public policy and (5) issues. If any of the participants' responses do not naturally fit into one of these five categories, create a new column or more columns if necessary. After you have fielded all responses, label each of the five columns according to the corresponding principle of citizenship. Then, present the responses to the group as a sort of group definition of citizenship.

## Reflection Activities and Ideas:

Ask the group the following reflection questions:

- What do you think of the provided definition of citizenship? How is it similar or different from your own idea of citizenship? How is it similar or different from the group definition?
- Do you prefer your own idea of good citizenship to that of the group? How does it feel to have ideas different from the rest of the group?
- Is our definition of citizenship inclusive of all groups? Are there people who are left out of our definition based on race, gender, ethnicity, class or other reasons?
- A common stereotype is that people of color, including Latinos, Asian Americans, Arab Americans and others are "from somewhere else" and are not "real" citizens. People of color often get asked, "Where are you from?" even when they and their families may have lived in the United States for years – and even generations. What do you think about this statement? How can we ensure that we are inclusive of all groups?

## Try This, Too:

- For Part I, break participants up into teams and give them each a sheet of newsprint. Assign each team one of the seven USCIS criteria for U.S. Citizenship (see Part I, Step 2). Ask them to write (a) reasons why this is an important part of citizenship and (b) whether or not they think one can be a good citizen without fulfilling this requirement. Share ideas with the group.

- Invite speakers into your meeting who have become naturalized citizens and ask them to speak with the group about what becoming an American citizen means to them. Ask them to talk about similarities and differences to their country of origin, including government and individual participation in government.

- The participants' depictions of "good citizens" (Part IV, Step 2) can be adapted to include different types of media (such as theatre or photography), and the group definition can also be represented through a larger project such as a mural, a performance or a focus group with students in their school.

**HANDOUT:**

# U.S. Citizenship Test

The questions and answers below were selected randomly from the official list of 142 *Questions and Answers for New Pilot Naturalization Test* from the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). For a full list of questions, visit the USCIS web site at *http://www.uscis.gov/natzpilot* to compile a list of ten questions of your choice. When giving the test to persons desiring citizenship, the examiner selects any ten questions at his or her discretion to be posed orally to the examinees. The examinee writes down the answer for each item. According to the USCIS, most regional offices require a score of six (6) out of ten (10) to pass.

1. **What is the supreme law of the land?**
   *The Constitution*
2. **What do we call the first ten amendments to the Constitution?**
   *The Bill of Rights*
3. **What are the two parts of the United States Congress?**
   *The Senate and the House of Representatives*
4. **When was the Declaration of Independence adopted?**
   *July 4, 1776*
5. **What decides each state's number of U.S. Representatives?**
   *The state's population*
6. **Who is called the "Father of Our Country"?**
   *George Washington*
7. **Who confirms Supreme Court justices?**
   *The Senate*
8. **Who was President during World War I?**
   *Woodrow Wilson*
9. **Why does the flag have 13 stripes?**
   *Because there were 13 original colonies*
10. **Name one state that borders on Mexico.**
    *Arizona, California, New Mexico, or Texas*

Obtained as public domain from:
U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services. *Questions and answers for new pilot naturalization test.* Retrieved April 9, 2007, from *http:www.uscis.gov/natzpilot*

**HANDOUT:**

# Oath of Citizenship

The **United States Oath of Allegiance for Naturalized Citizens** is an oath that must be taken by all immigrants who wish to become United States citizens.

The current oath is as follows:

> I hereby declare, on oath, that I absolutely and entirely renounce and abjure all allegiance and fidelity to any foreign prince, potentate, state, or sovereignty of whom or which I have heretofore been a subject or citizen; that I will support and defend the Constitution and laws of the United States of America against all enemies, foreign and domestic; that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same; that I will bear arms on behalf of the United States when required by law; that I will perform noncombatant service in the Armed Forces of the United States when required by the law; that I will perform work of national importance under civilian direction when required by the law; and that I take this obligation freely without any mental reservation or purpose of evasion; so help me God.

Obtained as public domain from:
U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services. *Oath of allegiance for naturalized citizens.* Retrieved April 9, 2007, from *http://www.uscis.gov/portal/site*

## ACTIVITY:

# *Five Easy Pieces of Citizenship*

***Description:***
In order to introduce the definition of citizenship on which this curriculum is based, youth explore that definition of citizenship, analyze its component parts, and compare and contrast it to their own ideas of citizenship. If performing this activity after the activity, "What is Citizenship?," skip the first three steps of the procedure during the meeting, and use the definition of citizenship that the group constructed at the end of the previous activity.

***Participant Age:***
13–19

***Activity Objectives:***
The participants will:
- Understand one definition of citizenship.
- Analyze one definition of citizenship and compare and contrast it with their own ideas of citizenship.

***Learning and Life Skills:***
Critical Thinking; Communication

***Materials, Equipment, Handouts:***
- Newsprint, five sheets
- Easel or tape for recording on newsprint
- Markers
- Handout: "Five Principles of Citizenship"

***Time:***
30–60 minutes, depending on whether or not the group has completed the activity, "What is Citizenship?"

***Setting:***
Indoors, tables and chairs to accommodate all participants

## Procedure:

### Before the meeting:

- Review activity directions and materials and the five principles of citizenship in the introduction to this unit and also in the "Five Principles of Citizenship" handout.
- Print one copy of the "Five Principles of Citizenship" handout for each participant.
- At the top of each sheet of newsprint, write one of the five principles of citizenship, as described in the "Five Principles of Citizenship" handout and in the introduction to this unit: (1) character, (2) knowledge of government, (3) issues, (4) community service learning and (5) public policy.

### During the meeting:

1. Ask the question, "What is citizenship?" and accommodate any responses and discussion.

2. Ask participants to think about examples of when they or somebody they know has been a good citizen. Then, give participants newsprint and markers and ask them to write a definition of citizenship. Give ample time to complete the definitions, and work with participants to help generate ideas.

3. Ask everyone to share their respective definitions of citizenship. Record items from everyone's definition on newsprint. As you field responses, try to categorize them into five different unlabeled columns based on the five principles of citizenship outlined in the introduction to this unit and also in the "Five Principles of Citizenship" handout: (1) character, (2) knowledge of government, (3) community service learning, (4) public policy and (5) issues. If any of the participants' responses do not naturally fit into one of these five categories, create a new column or more columns if necessary. After you have fielded all responses, label each of the five columns according to the corresponding principle of citizenship. Then, present the responses to the group as a sort of group definition of citizenship.

4. Tell participants that the purpose of this activity is to understand and examine a broad definition of citizenship. People use many definitions of citizenship, and this

curriculum emphasizes a broader definition of citizenship, which includes knowledge about society, skills for participation and attitudes to engage in public efforts. This definition has five parts, and it is important to understand what each of the five mean.

5. Break participants up into five teams. Give each team one of the sheets of newsprint with one of the five principles of citizenship at the top. Instruct each team to first talk about and then write a definition for their principle.

6. After about five minutes, tell each team to discuss and write three examples of how their principle can be put into practice.

. When each team is finished, reconvene the whole group and have each team share their principle, their definition and their practical examples.

8. After each team has shared, distribute the "Five Principles of Citizenship" handout. Give participants time to read over the handout. Then, explain that the five principles that each team explored are the parts of this broader definition of citizenship. The activities in this curriculum are based on this notion of citizenship.

## Try This, Too:

- Have participants make a citizenship collage that includes depictions of all five principles of citizenship.
- Arrange for participants to create and maintain citizenship portfolios in which they can keep records of their activities and accomplishments related to citizenship and civic engagement.

## Reflection Activities and Ideas:

Ask the group the following reflection questions:

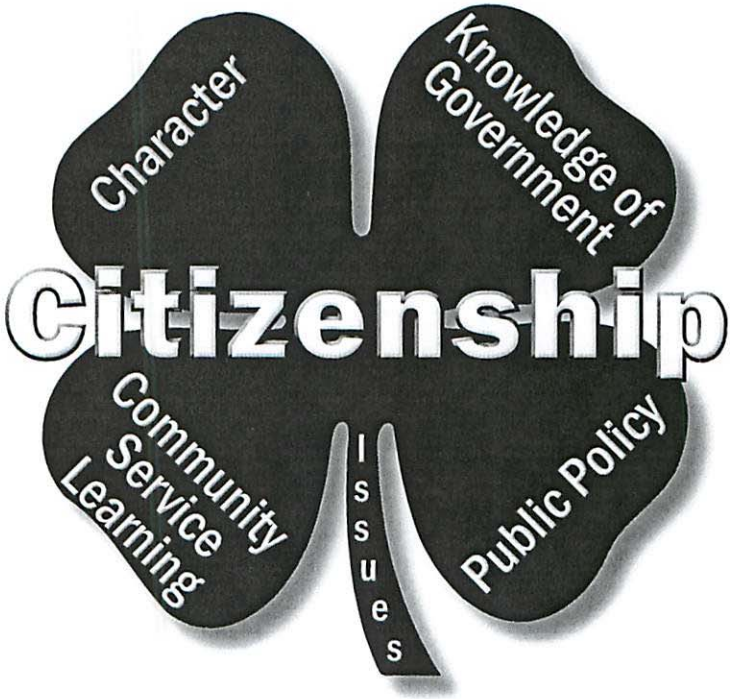
1. What are your reactions to this definition of citizenship based on the five principles of citizenship?
2. What would you add to this definition? What would you change? Do any of your ideas of citizenship not fit into any of the five principles?
3. What would it look like if a person were to use all of these principles in his or her life?

**HANDOUT:**

# *Five Principles of Citizenship*

Being a responsible citizen means different things to different people. Some consider a good citizen to be someone who has strong character, donates to charity and volunteers to help others; others say a good citizen is one who takes an interest in understanding social issues and concerns; and still others would describe a good citizen as one who has the skills and knowledge to actively influence decision-making and public policy. Because of these diverse ideas of what it means to be a good citizen, it is important to consider a broad definition of citizenship. Therefore, we can say that a definition of what it means to be a good citizen should include the following:

- **Character** — moral and civic virtues, such as a concern for the rights and welfare of others and appreciation of diversity;
- **Knowledge of government** — an understanding of the structure and processes of government and community organizations;
- **Community service learning** — an awareness of public and community issues, and participation in service to address problems;
- **Public policy** — the skills, knowledge and commitment to influence decision-making and public policy; and
- **Issues** — an awareness and understanding of public issues, how they are connected across local, national and global levels, and how one affects and is affected by them.




## References:

Carnegie Corporation of New York and The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement. (2003). *The Civic Mission of Schools.* New York: Carnegie Corporation.

Education Commission of the States. (2006). *Developing Citizenship Competencies from Kindergarten through Grade 12.* Denver, CO: Education Commission of the States.

## ACTIVITY:

# *Government Is Us*

***Description:***
Individually, youth write down what they believe the rules should be for the group. Then in groups, participants elect a representative to make rules for the entire group. Once the representatives have finished, their rules are contrasted with the rules that each person created to impress on participants the inherent compromise of representative government. After, youth discuss how to use their own voices to influence decision making as active citizens.

***Participant Age:***
13–19

***Activity Objectives:***
The participants will:
- Experience representative government.
- Brainstorm ways to use their voice in decision making.
- Define active citizenship.

***Learning and Life Skills:***
Self-Responsibility; Communication; Decision Making

***Materials, Equipment, Handouts:***
- Newsprint, several sheets
- Easel or tape for recording on newsprint
- Marker(s), one or two
- Writing utensils, for each participant
- Handout: "Group Rules"

***Time:***
30–60 minutes

***Setting:***
Indoors, tables and chairs to accommodate all participants

## Procedure:

### Before the meeting:

- Review activity directions and materials.
- Print one copy of the "Group Rules" handout for each participant.
- Make sure that all participants have a writing utensil.
- Bring newsprint and markers (easel optional).
- Arrange one table separate from the group for the "representatives."

### During the meeting:

1. Tell participants that the purpose of this activity is to set the rules for the group that everyone will follow for the remainder of the group meetings. Distribute the "Group Rules" handout to all participants. Explain that everybody should individually fill out the handout according to what they think the rules and expectations should be for group meetings. Encourage everyone to list at least five rules.

2. After everyone has filled it out, explain that, in the interest of time, not everyone can share their rules. Ask the group to pick "representatives" to share their rules (try to have about one representative per five participants). Explain that the representatives are the only ones who actually have the power to decide what the rules will be. Collect the representatives' handouts and record their chosen rules on newsprint for everyone to see (there is no need to write duplicate rules more than once).

3. Ask the whole group what they think of the rules and how the representatives' rules compare and contrast to the rules that they developed individually. Make sure everyone keeps their individual "Group Rules" handout.

4. Explain that the group is going to try an alternative process of coming up with the rules. Break participants up into teams of four or five; give each group a new "Group Rules" handout; and instruct them to talk together and, as a team, come up with rules. After, have each team decide together who they would like to represent them – this new "representative" should record his or her team's rules on a new handout. Then move the representative from each team to the separate table. Collect the representatives' handouts and record the rules on newsprint as in step 2.

5. Announce that these are the official group rules. Put the newsprint with the rules in a visible place where it can stay for the remainder of the group's meetings.

## Try This, Too:

Any decision-making activity that could be done collaboratively and that the group has an interest in could be substituted for generating group rules. For example, the activity could be planning a (real or imaginary) field trip, designing a T-shirt, or deciding how many pieces of candy everybody in the group should get.

## Reflection Activities and Ideas:

Ask the group the following reflection questions:

1. Reflect on the two methods used to devise the group rules. Ask: “What was frustrating or difficult?” “Which process more closely reflected your ideas? Why?” “What were the differences in how you selected representatives?” “What is the job of the representative?” “How were you able to communicate your ideas to your representative?” Allow ample time for discussion.
2. Remind the group that in our democracy, we choose representatives to make decisions for us. Ask: “What are some of the representative governmental bodies or groups called?” (Congress, House of Representatives [state/federal], Senate [state/federal], county board of commissioners, school board, city/village council). Stress that the representative’s job is to make decisions that we, the people he or she represents, *want*. Tell the group to think about the activity that they did, and ask the following questions: “How closely were your ideas represented when you didn’t communicate with your representative?” “How closely were your ideas represented when you did communicate with you representative?” “How, in government, do you think you can communicate with your representatives to make your ideas heard?” (for example, letter writing, petitions, meetings with representatives, protests, or other means).
3. How does this activity relate to responsible citizenship?

**HANDOUT:**

# *Group Rules*

Below, list the rules that you would like to have for this group:

**1.** _____

_____

_____

**2.** _____

_____

_____

**3.** _____

_____

_____

**4.** _____

_____

_____

**5.** _____

_____

_____

# *UNIT 2: Diversity and Inclusion*

People have different beliefs, values, personalities and perspectives and come from a wide variety of cultural backgrounds. It is the responsibility of a citizen to recognize, understand and appreciate these differences – and to work to understand how the impact of these differences (particularly those based on race, gender, class and other factors) may influence people's experience of what "citizenship" means to them. Citizenship is not simply promoting your own values and views; it requires a sense of caring, empathy and concern for others. A good citizen has the courage to stand up for what they believe in, as well as the rights of others. A commitment to the common good is paramount. But to understand and work for the "common good," one must be willing to build trust by listening and respecting other people's ideas, experience and realities.

## Who wins? Everyone does!

Strong thriving communities draw upon the talents and gifts of diverse people. They value the wisdom and experiences of all community members and mobilize the strengths, skills and talents of diverse groups. Diversity is seen as "value-added" and as an asset to the community. Building relationships across differences is key to developing partnerships and efforts committed to working for the common good.

## Learning begins with me

A good way to deepen your understanding of issues of diversity and inclusion is to commit to learning more about ourselves. It's important to have a good understanding of our own personality, beliefs and cultural background as a first step in being open to recognizing, understanding and appreciating the perspectives and differences of others. If we know ourselves – including our preferred styles of communication, values and reasons behind our beliefs – we may be more open to learning about the differences of others which can lead to mutually respectful interpersonal relationships. Self-awareness also encourages us to learn about the biases, assumptions and stereotypes we may hold about people different from ourselves. Learning to unlearn misinformation we may have about ourselves and other people is essential to good citizenship and working for the common good.

**Principles of Citizenship:**
- ***Character***

## Engaging in dialogue can lead to personal, interpersonal and community change

One way to learn more about ourselves and about others is to engage in dialogue. We live in a "debate culture" that tends to encourage thinking toward one "right answer" and often fosters division and arguments among people. Dialogue is different. Dialogue fosters understanding by encouraging the sharing of multiple perspectives while those involved remain open to learning and growth. Engaging in dialogue around complex issues such as those related to citizenship allows people to explore common ground from which they might work for positive change together.

