

City Government Services, Departments, and Funding

Overview

In this lesson, students will identify services provided by local city government and determine which government departments are responsible for various services. They will then assume the roles of city council members and prioritize various government services, allocating mock resources accordingly. Finally, students will discuss the importance of being active citizens and participating in their local governments.

Grades

8-12

Materials:

- NC's Local Government Departments and the Services They Provide graphic organizer, attached
- Services provided by local government departments list and key, attached
- City Council Persona slips, attached
- Fake \$1000 bills, attached
- Timers (optional)

Duration

60+ minutes

Procedure

1. As a warm-up, ask students to brainstorm various services that their city's government provides for them by inquiring, "What does our city government do for you?" Allow them to call out their ideas as they think of them. You may need to guide them or give them an example to get them started. Write relevant ideas on the board as you hear them, trying to keep similar services grouped together. For example, pair "firefighting" with "policing," and "baseball field maintenance" with "providing parks." When 10-12 services have been recorded, ask students to think about why particular services were grouped together. Ask students if they know which government departments are responsible for the services. It's alright if they do not know; this is simply a way to gauge prior knowledge.
2. Allow students to pair up and distribute the "NC's Local Government Agencies and the Services They Provide" graphic organizer. Explain that the list is by no means exhaustive, but that most towns and cities have at least these nine government departments. Provide students with the attached list of services provided by city government. Ask students to place services with corresponding government department responsible for each. Spot check students as they are working and answer questions as they arise. After about 10 minutes discuss answers (key attached).
- **Variation:** Make this activity kinesthetic by posting nine pieces of chart paper around the room, each titled with one of the local government agencies. Cut each of the city services into strips, and pass them out among students. Have students (individually or in pairs) circulate around the room and find the appropriate agency that provides their service. Students will tape their service there. Once the activity is complete, have nine volunteers (one at each piece of chart paper) read the services place their and determine with the class if any are incorrect.
3. As a transition to the next part of the lesson, ask pairs of students to take 3-4 minutes to discuss and rank the importance of each agency from 1 to 9. Call on a few pairs to explain what they chose for their top three and

why they chose them. Ask which agencies in particular they had trouble ranking. Explain that the process of thought they just used in figuring out which agencies are most important is similar to what city council members go through when trying to figure out how to fund these very agencies.

