

Lesson 3: Preparing to Meet Your Council Member

GUIDING QUESTIONS

- What is the role of my local council?
- What questions do I want to ask my local council member?
- How can I speak constructively and respectfully about issues I am passionate about?

OVERVIEW

Council members discuss important community issues, listen to concerns from people in their area, and work to share those ideas and solutions during meetings.

In this lesson, students review the role of municipal government and local councils. Afterward, they brainstorm questions they want to ask their council member during the planned meeting. Next, students discuss and practice ways to engage in conversation in a constructive and respectful manner. In the *Consolidation* activity, they summarize their knowledge, a question they want to ask, and what they want to learn or share during the meeting.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

By the end of the lesson, students can:

- discuss local concerns and issues that matter to them;
- describe the role of the local council;
- communicate questions they want to ask their council member;
- speak constructively and respectfully to others.

STARTER

1. Invite students to reflect on one or both of the following questions:

- What would you say if you had one minute to share an idea with your municipal representative?
- If you could make one change in your community, what would it be?

Allow a few students to share their responses and explain why their ideas matter.

2. Inform students that they will have the chance to meet with their municipal representative or council member to ask questions or express their ideas and concerns. Share the representative's name and position, along with the date and time of the meeting.

ESSENTIAL LEARNING

1. Review municipal government services and the role of the local council.

- Municipal government programs and services affect our lives in many ways (e.g., parks, recreation programs, libraries, public transit, local police, roads, sidewalks, bike lanes and community safety)
 - Do you play at the local park?

- How often do you use the bike paths and sidewalks around neighbourhood?
 - Do you take public transit to go anywhere?
 - Do you participate in any recreation programs at the community centre (swimming, basketball, cooking lessons)?
- Our local council makes decisions about these aspects of our community, including approving the amount to spend on these areas and adding new programs, parks, and services where needed.
 - Council members are responsible for proposing, debating, and voting on by-laws and reviewing and approving government spending.
 - Council members also take time to respond to the concerns of people living in their area, helping them understand government services and intervening when necessary to solve issues. These social issues can include affordable housing, homelessness, poverty reduction and food security.
 - Being a council member can be a part-time or full-time job, depending on the municipality.
 - Public service is a public trust. It means that our elected representatives should act honestly and make decisions in the best interests of all community members, not for themselves or the interests of friends or specific groups.

2. Use the following discussion protocol to help students brainstorm questions they want to ask the council member. During the activity, students will use sticky notes or pieces of paper to generate ideas and respond to their classmates' suggestions.

a) Explain to students that their task is to come up with questions they would like to ask the council member. Questions could focus on:

- Issues that matter to students
- Ideas for the community
- Reasons they wanted to be a council member
- Interesting experiences they have had during their time on council
- Their most significant accomplishments
- Strategies for working with other politicians who may have different perspectives
- New projects the municipality has started in the community

Students should also feel free to add personal questions, such as their favourite place to go in their community, favourite movie or TV show, favourite (and least-favourite) subject in school, etc.

b) Provide students with sticky notes or pieces of paper and tape that they can use to affix their questions to a board or wall.

c) Once everyone has submitted their questions, give students time to read the questions from the other members of the class.

Give students the chance to vote on the questions they think are the most interesting or important. Students may identify their favourite questions by adding checkmarks or applying stickers to their top three choices, or through a class discussion where students can identify and make a case for the questions they would most like to raise. Encourage students to identify questions that they did not come up with themselves.

3. Organize the questions from the brainstorming strategy into themes and write down a final list of questions to ask your council member. Consider sharing some of the questions in advance so they can prepare.

ACTIVITY

1. As a whole class, discuss ways students can maintain a respectful environment during the meeting with the council member.

- How do we show respect for others when they are speaking?
- How can we respectfully share our concerns?
- How should we respond if someone says something we disagree with?

2. Review [‘Tips for Active Listening’ \(Handout 3.1\)](#).

3. Divide the class into small groups. Ask students to take turns role-playing, where one person acts as the council member and students take turns asking questions. Emphasize a few key tips:

- Greet the representative and introduce yourself.
- Speak clearly and confidently.
- Listen attentively.

Invite other students to provide feedback to each other.

4. Regroup as a whole class and discuss what went well (e.g., clear questions, polite tone) and areas for improvement (e.g., speaking louder, making eye contact).

CONSOLIDATION

Have students fill out the 1-1-1 Exit Card (Activity 3.2).

- One thing I learned about the role of local councils.
- One question I want to ask my council member.
- One thing I am excited to share or learn in the meeting.

EXTENSION ACTIVITY

After the meeting with your council member, ask students to write a follow-up letter thanking them for their time and any final thoughts or concerns they have.

This pilot program was developed through a partnership between CIVIX and the Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO). The mandate of AMO is to support and enhance strong and effective municipal government in Ontario. It promotes the value of the municipal government as a vital and essential component of Ontario and Canada's political system. Through AMO, Ontario's 444 municipalities work together to achieve shared goals and meet common challenges.

As this is a pilot program, if you have feedback on how CIVIX and AMO could improve these resources, please contact: hello@civix.ca