Once we have an understanding of ourselves, we can begin thinking about how to best understand and respect others. Oftentimes, when we hear an opinion that is different from ours, our first reaction is to either dismiss it completely or argue against it. A responsible citizen will instead listen in order to understand this differing viewpoint. This is not to say that citizenship requires abandoning your own opinions for the sake of others'; standing up for what you believe in is an important component of citizenship. Indeed, sometimes the result of understanding another's perspective is simply "agreeing to disagree." However, a citizen who displays tolerance and a respect for diversity will seek to find common ground between varying opinions and view the difference not as a battle to be won, but as an opportunity to learn and work towards a solution that benefits the most people possible.

## Acknowledging injustice – working for change

Citizenship and working for the common good requires us to learn about and acknowledge the history and realities of injustice in society and in our communities. If our goal is to improve our communities, it is our responsibility to do our best to involve, engage and work for everyone in the community, regardless of ethnicity, gender, class, race, sexual orientation, age, religion and other human differences. The first step to looking at our communities in an inclusive fashion is being honest with ourselves about existing stereotypes and forms of personal and institutional discrimination. In the effort to make "progress," groups of people are often left behind. Understanding and feeling the urgency to challenge inequities are precursors to overcoming them, and a caring citizen will have the attitude of fairness necessary to do this work.

## References


Kretzmann, J.P., & McKnight, J.L. (1993). *Building communities from the inside out: A path toward finding and mobilizing a community's assets.* Chicago: ACTA Publications.

Roysircar, G. (2003). Counselor awareness of own assumptions, values, and biases. In G. Roysircar, P. Arredondo, J. Fuertes, J. Ponterotto, & R. Toporek, (Eds.), *Multicultural counseling competencies, 2003: Association for multicultural counseling and development (17-38)*. Alexandria, VA: American Counseling Association.


***"We all should know that diversity makes for a rich tapestry, and we must understand that all of the threads of the tapestry are equal in value, no matter what their color."***

— Maya Angelou

## ACTIVITY:

# *Walk the (Trust) Walk*

***Description:***
Youth learn social skills and trust by leading one anther blindfolded from one point to another. This activity can be used as an icebreaker.

***Participant Age:***
13–19

***Activity Objectives:***
The participants will:
- Build team trust.
- Practice communication skills.

***Learning and Life Skills:***
Communication; Cooperation; Teamwork

***Materials, Equipment, Handouts:***
- Blindfolds equal to half the number of participants

***Time:***
20 minutes

***Setting:***
Preferably outdoors with plenty of space

## Procedure:

### Before the meeting:

- Review activity directions and materials.
- Find a safe outdoor area for the activity.

### During the meeting:

1. Tell the group that they will be doing an activity to get to know one another better. Ask everyone to find a partner, someone whom they don't know very well. (If there are an odd number of participants, the facilitator can participate.) Give each pair a blindfold.
2. If not outside already, take the group outside. Explain to them that one person in each pair must volunteer to be blindfolded. Give instructions that one member is to put the blindfold on; make sure that the blindfolded people cannot see.
3. Instruct the group that the non-blindfolded member in each pair is to choose a point somewhere in the immediate area to serve as the "destination" or end point. The goal of the activity is for the non-blindfolded member to give only verbal directions to the blindfolded member to lead them from the starting point to the destination. Teammates may not make physical contact during this activity, and the blindfolded member may not peek.
4. After every pair has finished. Switch roles (blindfolded/leader) and repeat the activity with a new destination.

## Reflection Activities and Ideas:

Ask the group the following reflection questions:

1. How did you feel as the blindfolded? As the leader?
2. How did you communicate to your blindfolded teammate when you were the leader?
3. How did it feel to trust your teammate when you were blindfolded?
4. How and when do we have to trust people in the real world? How is having trust in your community an important part of citizenship?

## ACTIVITY:

# *Communicating Through Conflict*

***Description:***

Youth work in groups to write a skit depicting a conflict situation. They discuss the situation, exploring whether the outcome was negative or positive, what parties did well and what parties could have done differently. After, youth learn and practice conflict resolution skills. Finally, youth make the connection between conflict resolution and citizenship.

***Participant Age:***

13–19

***Activity Objectives:***

The participants will:

- Practice conflict resolution strategies.
- Understand how communication affects citizenship.

***Learning and Life Skills:***

Communication; Conflict Resolution; Managing Feelings

***Materials, Equipment, Handouts:***

- "Conflict Role-Play" handout
- "Communicating Through Conflict" handouts (five): "Beginning a Difficult Conversation", "Using Contrast", "Listening", "Diffusing Emotions", "Moving Toward Resolution"
- Newsprint and markers
- Easel or tape for recording on newsprint
- Paper for each group
- Writing utensils, for each participant

***Time:***

90–120 minutes, broken into two parts

***Setting:***

Indoors, tables and chairs to accommodate all participants. Make sure an area is open to serve as the "stage."

## Procedure:

### Before the meeting:

- Review activity directions and materials.
- Print out one copy of the handout, "Conflict Role-Play," for each participant and one copy of each of the five "Communicating Through Conflict" handouts for each participant.
- Make sure that all participants have a writing utensil.
- Bring newsprint and markers (easel optional).
- Arrange a cleared "stage" area in the room, and ensure that all participants will have a clear view of this area.

### During the meeting:

### Part I

1. Tell participants that the purpose of this activity is to learn how to resolve conflicts using communication.

2. Distribute the "Conflict Role-Play" handouts and ask for two volunteers to act out the role-play in front of the group.

3. Break participants up into teams of two or three, and make sure each team has paper and a writing utensil. Instruct teams to write out a skit that depicts a conflict situation similar to the "Conflict Role-Play" example in that the outcome is negative. Encourage them to make their situation realistic (even based on real-life experiences, but being sensitive to the feelings of others). Explain that each team will act out their skit once they have finished.

4. Allow each team to act out their conflict skit in front of the group.

### Reflection Activities and Ideas:

After each skit, encourage discussion and record responses:

- Is the outcome positive or negative? Productive or unproductive?
- Ask the group to identify certain words or expressions that escalated the conflict.
- What could have been done differently to achieve a more positive result?

### Part II

1. Distribute the five "Communicating Through Conflict" handouts and explain to the group that they are going to learn and practice some conflict resolution skills to make difficult situations more peaceful and productive. Use the handouts to introduce techniques for the five different components of conflict resolution: (1) beginning a difficult conversation, (2) using contrast, (3) listening, (4) diffusing emotions and (5) moving toward resolutions. For each component, read the information and the examples aloud, and then, in pairs, have participants practice the techniques for that component using the cases given on the handout.

2. After going through the “Communicating Through Conflict” handouts, reestablish the original teams of two or three from Part I, and ask them to write a new skit – using the same situation from their first skit – to reflect a positive outcome based on the techniques they have just learned.

3. Allow each team to act out their new skit in front of the group.

## Reflection Activities and Ideas:

Ask the group the following reflection questions:

1. How did these skits differ from the first round? What made the outcomes more positive?

2. What do these techniques have to do with citizenship?

3. What issues related to citizenship are difficult to talk about? How can we use these techniques to have more productive dialogue regarding these issues?

## Try This, Too:

- Ask youth to brainstorm their own example situations in which they can practice conflict resolution techniques, rather than those given in the “Communicating Through Conflict” handout.
- Have the participants organize a workshop for other youth on conflict resolution techniques using the “Communicating Through Conflict” handout.
- Have the participants act out their skits for younger children to show them ways for resolving conflicts.
- Select – or have the group select – a controversial topic related to local public policy or school policy. Divide the group in two, and assign one side the “supporting” viewpoint regarding the issue and the other side the “opposing” viewpoint regarding the issue. Explain that they will have, not a debate, but a dialogue around this issue, using the techniques learned during the activity.
- Re-visit these techniques during future activities, for example, if youth discuss public policy with local government officials.

**HANDOUT:**

# Conflict Role-Play

## Background:

Two teens, David and Christina, are working together on planning an event for their 4 H club at which they will help elementary school students learn about nutrition. They agreed beforehand to each do an equal share of the work at the event, part of which involves giving a presentation to younger children about nutrition. There are four tasks they have to do in order to carry out the event: (a) Identify and invite presenters to talk about nutrition, (b) put up informational flyers around the elementary school, (c) get together crayons and coloring books to distribute to the children and (d) present a fun ice-breaker activity to kick-off the event. Tomorrow is the day of the event. The first three tasks are finished, and all that's left is to present the ice-breaker activity.

## Characters:

- **David:** Identified and invited the presenters and got together the crayons and coloring books for the children. He also selected an ice-breaker activity for them to use. He feels that he has done more than his share of the work for the project so far.
- **Christina:** Put up the information flyers in the elementary school. She feels that her teammate has been bossy and hasn't listened to her ideas

## Dialogue:

**David:** So, our event is tomorrow. Do you want to go ahead and present the ice-breaker activity?

**Christina:** Not really. I assumed we'd do it together. I don't like talking in front of groups.

**David:** (frustrated) Christina, I've done almost everything for this project. The least you could do is lead this activity. It would only be fair.

**Christina:** (angry) What do you mean, you've done almost everything? I put up our flyers. And besides, whenever I had an idea, you just shot it down! You don't listen to anything I say. You just want to do everything your way!

**David:** Well, I wanted to make sure this event goes well. A lot of your ideas didn't seem like they would work.

**Christina:** Well, I think your ideas are dumb, too! You can forget about me presenting anything tomorrow!

**David:** Ugh! What are you good for?

**Christina:** (offended) You can be such a jerk!

**HANDOUT: Communicating Through Conflict**

# Beginning a Difficult Conversation

Four important strategies can help *establish safety* (a key first step) and draw someone into a conversation about a difficult topic. These are:

- Explain the situation, focusing on the facts as you see them. Speak tentatively, recognizing that your interpretation may not be right.
- Tell how the situation is affecting you, emotionally and otherwise.
- Give the outcome you'd like.
- Ask how the other person sees the situation.

***Example:***
*"Christina, we've been working on this project together for a few weeks now, and the event is tomorrow. I think we've done a good job, but I have a concern. We agreed at the beginning that we would both put in the same amount of work to get the project done, and I feel like I've done more than my share so far. I'm a little frustrated with the way we've broken up the work. I want the event to go well, and I want to make sure we both get to contribute equally. I think it would be fair if you presented the ice-breaker activity tomorrow. How do you see this situation?"*

Find a partner. Consider the following situations. Take turns practicing these four strategies to open a conversation.

1. You and your fellow club members are planning a project. At the meeting, your club president, who is very competent and confident, dominates the conversation and doesn't consider the other members' ideas. After the meeting you approach the president to express your concern.
2. On your sports team, one of your teammates consistently stays out late the night before games and is too tired to perform well during the games. The teammate's performance is hurting the whole team. You have a conversation with him or her after practice to address this.
3. Your friend has been bullying an unpopular student in school. You've noticed him or her do this on several occasions, and you don't think that it's right. After witnessing another incident, you meet the friend in the hall and ask if you can talk with him or her about it.

Adapted with permission from "Communicating Through Conflict" workshop materials developed by LeadNet, East Lansing: Michigan State University Extension, 2006.

## HANDOUT: Communicating Through Conflict

# *Using Contrast*

When someone has misunderstood you, a contrast statement can be used in reply. This is a don't/do statement that negates the bad intention another has assumed of you, and reinforces your true intention. It also helps you avoid using the word "but," which often is a red flag in a conflict. For example:

*After David tells Christina that he thinks the breakdown of work has been unequal for their project, Christina replies angrily, "What do you mean, you've done more than your share? I put up our flyers. And besides, you didn't even listen to my ideas, anyway!" David's response to Christina is: "I don't want you to think that I don't value your ideas or contributions; I do want our share of the work to be equal."*

1. After confronting your club president about his or her tendency to disregard other club members' ideas, he or she replies sharply, "What are you talking about? Do you know how much work I do for this club?"

   I don't_____.

   I do_____.

2. You explain to your teammate how he or she is hurting the team by staying out late the night before games. Your teammate reacts defensively, saying, "Why do you have such a problem with me having fun? Just mind your own business."

   I don't_____.

   I do_____.

3. After witnessing your friend bully a less popular student, you confront him or her to express your disapproval. Your friend replies, "I thought you were my friend! You're supposed to stand up for me."

   I don't_____.

   I do_____.

Adapted with permission from "Communicating Through Conflict" workshop materials developed by LeadNet, East Lansing: Michigan State University Extension, 2006.

## HANDOUT: Communicating Through Conflict

# Listening

Four important listening skills can help establish safety and draw someone out or diffuse someone's anger. These are:

- **Ask** – *"Can you tell me what you're thinking about this?"* Or, *"Can you tell me why you feel that way?"*
- **Reflect** – *"You say nothing is wrong, but you seem pretty upset."*
- **Paraphrase** – *"Let's see if I understand. You feel unvalued when I go ahead on this project without discussing my action with you first."*
- **Guess** – *"Do you think I took all the best parts for myself and just gave you what I didn't want to do?"*

Find a partner. Consider the following situations. First decide which of the above four skills might be most effective in helping talk through the problem. Then choose one to role-play for a couple of minutes to demonstrate at least one of the listening skills.

1. Your teammate for a club project just told you that she feels you're not carrying your weight.
2. Your friend is upset with you because she thinks that you've been spreading rumors about her. You think there's been a misunderstanding, and you want to clear the air with her. When you confront her, she resists talking about it, saying, "There's nothing to talk about."
3. You are the president of your club. After one of your club meetings, a peer member approaches you and claims that you are too controlling and don't listen to other members' ideas.

Adapted with permission from "Communicating Through Conflict" workshop materials developed by LeadNet, East Lansing: Michigan State University Extension, 2006.

**HANDOUT: Communicating Through Conflict**

# Diffusing Emotions

Facing someone's anger is probably the most dreaded aspect of dealing with conflict. A key to helping them engage in a productive conversation is patience. When others are acting out their feelings, they are not ready for rational dialogue. Strong emotions take a while to subside because of chemicals that are released into the blood. To keep yourself from reacting to anger with anger or defensiveness, and to help establish conditions for rational discussion, there are a few strategies you can use.

- First, ask yourself, "Why would a reasonable person react this way? How might I act if I were that person?" This question can help you see things from the other person's point of view, and avoid a defensive reaction, which can escalate the anger.
- Next, use listening skills, especially *reflect* and *paraphrase*.
- If you learn you have done something to offend them, intentionally or not, apologize.
- After listening patiently and respectfully, and reflecting and paraphrasing to make sure you understand the problem as they see it, *legitimize* their emotion and *invite* them to strategize solutions. For example: "I understand why you are upset. I might feel the same way. Can we look at ways we could resolve this situation?"

Try practicing this sequence with a partner, using the situations below.

1. A teacher bursts out of her classroom and into the hallway where you and your friends are having a conversation and yells at you about disrupting her class. She threatens to write you up.
2. You are the president of your club. During a club meeting one of the members makes a suggestion for a project that the club could perform. You reply that you don't think the club has enough money to do what the member has suggested. The club member reacts angrily, "Fine, nobody ever listens to my ideas anyway. I should just quit!"
3. The roads were bad leaving your friend's house and as a result you get home a half hour past your curfew. One of your parents blows up at you for being late.

Adapted with permission from "Communicating Through Conflict" workshop materials developed by LeadNet, East Lansing: Michigan State University Extension, 2006.

**HANDOUT: Communicating Through Conflict**

# *Moving Toward Resolution*

You have successfully begun a difficult conversation, listened respectfully, used apology or contrast when appropriate, legitimized their emotion and invited them to search for solutions. Once the other person has agreed to try to resolve the situation, the following strategies can help you move forward.

- **Find a mutual purpose.** Find something you can both agree on, and build on this. For example, consider the situation where Sarah is getting defensive because Peter doesn't think she's been doing enough for their project. Peter can say, "Well, I think we can agree that we both want to do well on this project. Can we talk about a way to do this that we both feel is fair?"
- **Clarify the reasons underlying a position.** Often people take opposing positions on issues, when the underlying reasons for their positions might not be in conflict. For example, Sarah may not have been contributing to the project because she didn't feel that her ideas were welcome. Her interest is to participate and do well on the assignment. Once Peter understands that, the two of them can be creative about finding ways to satisfy each of their needs.
- **Agree to disagree.** Openly recognize those areas where you disagree, and work around them. Make sure you understand the reasons underneath the disagreement.
- **Brainstorm possible solutions.**

Adapted with permission from "Communicating Through Conflict" workshop materials developed by LeadNet, East Lansing: Michigan State University Extension, 2006.

## ACTIVITY:

# *Exploring and Challenging Stereotypes*

### *Description:*

Participants engage in an activity and discussion to deepen understanding about stereotypes, prejudice and discrimination and the connections to issues of citizenship within communities.

