

MSV: CIVICS 101

CONNECTING NATIONAL ISSUES TO THE LOCAL LEVEL

ENTER CLUB NAME HERE ^

MY SCHOOL VOTES is an action-oriented civics program where students learn by doing. We build student leadership, advocate for local issues, create exceptional voter registration campaigns, and together, launch young people into cycles of life-long civic engagement. Our mission is to close the race and age gaps in voting and increase youth participation in our democracy.

TRAINING GOALS FOR WORKSHEET III

Section I: Reflection & Review

Analyze your Club’s activities over the last month and understand strengths and weaknesses.

Pages 2-3

Section II: How National Issues Show Up in Your Community

Why focus on the local level?

Our levels of government.

Pages 4-6

Section III: Pursuing Change at the Local Level

Mapping decision makers.

Pages 7-10

SECTION I: REFLECTION & REVIEW

Use this section to analyze your work so far. Each worksheet will create space to reflect and understand your Club's work. This is an important part of leadership and project management.

For schools starting a MSV Club: What steps do you need to complete to establish your MSV Club?

Example: Recruit a leadership team, Create roles/committees, Register your Club (REMEMBER: If you are working with an established club, tell us about it!)

How is recruitment going for your Club? How many people have you recruited? How many more students do you still want to reach out to?

What are your Club's goals for this Spring? *(Keep in mind, we will be kicking off our Voter Registration Season of Action in March!)*

In Training II, we discussed how to create and distribute an effective message. If you had a chance to develop and distribute a message to fellow students in your school, reflect on: what went well? What could be improved? What makes your student body unique, and how can you get their attention? *(Refer back to Worksheet II if you need to jog your memory!)*

SECTION II: HOW NATIONAL ISSUES SHOW UP IN YOUR COMMUNITY

Whether they're debated on the news, in online articles and social media platforms, or at lunch in the cafeteria, national issues -- topics or problems of national scale and significance -- are all around us. It is important to learn how to understand these issues in order to deepen our problem solving and critical thinking skills so that we can become informed and active citizens. Sometimes though, national issues can be overwhelming and difficult to understand: they may show up differently depending on whether we're talking about the federal, state, or local level. **Let's start by first defining what each level of government does and what it controls.** In order to fully participate in our democracy, it's important we understand how the issues we care about play out in our government's three levels.

WHY DOES MSV FOCUS ON LOCAL LEVELS OF GOVERNMENT?



- Every day issues that have DIRECT impact on our lives and communities are much more often determined and dictated by local elections

- Local leaders are oftentimes more accessible and responsive

- Local elections are often determined by smaller margins, thus increasing the “value” of your vote

FIRST, LET'S MAKE SURE WE UNDERSTAND:

What does the Federal government do and what does it control?

What do State governments do and what do they control?

What do Local governments do (city or county) and what do they control?

Now pick one national issue that is of particular importance or significance to you. Maybe it's climate change, racial justice, education funding, LGBTQIA rights, or anything else.

What is the issue?

Take a few minutes to research and identify one fact for how this issue shows up at the federal level
(Example: In 2019, the federal government spent \$4 million a year on Civics education, and \$3 billion a year on STEM education).

Take a few minutes to research and identify one fact for how this issue shows up at the state level
(Example: The State of Oregon does NOT require high school students to take a Civics course in order to graduate).

Take a few minutes to research and identify one fact for how this issue shows up at the local level
(Example: My town's school district's civics curriculum focuses on historical knowledge rather than taking action).

SECTION III: PURSUING CHANGE AT THE LOCAL LEVEL

Once you have identified an issue that is important to you, individually or as a community, your next step is to begin to understand what offices have authority over this issue. This is very important to note because “who” makes decisions and “how” they make them will impact your organizing and advocacy approach. Pushing for change around issues can get very complicated - so let’s start with a simple framework.

Decision-Making Mapping Exercise: Identifying the issue we want to work on, and who are the decision makers along the way!

STEP 1: Select an issue.

STEP 2: What is the problem? What is the solution you would like to pursue?

STEP 3: Identify the office or body that has responsibility for or jurisdiction over this decision (And remember: There might be people and offices that have a say! Outline them in order of who is closest to you!)

STEP 4: Identify ways you can address this office or body (Is it writing a letter? Asking for a meeting? Attending a meeting if this body meets regularly? Do some research and ask around!)

STEP I:

Select an issue. (Example: let's stick with civics education and voter registration.)

STEP II:

Identify the problem and the solution you would like to pursue. (Example: When we learn about Civics at our school, it's mostly through a historical framework. We want our school to be more action-oriented in its approach to civics education and want it to dedicate a single day in the Spring to voter registration and education!)

STEP III:

Identify the office or body that has responsibility for or jurisdiction over this decision. (*REMEMBER: In the case below, while the positions and roles might be the same from district to district, the decision-making structures and authority may be wholly different. For example, in one district the school board might have full decision-making authority. In another district, it may be the mayor!)

YOUR SCHOOL:

Your Civics teacher

The Civics/Social Studies
Department Chairperson

The Principal or
Dean of Academics

YOUR SCHOOL DISTRICT:

Department Chairperson

Superintendent or Mayor

Mayor or School Board

CHOOSE YOUR OWN:

STEP IV:

Identify ways you can address these offices or bodies. **Here are some examples:**

Civic Teacher



Bringing up the issue in class or in a meeting outside of class.

The Civics/Social Studies
Department Chairperson



Sending an email and requesting a meeting to understand who could help you bring your idea to fruition.

The Principal/Dean
of Academics



Sending an email, providing your plan (that you talked through with the previous folks!), and requesting a meeting to understand whether they can make this happen or whether you need further approval.

Department Chairperson
in School District



Sending a formal letter showing your intent, the general argument for your plan, previous work you've done, and whatever support you've already received.

Before you start thinking through your plans and sending your letters, it's important to understand how the decision-makers you identified make their decisions, and whether the issue and action you chose require:

An Administrative Decision:
Applying existing policy or laws

A Legislative Decision:
Passing a new policy or law into action

VOTING IN ACTION!

Understanding the decision makers nearest to you, as well as how they make their decision, is absolutely critical. Many of the bodies mentioned above are elected positions and YOU have the power to elect officials who reflect your viewpoint. Get to know the officials around you and remember: you have much more impact than you may have originally thought!

Using the example on page 9, identify the offices and/or individuals you want to reach out to and how you'll reach out.



Our parent initiative When We All Vote is a nonpartisan initiative of Civic Nation, a 501c3 non profit, on a mission to increase voter participation in every election and make sure EVERY voice is heard. This means we don't refer to any candidates or positions at any time. We will never advocate for either but only that you get active and involved. As members of the My School Votes community, our communication must be strictly nonpartisan, and cannot include any mention of candidates or specific positions. MSV does not support or oppose candidates for public office or take a stand for or against any political party. We encourage active and informed participation in American democracy.

This worksheet is meant to support the learning and understanding of local and state systems of government. My School Votes does not support is not asking you to advocate for any specific issue area or any issue position. Lobbying done on any level around any issue should be done in your personal capacity.

EXAMPLE LANGUAGE YOU CAN USE:

If someone asks whether your club is planning to support certain candidates or how it plans to act on a specific issue, you can say: *"I'm hearing that that is important to you. MSV is non-partisan so we don't advocate for or against any candidate or party. We want to give everyone the change to make their voice heard!"*

CONTACT INFORMATION/OFFICE HOURS

myschoolvotes@civiction.org

Office Hours calendly

Linktree