### *Participant Age:*

13–19

### *Activity Objectives:*

The participants will:

- Explore definitions of stereotypes, prejudice and discrimination.
- Examine negative impacts of prejudice and discrimination.
- Explore connections between citizenship and the importance of addressing issues of prejudice and discrimination.

### *Learning and Life Skills:*

Accepting Differences; Empathy; Self-Responsibility

### *Materials, Equipment, Handouts:*

- Newsprint and markers (various colors)
- Easel or tape for recording on newsprint
- Handout: "Exploring Stereotypes" (It is strongly advised that you adapt this handout to include three or four racial/ethnic groups based on what makes sense for the geographic area you live in and the issues of stereotyping and prejudice that exist.)

### *Time:*

60 minutes

### *Setting:*

Indoors, participants seated in a circle, if possible

## Procedure:

### Before the meeting:

- Review activity directions and materials.
- Print one copy of the "Exploring Stereotypes" handout for each participant.

### During the meeting:

1. Introduce the concept of stereotypes with the following statements:

*Today we're going to focus on what we know about the concepts of stereotypes, prejudice and discrimination. These discussions are critically important to the notion of "citizenship" – and can be challenging at times. It may be important for us to create guidelines together about how we want to be in dialogue. What are some guidelines for discussion that you think are important for us to establish for this conversation?*

2. It may be important to first set the stage by establishing some guidelines for discussion. Ask the group for suggestions and write them on newsprint so all can see them. The following are examples of helpful guidelines related to issues of diversity:
   - Be respectful.
   - Listen to each other.
   - Remain open and non-judgmental.
   - Be sensitive to how painful these dialogues can be to people who are part of groups who are targeted for stereotypes, prejudice and discrimination.
   - Honor the seriousness of the learning and conversation.
3. Begin the activity by asking the group what the concept of stereotypes means to them. Jot down their thoughts and ideas on newsprint. Ask if anyone in the group can relate to being part of a group that is stereotyped. Invite them to share their examples and ask, "How does it make you feel when you experience being stereotyped?"

4. Thank the group for sharing their examples and acknowledge their good work together. Then offer the following as one definition of stereotypes:

*Stereotypes are over-simplified generalizations – most often negative – about members of a particular group.*

5. Tell the group that we're now going to explore the notion of stereotypes more deeply. Divide the participants into three small groups. Assign one group "athletes", another group "adults" and another group "teenagers." Give each group newsprint and markers and tell them that they have about three minutes to work together to come up with as many stereotypes as they can of that group. Tell them to be prepared to share their list with the whole group.

6. After a few minutes, ask each group to share their lists and process a discussion by asking the following questions:

- What do you notice about what the groups came up with?
- Are there any similarities or differences between the lists?

7. Explain to the group that you want to move into the next portion of the activity. Emphasize that learning and dialogue around the very real issues of prejudice and discrimination based on race and other differences are important aspects of good citizenship. Distribute the "Exploring Stereotypes" handout. Instruct participants to write below each group name as many stereotypes that they can think of related to that group. Make sure they do not write their names on their handouts. Emphasize that these are stereotypes that they are aware of, not necessarily ones that they believe. Allow about five minutes for this step.

8. After about five minutes, collect all of the handouts. Shuffle the handouts to protect the anonymity of the authors, and then redistribute one handout to each participant so that everyone has a handout filled out by someone other than themselves. Reemphasize that the stereotypes that everyone generated are stereotypes that they are aware of, not necessarily stereotypes that they accept. Ask the group to read the stereotypes on the handout they received. Record their responses on newsprint.

Facilitate a discussion using the following questions as a guide:
- What do you notice about the responses?
- How do we learn stereotypes? How do we get information about groups different from us?
- Stereotypes often lead to people in that group being treated as "less than" which is the essence of discrimination. Can you think of examples of how stereotypes based on race lead to discrimination and groups receiving fewer resources?
- What are the costs to all of us if we continue to hold stereotypes and misinformation about people different from ourselves?
- How do building relationships and friendships with people different from ourselves help to breakdown stereotypes, bias and misinformation that we may have about groups?
- Why is it important to focus on stereotypes and work to unlearn bias and misinformation in order to work for the greater good and good citizenship?
- What ideas do you have about how we can work to address issues of stereotype and discrimination?

## Possible key points to draw out and engage in dialogue around include:

- Citizenship is about working toward a true and just democracy. This includes learning more about the realities of our histories – and how we've all learned bias, stereotypes and prejudice – and how those biases too often lead to behaviors and systems that are harmful to the common good in communities and in society.
- Stereotypes are generalizations – or more accurately – overgeneralizations and simplifications that are usually negative about a group of people.
- Stereotypes are often based on race, gender, class and other human differences.
- We all learn stereotypes through our families, schools, faith communities, peer groups, the media and other institutions. Carlos Cortéz and others refer to this as the societal curriculum through which we all learn information that may or may not be helpful and accurate about individuals and groups.
- We likely hold stereotypes and misinformation about groups different from us even if members of that group do not live in high numbers in our community.

- Stereotypes can be difficult to unlearn because of the tendency to look for information and examples that "confirm" our beliefs. Research shows that when people receive information that disconfirms their stereotypes, they think of that person as an "exception" to the stereotypes they hold of that group.
- People are individuals – and they are part of groups. Not all generalizations about groups are negative. Some may be a guide to what is true for many individuals within a certain group. (For example, many Latinos are often connected and committed to their families.) But it's important to realize that there are likely to be as many differences within groups as there are similarities.
- Even "positive stereotypes" (such as, "all Asian American students are good at math") are harmful. Stereotypes foster simple and shallow notions of groups and often encourage the denial of the real issues, complexity, wholeness and humanity of people and groups.
- It's important not to deny that people are part of groups and understand that there may be a very real sense of pride and group identity for members of that group. There are likely to be many differences within that group as well.
- Negative stereotypes foster prejudice and discrimination at the personal and institutional level. For example, if one holds the stereotypic view that African Americans are not as smart as white people, than teachers, schools and communities may not question (or even be aware of) behaviors, systems and policies that advantage white students at the expense of students of color.
- A common stereotype is that people of color, including Latinos, Asian Americans, Arab Americans and others are "from somewhere else" and are not "real" citizens. People of color often get asked, "Where are you from?" even when they and their families may have lived in the United States for years – and even generations.
- Everyone holds stereotypes that foster prejudicial beliefs about groups different from themselves. When those in the dominant group – those with more power and resources in society – hold those beliefs and act on them through laws, rules and policies, it is called racism, sexism and other "isms."
- There are many examples of how stereotypes and bias lead to treating groups as "less than." For example, the belief that girls are not athletic and are not as valued or important as boys has led to the reality that in most communities in the U.S., boys' sports receive many more resources and attention including stadiums, cheering squads, school assemblies and community-wide parades. While there are increasing sports activities available to girls, boys' sports continue to receive school and community-wide support and attention. (You may want to engage the group in dialogue around this point to check out the perspectives of girls and boys on this issue.)
- While women in the U.S. became full citizens with the right to vote in 1920, men continue to maintain firm control of the nation's major systems and institutions including government, business, industry and the media. Women continue to be paid less for comparable work done by men – and in Michigan, earn only 67 cents on the dollar as compared to men. At the present rate of progress it will take 50 years for women to achieve earnings parity with men nationwide.
- It's important to understand the equation that racism = prejudice + power. Stereotypes and prejudice influence how those with power create and enforce rules and policies within organizations and in communities. For example, since the framing of the U.S. Constitution in 1787, whiteness in this country has meant preference and advantage. In the Act of March 26, 1790, Congress's first words on citizenship and the ability to become a citizen was limited to "any alien, being a free white person who shall have resided within the limits and under the jurisdiction of the United States for a term of two years" (Kendall, 2006).

- History teaches us that the notion of "whiteness" was created right at the beginning of the development of the U.S. system of government in order to advantage those who were deemed as white. Many legal cases related to citizenship over the years defined who was to be considered white and who was not. Those who were white were given preferences and advantages such as the right to vote, own property and be part of national and local decision making.
- This legacy of advantage to white people is maintained today and contributes to the continuation of economic and social inequities between white people and people of color.
- It's clear that stereotypes are dangerous because they tend to foster a sense of superiority and entitlement in those who hold them against others. Often those who are advantaged based on race, gender and other differences are unaware of the preferences and privileges that they historically and currently receive.
- People who are part of groups who are commonly stereotyped and disadvantaged may internalize these messages to the detriment of their own sense of self-worth and capacity to achieve.
- Studies show that even when people are committed to equality and egalitarian views, they often still harbor "mental residue" of hidden bias, prejudice and stereotypes.
- Stereotypes and prejudice we hold may lie hidden beneath the surface of our thinking and have an impact (more than we know) on friends we choose, where we choose to live and go to school, who gets hired and promoted in companies and who's arrested and prosecuted for crimes.
- Developing a critical consciousness and engaging in learning and discussion about stereotypes and other issues of diversity and social justice can be healing and liberating.
- We tend to "make up" information about people based on stereotypes we've learned when we don't really know people. An important way to unlearn bias and stereotypes is to create authentic relationships with people across differences. This can be a challenge in many areas because we are often disconnected from one another. Racial segregation, for example, has been increasing throughout the past 25 years in many regions of the United States.

## References


Cortez, C. (2000). *The children are watching: How the media teach about diversity*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Institute of Women's Policy Research. (2004). *The status of women in Michigan.* Retrieved June 26, 2007, from *http://www.iwpr.org/States2004/PDFs/Michigan.pdf*.

Kendall, F. (2006). *Understanding white privilege: Creating pathways to authentic relationships across race*. New York: Routledge.

Orfield, G., & Lee, C. (2006). *Racial transformation and the changing nature of segregation*. Cambridge, MA: The Civil Rights Project at Harvard University.

Plous, S. (2003). *Understanding prejudice and discrimination*. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Shor, I., & Freire, P. (1987). *A pedagogy for liberation: Dialogues on transforming education*. Westport, CT: Bergin & Garvey.


## Try This, Too

Many of the points listed in this activity make excellent discussion starters. Consider cutting the statements into strips and putting them in a "hat." Pick a statement, read it aloud and facilitate a dialogue in small or large groups about that statement. Allow ample time so that everyone's views and voice can be heard. Remember to use guidelines for discussion because these issues often generate feelings and multiple perspectives. If the group has further questions, consider creating research projects that encourage learning to go deeper around these important issues.

## Want to Learn More?

Are you interested in digging deeper and testing yourself for hidden biases you may hold. Hidden bias tests measure unconscious attitudes and associations we may have about people and groups. Our willingness to explore our own biases, assumptions and stereotypes is an important first step in creating positive change in our communities. Visit the "Understanding Prejudice" web site and take the hidden bias test to get a glimpse at your own conscious or unconscious attitudes based on gender and race. You'll find the test at:
*http://www.understandingprejudice.org/iat/*

**HANDOUT:**

# Exploring Stereotypes

For the group listed below, write as many stereotypes that you can think of. These are not stereotypes that you necessarily believe, but stereotypes that you know to exist for each of these groups.

***Black/African American***

***Arab American***

***Asian American***

***Latino/Latina/Hispanic***

***Native American/American Indian***

***White/European American***

## ACTIVITY:

# *A Class Divided*

### *Description:*

By watching the video, *A Class Divided*, participants address the impact of prejudice and oppression.

### *Participant Age:*

13–19

### *Activity Objectives:*

The participants will:

- Illustrate that prejudice is learned and can be unlearned.
- Examine the negative impact of prejudice and discrimination.
- Explore the positive impact of working to understand the pain of discrimination and the affect on overall group cohesion across differences.
- Shed light on oppression at the personal, interpersonal and institutional levels.

### *Learning and Life Skills:*

Accepting Differences; Empathy; Self-Responsibility

### *Mateials, Equipment, Handouts:*

- Video, *A Class Divided*. The activity involves using the first 30 minutes of the video. (This video is available through PBS Video by calling 1-800-344-3337. It is available for loan to those living in Michigan through your county Michigan State University Extension office. MSUE staff members: The video is available for loan through the MSU Extension Multicultural Resource Library.)
- VCR and monitor
- Newsprint and markers (various colors)
- Easel or tape for recording on newsprint

### *Time:*

60 minutes

### *Setting:*

Indoors, room arranged so that everyone can see video

## Procedure:

### Before the meeting:

- Review activity directions and materials.
- Set up the VCR and monitor so that it is viewable to all participants.

### During the meeting:

1. Introduce the activity with the following statements:

   *Today we're going to have an opportunity to focus on issues of diversity as they relate to the development of prejudice, stereotypes and injustices. These discussions are critically important to the notion of "citizenship" – and can be challenging at times. It may be important for us to create guidelines together about how we want to be in dialogue. What are some guidelines for discussion that you think are important for us to establish for this conversation?*

2. It may be important to first set the stage by establishing some guidelines for discussion. Ask the group for suggestions and write them on newsprint so all can see them. The following are examples of helpful guidelines related to issues of diversity:
   - Be respectful.
   - Listen deeply to each other.
   - Remain open and non-judgmental.
   - Be sensitive to how painful these dialogues can be to people who are part of groups who are targeted for prejudice and discrimination.
   - Honor the seriousness of the learning and conversation.

3. Introduce the video with the following statements:

   *We are now going to watch a video called* A Class Divided*. But first, I'd like to share a little background information about what we're going to see. The day after The Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated in April 1968, Jane Elliott, a teacher in rural Riceville, Iowa, conducted a powerful exercise with her third grade students to help them experience the pain of discrimination by dividing them into groups that were "better than" and "less than" based on eye color. Two years later the Public Broadcasting System visited her classroom and filmed the exercise for an episode of the TV show* Frontline*. The video you are about to see,* A Class Divided*, features those students as adults, revisiting the exercise they experienced as third graders and reflecting on its effects on their lives.*

4. Tell the group that as they watch the video to pay special attention to:
   - The behaviors of the group when they are told that they are "less than."
   - The behaviors of the group when they are told that they are "better than."
   - The behaviors of the teacher.
   - Your feelings and reactions to the film.

It may be helpful to write these statements on a sheet of newsprint and display it on the wall during the video.

5. Show approximately 30 minutes of the video. Stop the videotape at the point when the announcer says, “This experiment has been used with schools, organizations. . . .” School children are seen getting on a school bus and the film is about to go into a segment on how the film has been used in prisons.

## Reflection Activities and Ideas:

Ask the group the following reflection questions:

1. What seems to stand out for you?
2. What did you notice about the children when they were told they were in the “less than” group?
3. What did you notice about the “better than” group?
4. What did you notice about the teacher?
5. Describe your feelings and reactions to the video.
6. How do you see these kinds of beliefs and actions playing out in today’s classrooms and communities?

Possible key points to draw out and/or share with the group:

- Citizenship is about working toward a true and just democracy. This includes learning more about the realities of our histories – and how we’ve all learned bias, stereotypes and prejudice – and how those biases too often lead to behaviors and systems that are harmful to the common good in communities and in society.

- The video illustrates how prejudice is learned. Jane Elliott introduced the thought that intelligence and moral character – and the value placed on people – is based on the color of their eyes. This is similar to how prejudice is learned based on skin color and other differences.

- As an authority figure, the teacher had power and influence and set the rules for how the children were to behave related to their behaviors toward others based on eye color. This is very similar to how prejudice and discrimination work in real life. Important adults (parents, family members, teachers and others) teach children through words and actions how to think and behave toward people and groups that are different from themselves.

- Prejudice and stereotypes that people hold influence how rules and policies get created in organizations and in communities. This is powerfully illustrated in the video. Jane Elliot provided the information or belief that groups are “less than” based on eye color. She then created rules and systems that advantaged those in the “better than” group. For example, when the group was “on top” they got to use the drinking fountain, get second helpings at lunch, play on the playground equipment and had other advantages available to them when they were told they were “better than.” When they were in the “less than” group, the opposite was true and they were denied access to these things. This is how racism, sexism and other “isms” work in society.

- In the video, Jane Elliott constructs or “makes up” the idea that people are better than others based on eye color. Similarly, it is widely believed that race is a “socially constructed” idea whose purpose was and is to advantage groups based on race. History teaches us, for example, that the notion of “whiteness” was created right at the beginning of the development of the U.S. system of government in order to advantage those who were deemed as white. These were the people who were

allowed to vote, own property and be part of national and local decision making. This notion of “whiteness” allowed the government to justify the enslavement of people of African decent and genocide of those who were indigenous to this country before white people came to this land.

- This legacy of advantage to white people is maintained today and is largely responsible for the continuation of massive economic and social inequities between white people and people of color.

# *UNIT 3: Issues Identification*

It can be difficult to develop and maintain an interest in things like government, community service and citizenship just for the sake of knowing about them. Some people enjoy memorizing the structure of government and the names of various government officials. This is an important part of being an active citizen, in its own right, but for many people it often takes more to spark an initial interest. When we begin to think about citizenship in the context of issues and problems that affect our lives and the lives of people around us, the ideas of government, community service and citizenship become more real and meaningful.

## Keep it focused on the issues

Understanding and awareness of public and community issues is a key component of citizenship. In order to stand up for the rights of oneself and others, it is first necessary to look at where these rights are not being fully respected. It is also important to look at how things can be improved upon even in instances where there are no rights violations. When we come across a point or matter in our communities over which there is a desire for change, then we are presented with an issue. Issues range from minor concerns (for example, whether or not to install a street light) to problems and concerns of greater consequence (for example, what to do about poverty). If a decision can be made to affect the matter, then the matter becomes an issue.

Issues of public importance affect all of us, to varying degrees of significance. Everybody in a community has an interest in how an issue is decided – whether they know it or not. This interest often takes the form of taxes that people pay to finance public spending. Take the example of a city deciding whether or not to install another street light. The outcome of this decision may mean very little to each individual city resident, but to the people who live in the vicinity of the street light, it may be very important for their sense of safety. But all city residents have an interest, too, if they are taxpayers. It's their money that will pay for the streetlight. Or, the money used for buying and installing the streetlight could have been spent on a basketball hoop to be installed in a popular city park. Public and community issues are often a matter of money and a question of who pays for what.

**Principles of Citizenship:**

- ***Character***
- ***Issues***

## Becoming informed

Issues grab us. Some of us become interested because of the personal consequences decision making can have; some of us become interested out of compassion for others; and sometimes these two motivations overlap. In order to understand what issues our communities are faced with, we have to research, ask questions, explore and think critically. Even if we are unaware of an issue, it can still have an impact on us. There are a variety of ways to inform ourselves about community issues, and the activities in this unit offer a number of approaches.

After we have an understanding of some of the key issues in our communities, the next step is to identify which issues we want to work on. These should be issues that we deem important, but also issues that we are passionate about. The problems that we focus on will serve as the vehicle for learning about how local government works, as well as how community action happens.

## Resources for issues identification

- Building Communities from the Inside Out: A Path Toward Finding and Mobilizing a Community's Assets by John Kretzmann and John McKnight. *http://gearup.ous.edu/gusaccess/documents/pdf/BuildingCommunitiesInsideOut.pdf* The introduction to this book provides a number of useful handouts for identifying community problems and assets.
- "Our Communities, Our Lives," from YEA! Youth Experiencing Action: A Community Service Learning Guide (4H1553), Michigan 4-H Youth Development *http://web1.msue.msu.edu/cyf/youth/cls/documents/YEA_Community_book.pdf* This online curriculum has a variety of experiential activities to aid in the issues identification process.
- "Social Issues," Multnomah County Library; Multnomah County, Oregon *http://www.multcolib.org/homework/sochc.html* This is a highly useful and comprehensive site for researching specific social issues.
- Walking Neighborhood Surveys, Junior Citizen Planner, Michigan State University Extension http://web1.msue.msu.edu/cplanner/jcp/walksurvey.pdf . This activity guides young people in exploring their neighborhoods and identifying issues.

## ACTIVITY:

# *It's My Right!*

### *Description:*

Through brainstorming and discussion, this activity leads youth to define what it means to be human and to relate human rights to human needs. After, youth work together to create a map of their community and identify the rights associated with each major institution.

### *Participant Age:*

13–19

### *Activity Objectives:*

The participants will:

- Discuss and define human rights.
- Apply human rights to their community.
- Explore where human rights are and are not being upheld in their community.

### *Learning and Life Skills:*

Critical Thinking; Concern for Others

### *Materials, Equipment, Handouts:*

- Newsprint
- Easel or tape for recording on newsprint
- Markers, pencils, other drawing utensils
- Writing or drawing utensils, for each participant
- Handout: "Universal Declaration of Human Rights, in Brief"; for a complete version of the "Universal Declaration of Human Rights," go to *http://www.un.org/Overview/rights.html*

### *Time:*

120 minutes, broken up into two parts

### *Setting:*

Indoors, tables and chairs for all participants

## Procedure:

## Before the meeting:

- Review activity directions and materials.
- Set up easel for newsprint or tape newsprint to wall. On a sheet of newsprint, write "Human Rights" at the top and draw a large outline of a person, large enough to accommodate writing.
- Read over the "*Universal Declaration of Human Rights, in Brief*;" if you prefer to use the full version of the "Universal Declaration of Human Rights," go to the United Nations web site at *http://www.un.org/Overview/rights.html*. If you are unfamiliar with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, go to the Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt Institute's web site for the Universal Declaration of Human Rights at *http://www.udhr.org* for information on the document's history.
- Print one copy of the handout, "Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), in Brief," for each participant.

## During the meeting:

### Part I

1. Give each participant a sheet of paper, and have them write the words "Human" and "Rights" at the top. Below the word "Human," instruct the group to draw a circle or the outline of a person so that there is enough room to write inside. Ask the group to brainstorm what qualities define a human being (for example, intelligence, sympathy) and to write the words or symbols inside the outline or circle. This should be done individually.

2. Then ask the group to write what they think is needed in order to protect, enhance and fully develop the *positive and desirable* qualities of a human being. Ask them to write their answers outside the outline or circle under the word "Rights." For example, "education," "friendship," "loving family."

3. After everyone has finished, display the sheet of newsprint that was made before the meeting with "Human Rights" at the top and the outline of a person. Ask the group to share their responses to the question, "What qualities define a human being?" and record responses inside the person outline. Next, ask the group for their responses to the question, "What is needed in order to protect, enhance, and fully develop the positive and desirable qualities?" Write down responses outside the outline or circle on the newsprint or under the word "Rights."

## Reflection Activities and Ideas:

Ask the following questions to the group to stimulate discussion:

- Based on this list, what do people need to achieve their full potential?
- What is the difference between achieving one's full potential and merely surviving?
- For items recorded outside of the human outline, which would you consider rights and which would you consider luxuries? What is the difference?

- What happens when a person or government attempts to deprive someone of something that is necessary to human dignity?
- What would happen if you had to give up one of these human necessities?
- Can a person realize his or her full potential without any of these necessities?

## Part II

1. Refer to the newsprint depicting the human outline from Part I. Explain that everything inside the human outline relates to human dignity, the wholeness of being human. Everything written outside the human outline represents what is necessary for people to achieve their potential as human beings. Human rights are based on these necessities (for example, education, health care, freedom of speech). (Make clear that not having access to basic human rights does not make a person less human – we are all human despite our differences.)

2. Distribute the handout, "Universal Declaration of Human Rights, in Brief," to each participant. Explain that the United Nations created the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)* in order to clarify the rights that every person in every country should enjoy – human rights. Either (a) read over the *UDHR* articles as a group or (b) give everyone sufficient time to read over the articles individually. After reading over the *UDHR* articles, ask the group what they think of the human rights represented here. Provide clarification if there is misunderstanding. "Is anything missing? Should anything be removed?"

3. Divide participants into teams of two or three, give each team a sheet of newsprint, and ask them to draw a map of their town (or neighborhood in the case of larger communities). They should include their homes, major public spaces and buildings (for example, parks, post office, city hall, schools, places of worship) and public services (for example, hospitals, fire department, police station) and any other places that are important to the community (for example, grocery stores, cemetery, cinemas, gas stations).

4. When the maps are complete, ask each team to analyze their maps from a human rights perspective. What human rights do they associate with different places on their maps? For example, a place of worship with freedom of thought, conscience and religion; the school with the right to education; the post office with the right to information, to privacy and to self-expression. As they identify these rights, they can use the *UDHR* as a guide.

## Reflection Activities and Ideas:

Have each team present its map to the whole group and summarize its analysis of human rights exercised in the community. Ask each team the following questions:

- Why is it important to protect a person's or group's human rights?
- Are there any rights or articles of the *UDHR* that seem to be especially exercised in this community? How can this be explained? Are there any rights or articles of the *UDHR* that no group included on their map? How can this be explained?
- After discussion can anyone see new ways to add rights to their map, especially those that were not included in the first version?

## Try This, Too:

- It may be necessary for participants to draw their community maps independently, if they are not from the same areas.
- Visit the University of Minnesota Human Rights Resource Center web site at *http://www.hrusa.org* for more resources and activities on human rights.
- With the permission of local officials, create posters representing articles of the *UDHR* and post them in the community.

Adapted with permission from University of Minnesota Human Rights Resource Center, *Human Rights Here and Now*, edited by Nancy Flowers, 1998, p 54-55.

Retrieved July 10, 2007, from *http://www1.umn.edu/humanrts/edumat/hreduseries/hereandnow/Part-3/Activity7.htm*

- Are there any places in this community where people's rights are violated? Are there any people in this community whose rights are violated?
- What happens in this community when a person's or a group's human rights are violated? How can we determine when there is a violation?
- Are there any places in this community where people take action to protect human rights or prevent violations from occurring?
- What can a good citizen do to protect people's rights?

**HANDOUT:**

# Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), in Brief

***Article 1***
Right to Equality

***Article 2***
Freedom from Discrimination

***Article 3***
Right to Life, Liberty, Personal Security

***Article 4***
Freedom from Slavery

***Article 5***
Freedom from Torture and Degrading Treatment

***Article 6***
Right to Recognition as a Person before the Law

***Article 7***
Right to Equality before the Law

***Article 8***
Right to Remedy by Competent Tribunal

***Article 9***
Freedom from Arbitrary Arrest and Exile

***Article 10***
Right to Fair Public Hearing

***Article 11***
Right to be Considered Innocent until Proven Guilty

***Article 12***
Freedom from Interference with Privacy, Family, Home and Correspondence

***Article 13***
Right to Free Movement in and out of the Country

***Article 14***
Right to Asylum in other Countries from Persecution

***Article 15***
Right to a Nationality and the Freedom to Change It

***Article 16***
Right to Marriage and Family

***Article 17***
Right to Own Property

***Article 18***
Freedom of Belief and Religion

***Article 19***
Freedom of Opinion and Information

***Article 20***
Right of Peaceful Assembly and Association

***Article 21***
Right to Participate in Government and in Free Elections

***Article 22***
Right to Social Security

***Article 23***
Right to Desirable Work and to Join Trade Unions

***Article 24***
Right to Rest and Leisure

***Article 25***
Right to Adequate Living Standard

***Article 26***
Right to Education

***Article 27***
Right to Participate in the Cultural Life of Community

***Article 28***
Right to a Social Order that Articulates this Document

***Article 29***
Community Duties Essential to Free and Full Development

***Article 30***
Freedom from State or Personal Interference in the above Rights

Adapted with permission from University of Minnesota Human Rights Resource Center, *Human Rights Here and Now*, edited by Nancy Flowers, 1998, p 141.
Retrieved July 10, 2007, from *http://www1.umn.edu/humanrts/edumat/hreduseries/hereandnow/Part-5/8_udhr-abbr.htm*

## ACTIVITY:

# *Agree to Disagree*

***Description:***
Youth express their opinions on current public policy issues in order to demonstrate the complexity of issues and the range of possible positions regarding them.

***Participant Age:***
13–19

***Activity Objectives:***
The participants will:
- Identify their opinion on current policy issues.
- Share their views on contentious issues.
- See that there are multiple perspectives on controversial policy issues.

***Learning and Life Skills:***
Communication; Accepting Differences; Decision Making

***Materials, Equipment & Handouts***
- Newsprint and markers
- Handout: "Current Public Policy Issues"
- Tape for displaying newsprint

***Time:***
30–60 minutes (varies according to number of issues addressed)

***Setting:***
Indoors, enough open space for all participants to move around

## Procedure:

### Before the meeting:

- Review activity directions and materials.
- Create five signs using the newsprint and markers that read: "strongly agree," "agree," "no opinion," "disagree" and "strongly disagree."
- Post the five signs on the wall from left to right in this order: "strongly agree," "agree," "no opinion," "disagree" and "strongly disagree."

### During the meeting:

1. Tell the group that they will be presented with a series of statements and that they must decide whether or not they agree with it. Direct them to the wall on which the five signs are posted. Tell the group that they should stand in front of the sign that indicates their opinion on the statement. Explain that they should consider each statement individually and not be influenced by the opinions of others in the group.
2. Before beginning, tell the group that some statements may have personal significance for some members; it is therefore important to create guidelines to follow throughout the activity to ensure that everyone feels safe to share their ideas. Ask the group to brainstorm guidelines, and write down their responses on a sheet of newsprint. Some examples of guidelines are:
   - Be respectful.
   - Listen to each other.
   - Remain open and non-judgmental.
   - Be sensitive to group members' personal significance regarding some issues.
   - Honor the seriousness of the learning and conversation.
3. Read the first statement on the "Current Public Policy Issues" handout, and allow participants to move to the sign that best represents their opinion. Remain objective and do not make comments about where individuals are standing under the signs. After all participants have decided where they stand, ask for volunteers to explain why they chose the position that they did. Encourage all participants to share their opinions. Try to hear comments from both the "agree" and "disagree" side. It is important to effectively mediate this sharing; make sure that conversation focuses on the issue, not the person, and that one person talks at a time.
4. Repeat step 3 for each statement on the handout.

## Reflection Activities and Ideas:

Ask the group the following reflection questions:

1. What did you think about as you decided where to move?
2. How did it feel to be part of the majority opinion group? How did it feel to be part of the minority group?

3. Were you with the same people on every issue? How did it change?

4. Were there any issues for which everyone had the same opinion? Who might have a view different from the group on these issues?

5. Why is understanding that there are different sides to an issue an important part of citizenship?

## Try This, Too:

- It is strongly recommended to develop a list of issues more relevant to your community. It is best if the policy issues relate to the issues that the group may be interested in exploring later on.

- If you believe that the group may have difficulties defending their positions on these issues, or if you think that the nature of the issues may cause too much disruption, try this. Prepare a handout with all of the issue statements listed in order, and have participants privately write “A” or “D” next to the statement (add SA for “Strongly Agree” and SD for “Strongly Disagree” categories, if you like). After, shuffle the responses and redistribute them to all participants, As you read through the issue statements this time, have participants go to the sign that represents the opinions given by the handout that they received. Once there, have participants try to argue in favor of the position stated in the handout they received, even if this is not their personal stance on the issue. Add the reflection question: “What did it feel like to have to argue a position that you don’t agree with?”

**HANDOUT:**

# Current Public Policy Issues

Consider your opinion on each of the issues below and move around the room to the sign that reflects your view:

1. Vending machines with pop should be banned in public schools.
2. A student who misses more than the normal number of school days should be denied a driver's license.
3. School districts should be required to develop anti-bullying policies.
4. Police officers should be able to pull a driver over for not wearing a seatbelt.
5. There should be a law that requires bicyclists under age 16 to wear a helmet.
6. Any student found carrying a weapon on school grounds or at a school function should be permanently expelled.
7. For safety purposes, there should be a limit to the number of passengers in a car driven by a teenager.
8. Public schools should have the right to post the Ten Commandments on school property.
9. Affirmative action should apply to college admissions decisions.
10. The government should give subsidies – contributions of money – to farmers.
11. The government should allow people from other countries to freely immigrate into the U.S.

## ACTIVITY:

# *We Have Issues*

***Description:***
Through research and brainstorming, youth begin exploring important issues in their community. After identifying issues, they decide which are most pertinent for their group to address.

***Participant Age:***
13–19

***Activity Objectives:***
The participants will:
• Analyze different media resources.
• Identify issues in their community.

***Learning and Life Skills:***
Wise Use of Resources; Concern for Others

***Materials, Equipment, Handouts:***
- News articles concerning local issues in the community; these can be compiled (a) by the facilitator or (b) as a "homework" activity for participants prior to the meeting
- Handouts: U.S. Census Bureau fact sheet (if computers are available, it is preferable for participants to locate these materials themselves)
- County Profile for each participant (available online from Arkansas Extension at http://uaex.edu/business-communities/economic-development/trends-opportunities.aspx#)
- Handout: "Common Community Issues"
- Newsprint and markers
- Easel or tape for recording on newsprint

***Time:***
120 minutes, broken up into two parts

***Setting:***
Indoors, tables and chairs for all participants

## Procedure:

### Before the meeting:

• Review activity directions and materials.
• If facilitator is compiling news articles, browse local media sources for stories about local issues. Cut out the articles and make copies equal to the number of participants.
• Go to the Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service web site at: http://uaex.edu/business-communities/economic-development/trends-opportunities.aspx#. Choose a county from the list. Participants can view their county profiles online or the profiles can be printed for each participant.
• Go to the U.S. Census Bureau web site at *http://factfinder.census.gov* to find statistical information on your community. Type in the name of the county, city, township or zip code area to get detailed social, economic and housing information. It is good to get information for a broader region (such as a county) and also more specific localities (such as zip codes) within the county to highlight contrasts. Print one copy of the county census information for each participant.

### During the meeting:

## Part I

1. Explain to the group that this meeting will be spent identifying issues and problems in the community.

2. On a sheet of newsprint, write "strengths" and "problems." Ask the group, "What are the strengths of your community?" Record responses on the newsprint. After everyone has had a chance to respond, ask, "What are the problems in your community?" Record responses.

3. Explain that an issue is a point, matter or dispute, the decision of which is of special or public importance. For example, an issue could be the condition of public parks. There are generally two or more sides to an issue. For example, one person may believe that the public parks are enjoyable, while another may believe that they are too few and in disrepair.

4. Distribute the handout "Common Community Issues." Allow time to read over the list together or individually.

## Reflection Activities and Ideas:

Ask the group what they think about the lists.
• Which of these issues is applicable to their community? Which are not? What would they add to this list?
• Why is it important to consider both strengths and weaknesses of the community?

## Part II

1. Divide the group into teams of three or four.
   i. If computers are available, assign each group to a computer and have them visit the U.S. Census Bureau web site at *http://factfinder.census.gov.* First, ask the groups to type in the name of their county. Instruct them to note interesting statistics (for example, poverty rate, unemployment). Give them time to explore the site and assist participants with questions regarding the statistics. After, have the groups search for their specific zip codes and ask them to note the differences between these and the county.
   ii. If there is no computer access, distribute the handouts of the county census information to each group. Instruct them to note interesting statistics (for example, poverty rate, unemployment). Assist participants with questions regarding the statistics. After, give the groups the handouts on specific zip code census information and ask them to note the differences between these and the county.
2. After each team has had the chance to look over the census information, distribute the news articles, the County Profiles and the "Common Community Issues" handout and have the individuals read them over. When they have finished, ask each team to think about the census information, the news articles, the County Profiles and the "Common Community Issues" handout to discuss what they feel are the most important issues in the community; give ample time for discussion.
3. Have each group record on a sheet of newsprint the issues they consider most important. Post this list on the wall, or otherwise keep it for future activities.

## Reflection Activities and Ideas:

Reconvene the group and ask each team to share their thoughts on community issues. Ask each team the following questions and record their answers:

- What did you learn about your community from the census information?
- What did you learn about your community from the news articles?
- What did your group decide are the most pressing issues in the community?
- As a whole group, what issues do we want to focus on in the community?

## Try This, Too:

- For Part II, have each small group draw a map of their community to include important landmarks and institutions (schools, hospitals, parks and others). Once completed, have each group make additions or changes to the map to represent what they would like their community to look like ideally. After, ask each group to explain the changes they made and discuss what problem or need these changes addressed.

- As another way of researching community issues, give each participant a disposable camera several weeks prior to the meeting with the instructions to take pictures that represent their community (instructions can be more specific, for example, take pictures that capture local issues). These photographs can then be used as another medium for the issues identification process.
- Have participants interview or survey adults and youth in their communities in order to get another perspective on local issues of importance. Look at the differences in opinion according to age, gender, race/ethnicity, class, etc.
- After the meeting, have the group organize an open forum for area teens to discuss issues and voice their opinions about what issues in the community most concern them. This feedback can help guide the group's focus.

**HANDOUT:**

# Common Community Issues

## Recreation

Lack of parks
Parks in disrepair
Need for recreation centers
Need for sports facilities
Lack of recreation programs
Lack of walking/biking paths

## Education and Health

School violence
Lack of textbooks
Drop-out rates
Truancy
Overcrowded schools
Poor test scores
Child abuse
Lack of child-care centers
Childhood illness
Teen parents
Pollution (air or water)

## Crime and Safety

Violent crime
Gangs
Drugs and alcohol
Theft
Police-community relations
Traffic accidents
Vandalism
Litter

## Economy

Youth unemployment
Lack of job training
Poverty
Homelessness

## Diversity

Hate crimes
Race relations
Gender issues
Age discrimination
Affirmative action issues

## Administration

Public transportation
Lack of sidewalks
Sidewalks in disrepair
Poor lighting on streets
Zoning problems
Abandoned buildings
Vacant lots
Tax or budget issues

## Other

(add you own ideas)

## ACTIVITY:

# *Cause and Effect*

***Description:***
Using identified community issues, youth will analyze the cause and effect of the issues. They will then brainstorm groups in the community that influence these issues.

***Participant Age:***
Ages 16–19

***Activity Objectives:***
The participants will:
- Brainstorm causes and effects of community issues.
- Identify interest groups for community issues.

***Learning and Life Skills:***
Critical Thinking; Planning/Organizing

***Materials, Equipment, Handouts:***
- Newsprint and markers
- Tape to display newsprint
- Sticky notes (three [3] different colors, and at least five [5] notes of each color per participant)

***Time:***
30–60 minutes, depending on discussion time

***Setting:***
Indoors, tables and chairs for all participants

Adapted with permission from "Cause-Effect Mapping," by Elizabeth Moore, in *Developing Community Leadership*, East Lansing: Michigan State University Extension, 2005.

## Procedure:

### Before the meeting:

- Review activity directions and materials.
- Make sure the group has already identified an issue or issues that it would like to focus on. If they previously created a list of issues, have this available for the activity.
- Tape a sheet of newsprint to the wall.

### During the meeting:

1. If the group has not yet narrowed their focus to one or two community issues, use the list of issues that they have generated, and have them select one or two issues to focus on. This can be done by voting or using dialogue to build consensus.
2. Write the issue at the top of the sheet of newsprint on the wall. Draw a vertical line down the middle of the newsprint dividing it into two columns. Label the first column "Causes" and the second "Effects."
3. Give each participant five same-color sticky notes, and ask them to brainstorm and write down causes of the chosen issue. Provide more sticky notes, if needed. When participants are finished, have them post the sticky notes on the newsprint under "Causes."
4. Ask what effects on the community this issue has, and repeat Step 3 for "Effects," using sticky notes of a second color.
5. Read through the responses for "Causes" and "Effects." Related responses should be grouped together. Once this is done, draw arrows connecting correlated causes and effects.
6. Pass out more sticky notes of a third color to participants, and ask what people or groups in the community influence these causes and effects? Who has the power and interest to do so? Write down people and groups on the sticky notes and post them next to the cause/effect that they influence. For guidance, suggest that participants think about community organizations, non-profit organizations, government officials, businesses, school groups and other groups.

## Reflection Activities and Ideas:

Have a group discussion and ask the following questions:
- What have we learned about this issue?
- How could we learn more about this issue?
- What can we do to address these causes?
- Who else in the community do we need to work with in order to effectively address this issue? (see Unit 5, "Taking Action" for a list of potential partners)

## Try This, Too:

- Invite a government official, employee of a non-profit organization, member of a community organization or member of the business community to attend the meeting and discuss issues and their causes and effects.
- Have participants do individual or group research projects on the issue and present their findings at the next group meeting. These research projects could also be used in presentations to government officials or community organizations.

# *UNIT 4: Local Government Knowledge*

Decisions are made every day that affect issues in our communities. While most of us are familiar with the people and the structure of the federal and state government, it is our local government that makes the majority of decisions that uniquely affect our communities.

Instruction in U.S. government and democracy – at the national, state and local levels – is an important part of increasing civic knowledge. American citizens should have an understanding of our government's structure, the powers and responsibilities of its different branches and levels, and how government influences and is influenced by the greater society. Knowledge of government helps us be politically engaged: the more knowledgeable we are, the more likely we are to grasp important political issues and be smart voters.

Learning about government is usually confined to the classroom. However, extracurricular programs are in a position to enrich this learning and bring government to life by engaging young people in simulations of democratic processes and procedures, and by using pertinent issues as vehicles for exploring how government works. Young people often see government as boring, distant and unrelated to themselves. A vital part of civic education is to demystify government. It shows young people that government is made up of real people and that the average American citizen is intimately involved in how governmental officials are chosen and how decisions are made. Exposing youth to the human side of politics – talking with elected officials, visiting government buildings, attending meetings – is a great way to make government more personal. Understanding government structure and processes allows us to see how the system works and how we can make a difference.

## Think local

Research has shown that high school students understand local government better than federal government, despite the lack of local government information in the formal school curriculum. At the local level, democracy comes to life. The people that we elect to lead our local government generally serve a much smaller constituency than federal and state leaders, and thus they are more accessible; they may even be people you regularly see in the community. These elected officials and many other appointed local government employees work to improve the quality of life in their districts by providing services and creating ordinances. And it is the responsibility of us, as citizens, to communicate with them our wants and needs. Working for change at the federal and state levels can be tiresome and long-term in nature, but at the local level, we can make our opinion heard by simply attending a governmental meeting and speaking face-to-face with decision makers.

**Principles of Citizenship:**

- ***Knowledge of Government***
- ***Public Policy***

Trying to understand local government can be confusing at first, given all of the different government units: counties, townships, cities, villages, school districts, intermediate school districts and special authorities all have different governing bodies and all have different powers and responsibilities. How can we sort all of this out? We can start by learning what local government units have jurisdiction over what issues. This way, we can use the issues that we are interested in to determine which government unit has the power to do something about those issues.

## Forming partnerships

Taking advantage of the relative accessibility of local government officials is a great way to increase understanding of how these government units work and to make your voice heard. Collaborating with local government officials *during the organization* of your group is an effective way to establish a working partnership. Many officials are excited about the opportunity to hear young people's opinions and concerns surrounding community issues and would be willing to support a youth group interested in citizenship. The following is an example of how one group formed such a partnership. (See Unit 5, "Taking Action" for other examples of partnerships.):

## Resources for local government knowledge

Association of Arkansas Counties. http://www.arcounties.org/.
Arkansas Municipal League. http://www.arml.org/.
Arkansas Secretary of State:
http://www.sos.arkansas.gov/educational/Pages/default.aspx.
http://www.sos.arkansas.gov/educational/Pages/StudentsTeachers.aspx.
The Butler Center for Arkansas Studies:
http://www.butlercenter.org/education/.
Arkansas History Hub: http://www.arhistoryhub.com/category/resource-type/lessons/#.
Hg.org Legal Resources: http://www.hg.org/arkansas-government.html.
University of Arkansas at Little Rock Institute of Government:
http://ualr.edu/iog/.
Arkansas House of Representatives: http://www.arkansashouse.org/about-the-house/information-resources.
Arkansas County & Municipal Information & Services:
http://www.local.arkansas.gov/index.php.
State & Local Government on the Net: http://www.statelocalgov.net/state-ar.cfm.
Guidebook for Municipal Officials of Mayor/Council Cities:
http://www.celdf.org/downloads/Arkansas%20-%20Guidebook%20for%20Municipal%20Officials%2007.pdf.

## References


Carnegie Corporation of New York and The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement. (2003). *The Civic Mission of Schools*. New York: Carnegie Corporation.

Flanagan, C.A, & Faison, N. (2001). Youth civic development: Implications for social policy and programs. *Social Policy Report, vol. xv, 1*.

Galston, W.A. (2001). Political knowledge, political engagement, and civic education. *Annual Review of Political Science, 4,* 217-234.

## ACTIVITY:

# *The "Invisible" Government*

***Description:***

Youth consider issues and problems of local relevance and use these to begin learning about the structure and processes of local government in Arkansas, including local government responsibilities and government officials. Youth then explore their own community to learn what services are provided and who the people are that make it run. This activity should be conducted after the group has completed the issues identification process in Unit 3, "Issues Identification."

***Participant Age:***

Ages 16–19

***Activity Objectives:***

The participants will:

- Understand the structure of local government.
- Understand the purposes and responsibilities of local government units.
- Connect local issues with local government departments and services.
- Become familiar with their own local government units and officials.

***Learning and Life Skills:***

Wise Use of Resources; Planning/Organizing

***Materials, Equipment, Handouts:***

- Handout: "What Does Local Government Do for You?"
- Three-ring binder for each participant with the following handouts inserted inside the binder:
  - Handout: "Understanding Local Government in Arkansas." Includes main page "What is Local Government" and the following: "Counties", "Responsibilities of county government" and "People in county government"
- Handout: "Common Community Issues"
- List of community issues that the group is interested in focusing on
- Handout: "Issues and Local Government"
- Notebook paper and writing utensils for all participants

***Time:***

2 ½ hours, broken up into three parts

***Setting:***

Indoors, tables and chairs to accommodate all participants

## Procedure:

### Before the meeting:

- Review activity directions and materials.
- Print one copy of "What Does Local Government Do for You?" for each participant.
- Print out, copy, and organize the handouts, "Understanding Local Government in Arkansas" (which includes the main page, "What is Local Government" and the following: "Counties," "Responsibilities of county government," and "People in county government") and also the handout, "Common Community Issues" into three-ring binders so that each participant receives one.
- Print one copy of "Issues and Local Government" for each participant.
- See Part III, step 2. If following option "c" in step 2, prepare a handout with information on your county government, including departments and/or commissions or get copies of your county directory from your county government.
- Make sure that the group has already identified which community issues it would like to focus on, and make sure the list is accessible.

### During the meeting:

## Part I

1. Ask the group what they think of when they hear the word "government." Take several responses. Responses will likely be in reference to state and federal government.
2. Explain to the group that today they are going to talk about local government. There is a government for your county, township and city or village, too, although it may not get as much attention as the state and federal government.
3. Distribute the "What Does Local Government Do for You?" handout. Explain that the items on the handout are services that are normally provided by units of local government, not state or federal government. As a group, read through each item on the list and ask participants to give examples of the service in their community or examples of problems associated with the item in their community.

## Reflection Activities and Ideas:

After the group has gone over each item, ask the following questions:

- Which of these services, or others, could be improved in your community?
- Where do the issues that you previously identified fit into this list?

## Part II

1. Distribute one three-ring binder (containing the handouts as described in the "Before the Meeting" procedure) to each participant. Explain that this binder contains information on the structure of local government in Arkansas and that they should keep this binder as a resource for the remainder of the group's meetings. Tell the group that it is important to understand the different units of local government and what each unit is responsible for in order to address an issue at the appropriate level. Go through the information on each of the units of government, answering any questions. (See "Try This, Too" section for fun ideas on how to reinforce participants' understanding of this information.)

## Part III

1. Explain to the group that they will use this information on local government to determine which unit of government deals with the issues and problems that they believe to be the most important in their community. Revisit the list of issues that the group is interested in focusing on. Have the group go through their list of issues and decide which unit of local government can address each issue. It may be that some issues are applicable to multiple units of local government. If the original list of issues is extensive, have the group narrow the list down to four or fewer issues. Distribute the handout "Issues and Local Government" and have the group work together to fill in the handout with their chosen issues and corresponding units of local government. Finally, have them fill in the name of the local government unit.

2. There are several options for this step:

   a. If computers are available, have participants work in pairs to research the web site for one of the local government units identified in step 1. Make sure each group has paper and a writing utensil. Instruct groups to pay particular attention to "departments" or "commissions" within each unit and to record these. Groups may record any other information that they find interesting.

   b. If computers are not available, instruct each participant to research the web site for one of the local government units identified in step 1 outside of the meeting. Instruct participants to pay particular attention to "departments" or "commissions" within each unit and to record these and bring them to the next meeting. Participants may record any other information that they find interesting.

c. If computers are not available, distribute the pre-prepared information on the county government and county government departments and/or your county directory. Give the group time to read through the information.

## Reflection Activities and Ideas:

Reconvene the larger group and have participants share the information they found interesting from Part III, step 2. Ask the following questions:

- What departments or commissions are in the local government unit(s) and what issues might they deal with?
- What department(s) might deal with the issues that we discussed in step 2?
- Do you think that there should be more departments to address more issues? Do you think that there should be fewer departments? What would be the benefit of having fewer departments?
- How does what you learned today help you to make decisions about getting involved with community issues? How does what you learned today relate to citizenship?

## Try This, Too:

- When preparing the three-ring binders for each participant, add information in the binder about the history of your particular county, township, city and/or village.

- After Part I, take a walk (30 to 60 minutes) with the group around the community, outside of the meeting place. Bring the "What Does Local Government Do for You?" handout. Have the group use the handout to identify real examples of local government services in the community (for example, parks, sidewalks, street lights, buses, libraries). If these services are not accessible by foot from the meeting place, it may be better to arrange a field trip at a later time to complete this activity.

- For Part II, invite a local government official (for example, county commissioner, county Extension director, city council member) to this meeting to introduce himself or herself, give a brief biography, and explain where he or she fits into the local government structure and what issues he or she works on. If possible, invite someone who works on an issue that the group identified as one they would like to focus on. The local official can also help field questions related to local government structure.
- After reviewing the information in the binders in Part II, make a game for participants to practice recalling facts about local government (for example, which units provide which services, names of government officials at each level). Use information from the "Understanding Local Government in Arkansas" handout to organize a game in the style of Jeopardy!, TRIVIAL PURSUIT® or Concentration. Break the group up into teams, or have participants compete individually. Provide prizes for the winner(s).

- At the conclusion of Part III, ask the group to identify one or more departments relevant to their issues of interest that they would like to visit. Arrange a field trip to this department building.

**HANDOUT:**

# What Does Local Government Do For You?

The list below reflects the types of problems we may all encounter at some point, or the services we may need.

## Services

1. Hospitals
2. Police and fire protection
3. Special education programs
4. Voter registration
5. Parking
6. Mental health counseling
7. Emergency medical services
8. Child custody, support and visitation
9. Street lights
10. Road maintenance
11. Public transportation (for example, buses, trains)
12. Parks
13. School buildings – use for community programs
14. Recreation programs for young people and adults
15. Juvenile detention or diversion
16. Sidewalks
17. Garbage pick-up/disposal
18. School curriculum
19. Libraries
20. Local fairs

These are all issues that can be addressed and services that can be provided by local government units. There are other issues and services that local government can address.

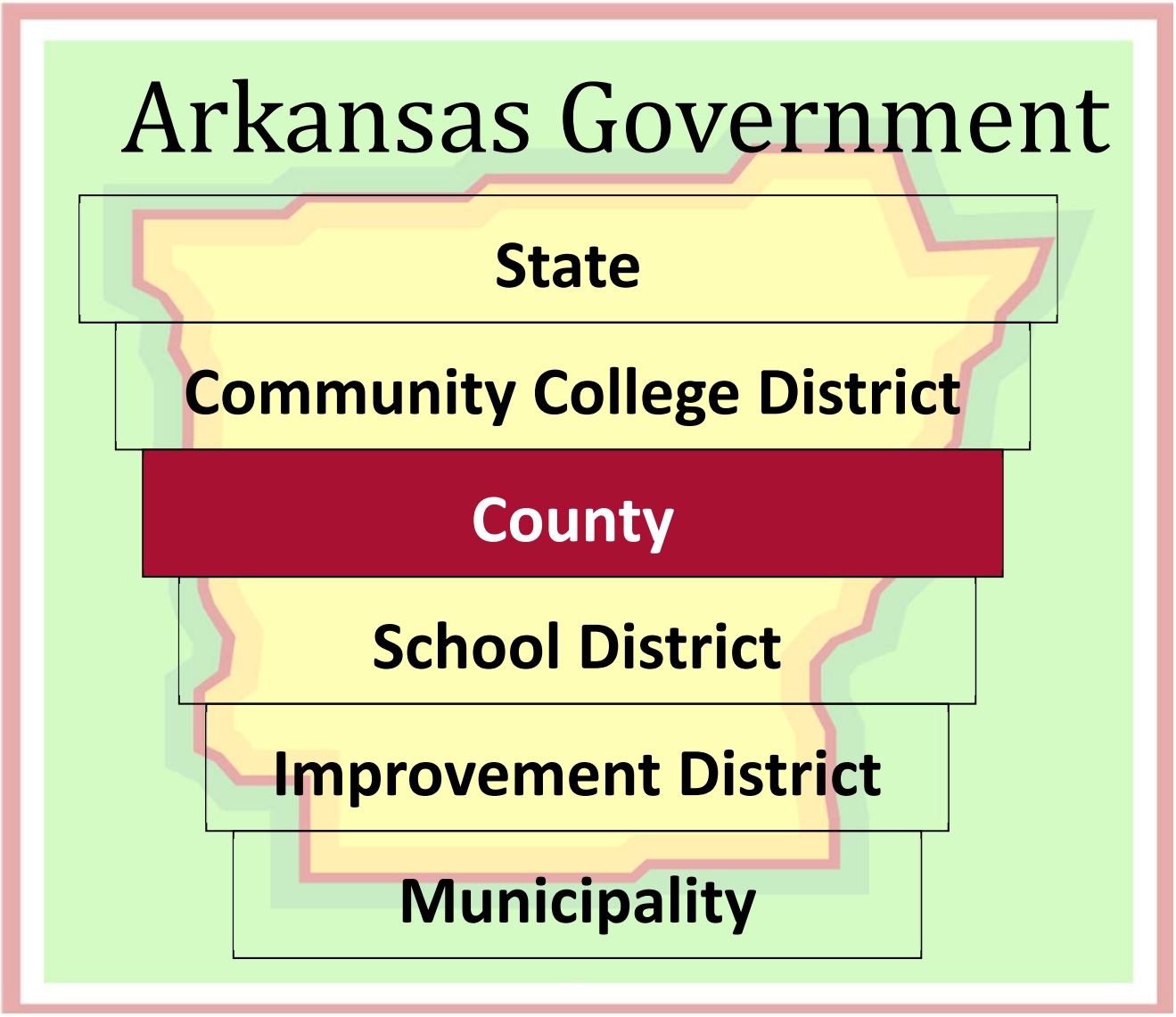
Adapted with permission from "What Does Local Government Do for You?" by Elizabeth Moore, in *Developing Community Leadership*, East Lansing: Michigan State University Extension, 2005.

**HANDOUT:**

# *Understanding Local Government in Arkansas*

## What is local government?

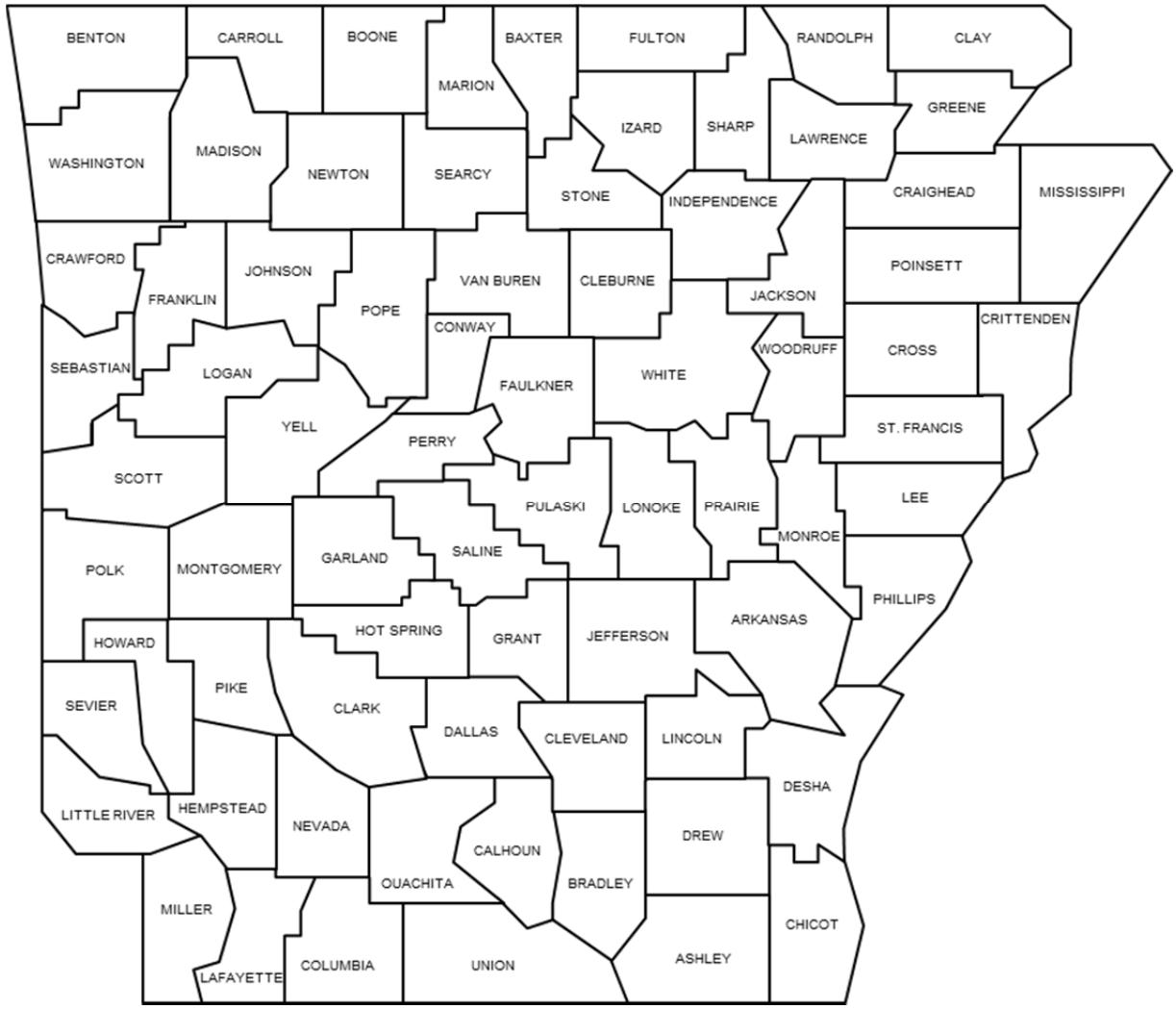
- Local government uses local tax money.
- Local government has a governing body usually composed of elected officials.



**HANDOUT: Understanding Local Government in Arkansas, continued**

# *Counties*

**There are 75 counties in Arkansas.**



# *Responsibilities of county government*

County governments only have the power to deal with issues that are related to the county. They cannot interfere with more local issues (for example, city sidewalks), nor can they influence state and national issues (for example, the Iraq War). County governments must also make sure that they follow all state laws.

## The following are some of the responsibilities of county governments and areas over which they have power:

Mandated services of county

- Administer justice through courts
- Law enforcement protection and custody of persons accused or convicted of crimes
- Real and personal property tax administration
- Court and public records administration

Non-mandated services of county

- Agricultural
- Community and rural development
- Emergency
- Human
- Solid waste
- Transportation
- Water, sewer and other utility

These responsibilities are usually carried out by **departments** in the county government. Many of the responsibilities listed above have a specific department created for their execution. Not every county has the same departments. Some examples of county government departments are the road department, sanitation department, health department and the sheriff's department.

# *People in county government*

The governing body of Arkansas Counties are called the **Quorum Court**. The Quorum Court members are elected by the people of the county. The size of the Quorum Court depends on the population of the county; the smallest Quorum Court in Arkansas has nine members and the largest has 15 members. The Quorum Court serves the following functions:

- Levy on taxes
- Appropriation of funds
- Preserve peace, order and freedom from dangerous activities
- Contract or join with other governments
- Restructure elected office with voter approval
- Fix number and compensation of county and employees
- Fix number and compensation of county officers within state determined range
- Fill vacancies in elected offices
- Provide for services relating to county affairs
- Exercise powers necessary for effective administration

**Other elected county officials include:**

- County Judge
- Sherriff
- County Clerk
- Circuit Clerk
- Collector
- Assessor
- Treasurer
- Coroner*
- Surveyor*

*Not all counties have; usually part time

**HANDOUT:**

# Common Community Issues

## Recreation

Lack of parks
Parks in disrepair
Need for recreation centers
Need for sports facilities
Lack of recreation programs
Lack of walking/biking paths

## Education and Health

School violence
Lack of textbooks
High drop-out rates
Truancy
Overcrowded schools
Poor test scores
Child abuse
Lack of child-care centers
Childhood illness
Teen parents
Pollution (air or water)

## Crime and Safety

Violent crime
Gangs
Drugs and alcohol
Theft
Police-community relations
Traffic accidents
Vandalism
Litter

## Economy

Youth unemployment
Lack of job training
Poverty
Homelessness

## Diversity

Hate crimes
Race relations
Gender issues
Age discrimination
Affirmative action issues

## Administration

Public transportation
Lack of sidewalks
Sidewalks in disrepair
Poor lighting on streets
Zoning problems
Abandoned buildings
Vacant lots
Tax or budget issues

## Other

(add you own ideas)

**HANDOUT:**

# *Issues and Local Government*

1. **ISSUE:** _____

   **Corresponding unit(s) of local government:**

   _____

   **Name of local government unit** (for example, county name):

   _____

2. **ISSUE:** _____

   **Corresponding unit(s) of local government:**

   _____

   **Name of local government unit** (for example, county name):

   _____

3. **ISSUE:** _____

   **Corresponding unit(s) of local government:**

   _____

   **Name of local government unit** (for example, county name):

   _____

4. **ISSUE:** _____

   **Corresponding unit(s) of local government:**

   _____

   **Name of local government unit** (for example, county name):

   _____

## ACTIVITY:

# *Behind-the-Scenes of Local Government*

### *Description:*

Youth learn about local government structure by visiting a city or county government building (for example, county courthouse, county jail, city hall). There, youth have a guided tour of the building and meet with local government officials to better understand how a department of local government runs and who the individuals are that make it run. Youth will identify what issues and problems this department of local government addresses and examine what strategies are employed to do so. This activity should be conducted after an introduction to local government structure.

### *Participant Age:*

Ages 13–19

### *Activity Objectives:*

The participants will:

- Visit and understand the function of a local government department.
- Examine public policies.
- Interview a local government employee.

### *Learning and Life Skills:*

Cooperation; Social Skills

### *Materials, Equipment, Handouts:*

- Informational materials about the department that the group visits. These materials should be obtained from the department itself, prior to the meeting.
- Handout: "Interview Questions for Local Government Site Visit"
- Handout: "Local Government Department Information"

### *Time:*

90–120 minutes

### *Setting:*

On-site at a local government facility

## Procedure:

### Before the meeting:

- Review activity directions and materials.
- Print one copy of the "Interview Questions for Local Government Site Visit" handout and one copy of the "Local Government Department Information" handout for each participant. Print extra copies of "Interview Questions for Local Government Site Visit" for the local government department contact person and interviewee.
- Two options:
  a. Choose a local government department to visit. The department's work should be relevant to the issues that the group is interested in.
  b. At the end of a prior meeting, allow the group to identify a local government department to visit. The department's work should be relevant to the issues that the group is interested in (see Try This, Too section of "The Invisible Government" activity).
- Contact (preferably in person) the chosen local government department at least one week in advance to schedule a guided visit. Identify the department officials that you would like to meet and the specific features of the facility you would like to see while there. Arrange to interview at least one department official. Follow up with the department contact person and the interviewee immediately prior to the visit for confirmation.
- Ask the local government department contact person to provide informational materials about the department's responsibilities, activities, structure and other important topics of interest to the group. These should be obtained prior to the day of the visit. Make sure there are enough copies for all participants.
- Provide the local government department contact person and interviewee with a copy of the "Interview Questions for Local Government Site Visit" handout prior to the day of the visit. Inform them that these are the types of questions about which the group will inquire. The specific questions may differ from those on the handout.
- Arrange transportation for all participants to the department facility.

## During the meeting:

1. Tell participants that today they will learn more about how local government addresses one (or more) of the issues that they identified by visiting a local government department. Remind the group that the purpose of local government is to provide services that people in the community want. There are a few services that are mandatory – that is, the local government is required by state law to provide them – but most services are non-mandatory and can be added, removed or changed.
2. Revisit the issues that the group identified as important and the local government departments that may address these issues. Explain that the group will visit one of these departments today and they should observe what the department does, how it operates, who the people are that make it run, and so forth. Tell the group to pay particular attention to how the department addresses (or does not address) the issue(s) that the group has identified.
3. Distribute the informational materials on the local government department. Give the group a few minutes to look over these materials individually. Help them with any questions. After about five minutes, ask the group what it appears the department does. What questions do they still have after reading these materials?
4. Distribute one "Interview Questions for Local Government Site Visit" handout to each participant, and give the group a minute to read over the questions. After, ask the group what questions they would add to the list. Remind the group that they must be polite and respectful of the government officials – keep this in mind when generating new questions. Have the group generate up to five new questions and ask participants to volunteer to ask specific questions so that each question is accounted for.
5. Distribute one "Local Government Department Information" handout to each participant, and instruct the group to take notes on the responses that they get and also of any observations they make of the facility.
6. Transport the group to the local government department facility.
7. Take the guided tour as arranged prior to the meeting. Make sure to save time at the end of the tour to interview the designated official.

## Try This, Too:

- If transportation to the site midway through the activity is problematic, the entire meeting can occur on-site at the local government facility. If so, it is preferable to have an adequate meeting area for pre- and post-activity discussion. If this is not feasible, try conducting the pre-activity discussion during a preceding meeting and the post-activity discussion during a subsequent meeting.
- Let participants choose their own local government department to visit, either individually or in small groups. Explain to participants what steps they must follow to plan the visit, and have them organize the visit themselves. Participants should generate a prepared list of interview questions to be answered during the visit. Afterwards, have participants talk about their visit with the group and explain what they learned.
- Repeat the activity for other local government departments, if there is interest.

## Reflection Activities and Ideas:

Ask the group the following reflection questions:

1. What did you learn about local government based on your tour of the facility?
2. What services does the local government department that you visited provide?
3. What services do you think the department should add, remove or improve on?

**HANDOUT:**

# Interview Questions for Local Government Site Visit

1. Please give your name, title, department and the local government for which you work.

   _____

2. What are the responsibilities of your job?

   _____

3. What are the responsibilities of your department?

   _____

4. How long have you held this position?

   _____

5. What is the most difficult aspect of your job?

   _____

6. Are the services provided by your department mandatory or non-mandatory? Which are mandatory? Which are non-mandatory?

   _____

7. Our group has expressed interest in the issue of

   _____.

   Does your department address this issue? How?

   _____

8. Speak about your department's view of the importance of the issue of

   _____.

9. How has this issue evolved or gotten to the point that it is now?

   _____

10. What advice would you give to our group for addressing the issue of

    _____?

**HANDOUT:**

# *Local Government Department Information*

**Department responsibilities/services provided:**

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

**Department employees (titles):**

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

**Notes:**

_____

_____

_____

_____

# *UNIT 5: Taking Action*

Responsible citizenship requires an attitude of caring for the common good; it requires an understanding of community issues; and it requires knowledge of local government. But why do we need these attitudes, knowledge and skills? To what end? The goal is community improvement, and to begin working to improve our communities, we have to marshal all these attitudes, knowledge and skills to take action.

## Community service or public policy?

In general, there are two ways to begin looking at how to take action on a community issue: engaging in community service projects or influencing public policy. Community service involves an organized effort to improve an aspect of one's community. Examples of community service projects include working at a soup kitchen, cleaning up a neighborhood park or organizing an after-school club. These projects are designed to address a specific need of the community in which they are carried out. Today, young people are engaged in volunteer activities more than ever; and, when effective, community service has the potential to improve the image of youth in their communities, broaden the perspectives of young people and make real changes in the community.

A public policy is essentially a decision, most often made by public officials, the outcome of which affects the communities that they serve. Examples of public policies include city bus schedules, local curfew ordinances and decisions of how to spend public funds. Influencing public policy is another way to make improvements in the community. In this way, young people can advise public leaders to provide a youth perspective. However, this avenue of change is comparatively underused by young people. Two ways to influence public policy are writing a petition and writing a policy brief. These two documents provide a space for citizens to inform and persuade public officials regarding issues of interest. Petitions can be used to influence public policy by demonstrating to decision-makers that there is public support for a particular action on an issue. The goals of the policy brief are to provide an outline of a community issue to underscore its importance and to put forth recommendations as to how to approach this issue from a policy standpoint. Guides for writing a petition and a policy brief can be found at the end of this unit.

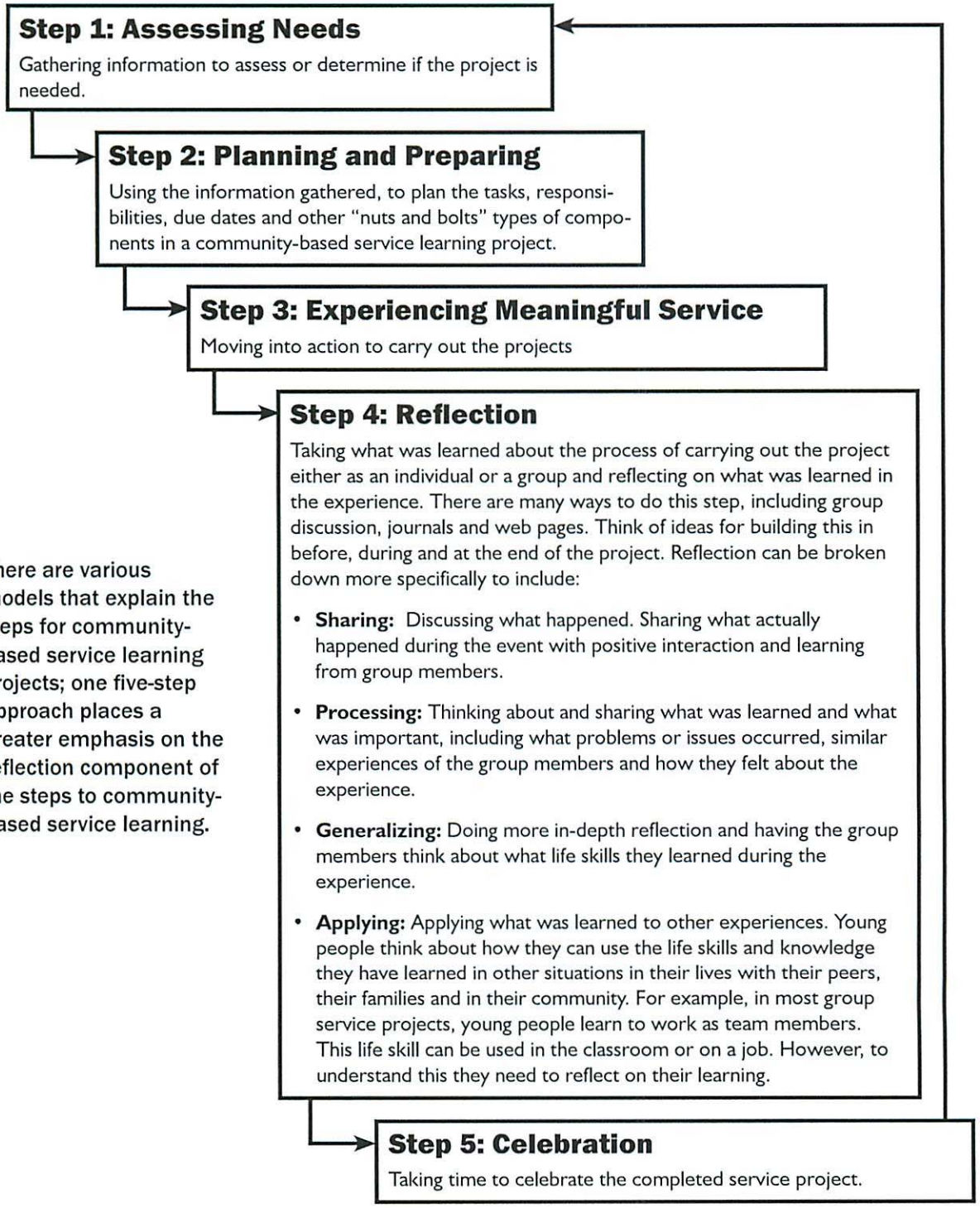
**Principles of Citizenship:**

- ***Community-Based Service Learning***
- ***Public Policy***

## Not "either-or" but "both-and"

While young people are volunteering at a high rate – as mentioned above – their voter participation is low; they are less interested in public issues; and their political and civic knowledge are lacking. This indicates that community service alone may not be sufficient in teaching youth to be participatory citizens. To truly foster good citizenship, exposure to public policy issues and thinking about the "big picture" should be incorporated into youth activities. Community service is designed to address a specific community problem, but in order to fully understand and address that problem, knowledge of governmental structure and public policy is necessary. For example, volunteering in a soup kitchen may help the homeless in the short term, but to effectively explore the issue of poverty and homelessness in the community, the issue must be examined at a bigger level – the policy level. Avenues for influencing public decision-making include writing petitions and policy briefs, public education and advocacy campaigns, nonviolent public demonstrations, resource development, attending local government meetings and voting. By influencing public policy, we address the foundation of public issues and work to make lasting change.

# Five-Step Community-Based Service Learning Model




There are various models that explain the steps for community-based service learning projects; one five-step approach places a greater emphasis on the reflection component of the steps to community-based service learning.

## Adult partnerships

A key part of connecting youth with the political process is forming relationships with adult groups who have an interest in their particular cause. The reasons for such partnerships are threefold. First, by successfully working with adults, youth have the opportunity to transform their image in the eyes of adults into one of capable, responsible citizens with an important voice to be heard. Second, a respectful working relationship between adults and youth can serve to instill a greater degree of confidence in young people regarding civil society, and the adults with whom they work can be strong positive role models. Third, the potential to achieve one's goals is substantially increased by teaming up with likeminded people, and by working with other groups, youth will be more likely to see results and effect change.

Relationships with other groups should be actively cultivated. Once we know what our issue is and what our goal is, it is important to explore what organizations are similarly working toward that goal. Inviting members of such organizations to speak at meetings or, likewise, attending their meetings is an effective way to reach out to likeminded groups.

Here are some adult groups that may be valuable partners in working on your issue:

- **School and teachers' associations —** to discuss the importance of highlighting community issues, citizenship and civic engagement in the formal curriculum;

- **Community groups, including faith-based groups —** to collaborate on addressing issues and problems through local action;

- **Non-profit organizations —** to learn more about public issues and/or engage in service. Many large non-profits have regional offices that may be active in your area. Non-profits can also be great resources for information regarding social issues.

- **Local and community media (TV, radio, newspaper and other media) —** to encourage them to give attention to community issues, in general, and your project, in particular.

- **Government officials and elected representatives —** to help address local issues at a public policy level.

- **The business community —** to learn how businesses are civically engaged, what issues they support, and how you may be able to cooperate.

***A non-profit organization is an organization whose objective is to support a public or private issue without concern for monetary profit. Non-profits are engaged in a wide range of areas: social issues, education, healthcare, politics, sports & others. Some examples of non-profits are the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the Red Cross and Goodwill Industries.***

## Resources

Michigan 4-H Youth Development's *YEA! Youth Experiencing Action: A Community Service Learning Guide* (4H1553) is a free online resource guide for planning and executing service learning projects. Download the curriculum at:
http://4h.msue.msu.edu/resources/yea

The San Francisco Department of Public Health's *Community Action Model Curriculum* is an excellent web-based resource for taking action. The content is specific to issues of public health, but the form of the activities can be applied to any domain of interest. The web address is:
https://www.sfdph.org/dph/includes/gSearch2.asp?q=community+action+model+curriculum&btnG=&entqr=0&ud=1&sort=date%3AD%3AL%3Ad1&output=xml_no_dtd&oe=UTF-8&ie=UTF-8

Specific activities from the Community Action Model Curriculum that are relevant to taking action are:

- "Spectrum of Prevention," which details potential approaches to taking action: https://www.sfdph.org/dph/files/CAMdocs/Step_4/spectrum%20of%20prev/Spectrum%20Prevention%20complete.pdf

- "Using the Media for Advocacy," which contains information about effecting change via the media: https://www.sfdph.org/dph/files/CAMdocs/Step_4/media%20advocacy/mediaadvocacy%20complete.pdf

The Innovation Center for Community and Youth Development at http://www.theinnovationcenter.org has a variety of resources on the subject of youth and civic activism. Included are profiles of successful youth activism projects that can serve as effective models for new projects.

# References


Carnegie Corporation of New York and The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement. (2003). *The Civic Mission of Schools*. New York: Carnegie Corporation.

Flanagan, C., & Van Horn, B. (2003). Youth civic development: A logical next step in community youth development. In F.A. Villarruel, D.F. Perkins, L.M. Borden, & J.G. Keith (Eds.), *Community youth development: Programs, policies, and practices* (pp. 273-296). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Killian, E., Donohue, G., Garner, L.P., & Henderson, D. (n.d.). Promoting your 4-H Afterschool program. In M. Kroll (Ed.), *Designing workforce preparation programs: A guide for reaching elementary and middle school youth after school* (pp. 44-46). Chevy Chase, MD: 4-H Afterschool.

Mohamed, I.A., & Wheeler, W. (2001). Broadening the bounds of youth development: Youth as engaged citizens. Chevy Chase, MD: The Innovation Center for Community and Youth Development and The Ford Foundation.

## ACTIVITY:

# *Board Meeting*

***Description:***
By attending a meeting of the local governing body at the county or city level, youth learn how the local government public policy process works. This activity should be performed after the group has decided what issue(s) it wants to focus on. The meeting they attend will be determined by which unit of government has jurisdiction over the chosen issue(s).

***Participant Age:***
Ages 13–19

***Activity Objectives:***
The participants will:
- Attend a meeting of a local governing body (for example, county board of commissioners).
- Learn how public policy is made at the local level.

***Learning and Life Skills:***
Responsible Citizenship; Decision Making; Cooperation

***Materials, Equipment, Handouts:***

- Handout: "Public Policy"
- Handout: "Local Government Decision-Making Process"

***Time:***
Varies according to length of meeting. Allow 20 minutes before and after the meeting for introducing the activity and debriefing.

***Setting:***
Site of local government meeting

## Procedure:

### Before the meeting:

- Review activity directions and materials.
- Print enough copies of the following handouts for each participant: "Local Government Decision-Making Process" and "Public Policy."
- Determine with the group the unit of government that has jurisdiction over the issue(s) that they are interested in.
- Contact the administrator's office for the unit of government that the group has selected. This contact information can be found on the internet or in a local phone book. Make arrangements for the group to attend a meeting of the legislative body for that unit of government (for example, county board of commissioners, school board).

### During the meeting:

1. Either immediately before attending the legislative body meeting or at a previous date, gather the group together to introduce the activity.
2. Explain to the group that they will be attending a meeting of the legislative body of the unit of local government that deals with the issue(s) they have identified. Explain to the group that one way to take action on an issue is to influence public policy. Distribute the handout, "Public Policy," and give the group a moment to read it over. Ask the group to give examples of public policy. If the group is primarily speaking of federal and state policies, ask them to think about some examples of local policies, too.
3. Ask the group what they know about how decisions are made in the federal and state governments (for example, how bills become laws). Tell them that one of the purposes of attending the legislative meeting is to see how decisions are made in local government units.
4. Distribute the handout, "Local Government Decision-Making Process." Explain to the group that this handout can be used to help them understand the decision-making process of the legislative body. Ask them to take notes at the meeting, focusing on (a) how ideas are introduced and who introduces them, (b) how ideas are discussed or debated, (c) how decisions are made on issues and who makes them and (d) how decisions are implemented or put into action. Ask participants to fill in the handout and keep it for future reference.
5. Attend the legislative body meeting of the chosen local government unit.

## Reflection Activities and Ideas:

Ask the group the following reflection questions:

1. What are your thoughts on how decisions are made in this government unit?
2. How can a citizen advocate for change through this government unit?
3. What concrete steps must a citizen take to influence decision making?
4. Why is it important for a citizen to understand the policy-making process in his or her community?
5. How is influencing policy different from doing community service?

## Try This, Too:

- Ask a local government official to join your group to explain how decisions are made at the local level (steps 3 and 4 in the above procedure). This official can also give examples of specific policies that have been enacted.
- A recommended extension of this activity is to engage the group in writing policy proposals – either individually or as a whole – using the knowledge and experience that they gained from attending the legislative meeting to inform the writing process. If possible, give the group the opportunity to advocate for their drafted proposals to the legislative body of the appropriate unit of local government. This can be accomplished either by arranging for the group (or select members) to attend another legislative meeting or by arranging for local government officials to meet with the group in an unofficial context.
- If the group writes policy proposals around identified issues, organize the proposals into a professional-looking publication. Ideas of what to include in the publication are: information about the group and group members, activities in which the group has participated, the process by which the group identified key issues and problems in their community, the group's vision for their community, research the group has done on key issues and recommendations the group has for how to approach key issues and problems in the community.

**HANDOUT:**

# Public Policy

**pol • i • cy** – *noun* - a definite course or method of action selected from among alternatives and in light of given conditions to guide and determine present and future decisions.

-Merriam-Webster's On-line Dictionary

"Public policy is a combination of basic decisions, commitments, and actions made by those who hold authority or affect government decisions. The policy-making process weighs and balances public values."

"Formally adopted policy generally takes the form of a governing principle, plan, or course of action. In the public sector it generally evolves from a deliberative process, and is adopted by an ordinance or resolution. Legislative bodies make public policy decisions; others perform the administrative task of implementing those policies. The decisions could be the adoption of a vision for the community, a comprehensive plan, a budget, or a policy relating to a specific issue, such as allowing or prohibiting local gambling activities."

-Municipal Research & Services Center of Washington. (1999). *Local government policy-making process*. Seattle, WA: Author. Retrieved July 9, 2007, from *http://mrsc.org/Publications/polmakpro.pdf*

**HANDOUT:**

# *Local Government Decision-Making Process*

**How are ideas introduced and who introduces them?**

**How are ideas discussed or debated?**

**How are decisions made on issues and who decides?**

**How are decisions implemented and put into action?**

**GUIDE:**

# Writing a Petition

Petitions can be used to influence public policy by demonstrating to decision-makers that there is public support for a particular action on an issue. The right to petition is one of the five freedoms guaranteed in the First Amendment of the Bill of Rights. A petition includes a statement of purpose, or what the petition hopes to achieve. This includes a clear description of the issue at hand, as well as what you would like to see done about the issue. The second part of the petition is a list of names, addresses and signatures of people in the community who support the purpose of the petition. This is a way of communicating to public officials the wants and needs of the communities that they serve. Naturally, the more signatures on the petition (and the number of signers of voting age), the more likely it is to influence the decision-making of public officials.

The process of getting signatures must be a resourceful one. Signatures can come from members of the group sponsoring the petition, members of community organizations that have a mission similar to your group, members of your school or family or even passers-by on the street. Be creative about finding signers for your petition, and remember – the more, the better.

***(The following sample petition form can be used as a guide for writing petitions concerning the issues in which a group is interested.)***

## Sample Petition Form

_____
(TITLE OF PETITION)

A petition of _____
*(Name of group or individual sponsor of the petition)*

Addressed to _____
*(Name of official or group for whom the petition is intended)*

We, the undersigned would like to bring to your attention the following issue, with recommendations:

_____
*(Statement of the petition: Briefly state the issue and your group's recommendations for addressing the issue.)*

_____

Agreed upon by the following individuals:

| | ***Name*** | ***Address*** | ***Signature*** |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | John Doe | 123 Main St., Anytown | John Doe |
| 2. | | | |
| 3. | | | |
| 4. | | | |
| 5. | | | |

(Add as many lines as necessary)

**GUIDE:**

# Writing a Policy Brief

***(The following handout can be used by the group as a guide for writing and presenting policy proposals – or "briefs" – concerning the issues in which they are interested.)***

The policy brief should be written with local decision makers as the intended audience. The goals of the brief are to provide an outline of a community issue to underscore its importance and to put forth recommendations as to how to approach this issue from a policy standpoint. That is, the brief should try to convince decision makers to reevaluate how their unit of government is addressing a problem. Writing the brief will draw on knowledge, attitudes and skills developed during the previous units.

The brief should be short, concise, practical and persuasive. You probably have a lot to say about the issue, but you will have to make your comments to-the-point. Remember that you are not debating, but rather educating decision makers so that they might make an informed decision on this issue and take action on it.

## Use the following format when writing a policy brief:

1. **Title of the paper.** The title of the brief should be catchy and compel the reader to continue reading.
2. **What is the issue or the problem?** The first part of the brief is to clearly state the issue to be addressed. Be clear and concise.
3. **Why is it important?** This is an opportunity to explain why you have chosen the issue at hand. What makes it important? It is helpful here to include specific information and statistics about the issue to support your case. Testimonials from the community are also valuable. You need to show here that you have done your research. It will help to revisit concepts from Unit 2, "Diversity and Inclusion" and Unit 3, "Issues Identification."
4. **How did the problem get this way?** Include background information about the problem. Give a brief history of how the issue has evolved. This requires research and interviewing of people familiar with the issue. Again, activities from the "Issues Identification" unit can help to provide this information.
5. **What are the different views on this issue?** Present all sides of the issue here, and don't be one-sided. Use what you have learned from researching the issue and what you have heard from people in the community. Brainstorm other possible viewpoints on the issue, as well. Here the idea is to show that you are aware of various perspectives, and that you have considered these perspectives in thinking about how to deal with the problem.
6. **Present recommendations.** This is your chance to present your ideas for how the issue should be addressed. What changes in action or strategy should the decision makers consider? "Should" is the key word here; these recommendations should be persuasive and supported with reasons for why this is the best course of action. Provide specific, practical steps for how your solution can be achieved. Be confident. Stand up for what you believe in, and make your point convincingly!
7. **References and further reading.** Add an extra page that cites the sources that you consulted in researching the issue. You can also provide citations to books, articles, websites, etc. that you would recommend for finding further information on the issue.

## Presenting

Two means for sharing a policy proposal with decision makers are to schedule an appointment with a local government official or to attend a local government meeting. The first step is to determine which officials or which governmental bodies have jurisdiction over your issue, that is, figure out who has the power to make the changes that you are seeking.

If you elect to make an appointment with an official, look for his or her contact information either online or in the phone book, and schedule an appointment; it may be easier if multiple members of your group attend. During the appointment, politely present your policy proposal and be prepared to answer any questions the official may have. At the conclusion of the meeting, ask for a commitment from the official to support your proposal.

If you elect to attend a local government meeting, call the administrator's office of the local government unit to determine the date of the next meeting and to get your group on the agenda for the meeting. At the meeting, present – individually or as a group – your policy brief and be prepared to answer questions from the audience.

## GUIDE: Writing a Policy Brief, continued

# Sample Policy Brief

### HEALTH IS WORTH MORE THAN LEARNING: RESTRICTING VENDING MACHINES IN DISTRICT SCHOOLS

Childhood and adolescent obesity are serious public health concerns both in our nation and in our community. Obesity is associated with heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes and arthritis. Vending machines in schools provide young people easy access to unhealthy, high-calorie foods and drinks; and they send the message that the school approves of these eating habits.

The vending machines at the schools in our district contain candy, chips, cookies, soft drinks and other sugary and fatty foods. There are few healthy alternatives for students. Indeed, a recent national study showed that 71% of purchases that students make at school vending machines are sodas and other sugar-sweetened drinks. This is consistent with our school district, too. In one district high school, 80% of the drinks in vending machines are sugary drinks (soda, juice with less than 50% juice, sports drinks) and 90% of the foods are candy, cookies, chips, snack cakes or pastries. This is having a negative effect on students' health. One local pediatrician said: "We see an alarming number of young people here with weight problems and the negative health consequences that come with it." Students take health classes as part of their curriculum in which they learn about healthy diets, but in school they are surrounded by unhealthy food options.

District schools began installing vending machines in the late 1980s. Since then childhood obesity has become a bigger and bigger issue. Presently, 20% to 30% of American children are overweight or at risk of becoming so. The schools have a contract with commercial vendors; in exchange for letting the vendors set up vending machines in the schools, the vendors pay a fixed fee to the school for using the space. A local high school official claimed that this year his school received approximately $10,000 in contracts with vendors.

Schools naturally value this additional money, particularly in these times of financial hardship for area schools. Every little bit counts, and $10,000, for example, goes a long way toward taking some pressure off of school administrators. Students, too, value their autonomy. Few teenagers want to be told that they cannot eat junk food. One district high school student remarked, "We're old enough to decide for ourselves if we want to eat candy and drink soda; taking vending machines out of schools won't stop us from getting these things." But there is a difference between actively blocking students' access to junk food versus promoting it by setting up vending machines in their learning environment. It is the school's responsibility to teach young people about healthy lifestyles, including healthy eating habits. A school can't stop young people from buying unhealthy foods in their communities, but it can take care of business in their own building, by promoting foods that are consistent with their health curricula. This sends a message to young people that schools are serious about students' health.

It is imperative that the school district rise up to meet the challenge of childhood and adolescent obesity by eliminating unhealthy food items from school vending machines. Many states have taken action to provide healthy vending machine alternatives to students. California, for example, has limited the sale of soft drinks in schools. If our district is serious about the health of its students, it needs to take similar measures. A ban on soft drinks and high sugar- and fat-content foods should be instated. Also, healthier food options should be given to students in school vending machines, such as baked chips, trail mix, fruit and cereal bars, water, 100% juice and soy milk. The added funds from vendor contracts are not worth our students' health. Besides, taking a preventative approach to student health would save significant money in health care costs for area families. With this money saved, the district could consider a millage to raise funds depleted by loss of vendor contracts. In any sense, our schools need to take leadership in ensuring a healthy future for our youth. Eliminate junk food; provide healthy alternatives.

## References and further reading:

Hellmich, N. (2004, May 12). School vending rated as junk. *USA Today*. Retrieved August 28, 2007, from *http://www.usatoday.com/news/health/2004-05-11-vending-machines_x.htm*

# UNIT 6: Finishing Strong

Reflection at the conclusion of a civic engagement project is a vital part of the learning experience for young people. It is also one of the most forgotten parts of the experience! By reflecting on their participation in a citizenship and civic engagement program, young people are more likely to truly incorporate the competencies and lessons they have learned.

## Last but not least

This post-program reflection and sharing process also serves as an evaluation to measure what has been learned through the experience of being an active and engaged citizen. Having young people share their conceptions of citizenship before and after participating in citizenship and civic engagement activities helps reinforce their learning. In this curriculum, the activity "What Is Citizenship?" in unit 1 is a great opportunity to assess youth participants' ideas of citizenship prior to engaging in intentional learning experiences; the definitions of citizenship that participants produce can be saved and used as a comparison for post-program definitions. The following are some ways to evaluate post-program learning, provided by the Points of Light Foundation:

- **Journals –** This is among the most traditional forms of reflection. Ask participants to keep a journal of their experiences in the program, writing entries at intervals (for example, after every group meeting). Try using prompts for journal entries to which participants can respond, such as specific questions, hot issues or topics, readings or quotations. Another variation on the individual journal is a "team journal," in which participants respond to one another's entries.
- **Discussion groups –** Assemble all the youth that participated in the program into a large circle. Prepare a series of reflection questions to facilitate a discussion between members. Other ideas include inviting a government, non-profit or community representative to join and/or facilitate the discussion; having youth participants take turns leading the discussion and using media articles about the broader issue that the group addressed to stimulate "big-picture" discussion. Consider videotaping the discussion to share with others.
- **Skits –** Split the participants into groups of three or four and ask each group to portray their experience through a skit. Give each group 10 minutes to plan what they will do and up to five minutes to share their skit with the rest of the group. After each group's skit have the whole group process reactions, give suggestions for effective future projects and give positive feedback to the actors.
- **Photographic journal or poster –** Individually or in groups, have participants take photographs documenting what they learned and accomplished. They can make a poster with the photos to represent and share what they have learned and accomplished throughout the course of the program.
- **Documentary –** If you have access to video equipment, have the group create a documentary that captures some of their activities during the program and also includes interviews with participants and community members in which they reflect on their experience.
- **Web site –** Have participants create a web site on which they can display information and things learned from the program. Many young people have the skills to put information up online, and there are a variety of services that help with web site creation.

## Spreading the word

Just as it is important for young people to reflect on their experiences in becoming engaged citizens, it is equally important for them to share what they have learned and accomplished with others. Promoting a group's activities and experiences is a source of pride for youth participants, and it can help attract support from the government, academic and business communities. Furthermore, educating others about activities related to civic engagement is a form of civic engagement in itself. Letting other young people and their parents know how to get involved can start a positive cycle of continued civic learning and practice. A democracy is only as strong as the citizens that make it up, so the more young people learning to be engaged citizens, the brighter our future. Sharing the products of the

group's reflection process is a great way to spread the word. Here are some other ideas:

- **Draft a news release** documenting your activities and accomplishments and send it to local newspaper, newsletters and community web sites. Smaller publications, such as school, community and business newsletters are good targets that may be looking for stories.
- **Participate in community events** such as art shows, food festivals, farmers markets or parades. These are good venues for youth to share their experiences with others.
- **Contact radio and television stations** to pitch the group's program as a news story.
- **Give presentations** at community, school, government and business group meetings. This is also an excellent way to reach out to these groups as partners.

## Celebration

After all the hard work is done, celebration is in order. Organizing a social event or a ceremony to recognize and celebrate the accomplishments of responsible young citizens is a way to conclude a project or program on a high note and reinforce positive feelings about being engaged in the community. Whenever possible, youth participants themselves should be involved in planning such a celebration – they are the experts! Providing music and food are typically good ways to add to the ambiance. Another great way to recognize young people is to furnish certificates for the completion of the project or program. This creates a source of pride and underlines the value of being a responsible citizen.

## References

Killian, E., Donohue, G., Garner, L.P., & Henderson, D. (2007). Promoting your 4-H Afterschool program. In Kroll, M. (Ed.), *Designing workforce preparation programs: A guide for reaching elementary and middle school youth after school* (pp. 44-46). Chevy Chase, MD: 4-H Afterschool.

Points of Light Foundation. (2002, December 3). *Communities as places of learning: Developing effective community-based service learning programs.* Paper presented at Points of Light Foundation Training, Traverse City, MI.

## ACTIVITY:

# *Put on Your Reflecting Cap*

***Description:***
At the conclusion of the group's activities, participants carry out a reflection project – either in groups or individually – to reinforce what they have learned and accomplished in the course of their experience in learning and practicing citizenship and civic engagement.

***Participant Age:***
Ages 13–19

***Activity Objectives:***
The participants will:
- Plan a reflection activity to document and share their experiences.
- Present their reflections to the group and/or the public.

***Learning and Life Skills:***
Critical Thinking; Service Learning; Planning/Organizing

***Materials, Equipment, Handouts:***
- Handout: "Reflective Questions"
- Handout: "Reflective Activities"

***Time:***
30 minutes. Extra out-of-meeting time for participants to complete their evaluation activities.

***Setting:***
Indoors

## Procedure:

### Before the meeting:

- Review activity directions and materials.
- Print out one copy of the handout, "Reflective Questions" and one copy of the handout, "Reflective Activities" for each participant.

### During the meeting:

1. Introduce the concept of reflection with the following statements:

   *We have used reflection in this group to process each activity that we have done together. It's important, too, to reflect back on what was learned at the conclusion of a civic engagement project or program. This helps reinforce the skills, knowledge and attitudes that we gain, and it also helps us gauge the effectiveness of our work in the community. What have you learned throughout this experience? What have you accomplished? What would you do differently? Thinking about the answers to these questions is a way of learning from your experience.*

2. Ask the group the following questions and allow several minutes for conversation:
   - What have you learned from this?
   - Will any of your attitudes, thoughts or behaviors change as a result of this program?

3. Next, break participants up into teams of three and give each team a copy of the "Reflective Questions" handout. Either have each team discuss and fill out the handout together or simply discuss the questions together. Allow about ten minutes for this step.

4. Distribute the handout "Reflective Activities." Have participants – working in teams or individually – choose a reflection activity to carry out on their own time. Give participants the option of creating their own reflection activity, as well.

### Try This, Too:

- Using some of the ideas provided in the unit introduction, find or create a forum for participants to share their reflections with the public.

**HANDOUT:**

# Reflective Questions

Group name: _____ Program dates: _____

County: _____ Number of participants: _____

Person filling out report: _____

1. What did you expect to get out of this experience?

2. How did your definition of "citizenship" change as a result of this experience?

3. Have you become a better citizen as a result of this experience? Why or why not?

4. What have you learned about issues in your community?

5. What have you learned about ways to address issues in your community?

6. What issues did your group focus on? Why did you choose those issues?

7. Who is affected by the issues you addressed? Who benefited from the action your group took?

8. What were the challenges to taking action?

9. If you were to have this experience again, what would you do differently?

10. What are your thoughts and feelings about government? How do they compare to your thoughts and feelings before this experience?

11. If you were to draw a picture of "government," what would it look like?

12. What makes a good citizen?

Adapted with permission from "YEA Project Reflection Form," developed by 4-H Youth Development in *YEA! Youth Experiencing Action: A Community Service Learning Guide* (4H1553), East Lansing: Michigan State University Extension, 2000.

**HANDOUT:**

# Reflective Activities

- **Discussion Groups** – Prepare a series of reflection questions to facilitate a discussion between group members. Additional ideas include inviting a government, non-profit or community representative to join and/or facilitate the discussion; having youth participants take turns leading the discussion and using media articles about the broader issue that the group addressed to stimulate "big-picture" discussion. Consider videotaping the discussion to share with others.
- **Skits** – In a group, portray your experience through a skit. Plan what you will do, and perform the skit for the rest of the group. After, have the whole group process reactions and give suggestions for effective future projects.
- **Photographic journal or poster** – Individually or in groups, take photographs documenting what you learned and accomplished. You can make a poster with the photos to represent and share what you have learned and accomplished throughout the course of the program.
- **Documentary** – If you have access to video equipment, create a documentary that captures some of your activities during the program and also includes interviews with participants and community members in which they reflect on their experience.
- **Web site** – Create a web site on which you can display information and things learned from the program. Many young people have the skills to put information up online, and there are a variety of services that help with web site creation.
- **Be creative!** – Come up with your own idea of how to reflect on and share what you've learned and accomplished!

What activity will you use to reflect on and share your experiences? _____

## Reference

Points of Light Foundation. (2002, December 3). *Communities as places of learning: Developing effective community-based service learning programs.* Paper presented at Points of Light Foundation Training, Traverse City, MI.




Rev. 11/5/14