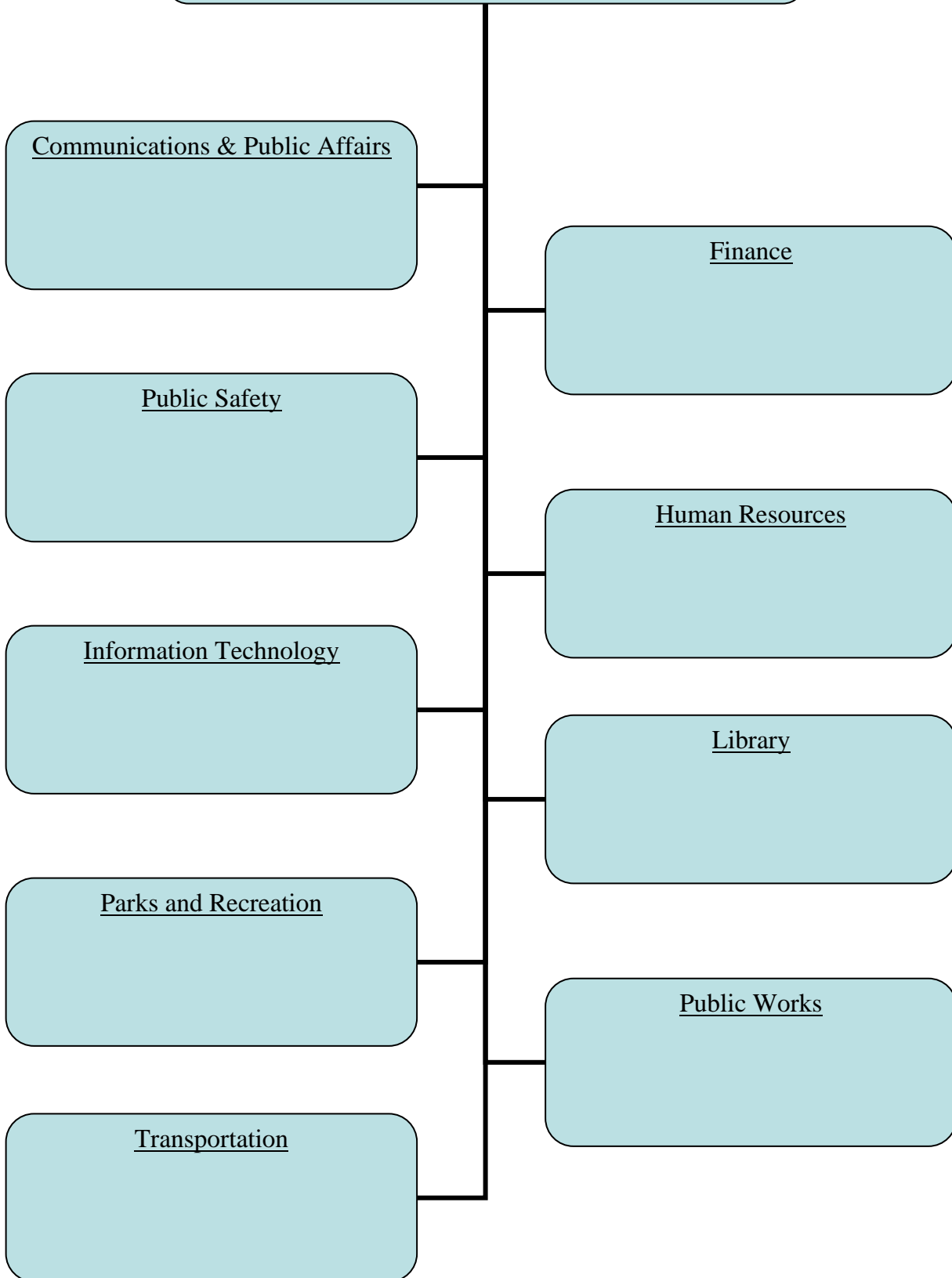
4. Ask students to discuss what the roles and responsibilities of city council members are (*The city or town council makes decisions for the municipality, carries out those decisions, manages a budget, and has authority to levy taxes. In most cities and towns with populations over 1,000, the council hires a City Manager, who oversees the municipality's day-to-day operations.*)
5. Tell students that in the next activity, they are to imagine they are each a city council member. Assign students into groups of five. Distribute five slips of paper, each with a different city council persona, to each group. Tell students that there is \$10,000 available for spending on whatever projects they deem worthy and most important for their city.
6. Have students select strips randomly without looking at them. Give students 5 minutes to read and assume their respective roles. Before commencing debate, have students write a few sentences supporting the proposed plan of their personas.
 - **Variation:** If you feel your students may have trouble appropriately portraying their role and advocating for their requested funds, teachers can first have all students playing the same role meet in five small groups to strategize. Once students have discussed how to advocate for what they want with fellow classmates playing the same roll, they can all return to their city council groups and begin the simulation as described below.
7. Once students have had a few moments of planning time, call the class to order and establish expectations and ground rules for the activity. Explain that each group's Mayor will facilitate the conversation, and that each group member will be given two minutes (provide each group's time keeper with a timer or ask them to use the minute hand of their watch) to tell the rest of the group who they are, what they propose, and why they support the proposal without interruption. After each person has had an opportunity to talk, students will begin debate. They have up to 10 minutes as a group to decide how to allocate the money among themselves. Be limited in your instruction, asserting that you want to see where each group takes the debate. Simply tell them they must have money allocated within the allotted time period.
 - **Variation:** Teachers can also give each group ten of the attached \$1000 bills to be 'managed' by whoever draws the treasurer's persona; having a manipulative can assist visual students in investing in the activity.
8. At the end of the activity, each group's "spokesperson," as assigned by persona slips, will explain to the class how their group divided money, why they chose to divide it in such a manner, and what the city stood to lose as a result of their decisions. After each presentation, allow students outside of the presenting group to raise their hands to ask questions/bring up issues regarding the group's decision. This will add to the demonstration of how difficult it can be to reach decisions. Facilitate discussion by asking:
 - Was it hard for your group to reach a decision? Why or why not?
 - Summarize your group's discussion. During the discussion, did you start out advocating for the funding issues that reflected your personal interests? If so, did you continue to do this or did others convince you that that their needs were also important? If so, what techniques and ideas convinced you?
 - Compare and contrast this exercise to a real city council's budgetary meeting. How would they differ or be similar?
 - What factors influence city council members in the decisions they make?
 - Do you know of examples where a public official has made an unpopular decision? If so, do you think they were trying to do the right thing or do you think that they had other motivations?

- How is the work of a city council relevant to each of us?
9. Discuss with students how it is often the local level of government that has the most direct impact on our lives (local government agencies pick up our trash, provide places for recreation, has council members that set the ordinances we must abide by, etc.) Yet, local elections in North Carolina often have very poor turnout, ranging between 10%-13% on average! Discuss with students:
- Why is it important for citizens to participate in the election process of their city council members?
 - Why is it important to be aware of the decisions your elected council members are making?
 - In what ways may citizens participate in their local government?
10. Explain to students that citizens can be very important factors in the decision-making process of their local governments. Tell them that part of their responsibility as citizens is to voice their opinions on issues of public concern. Through letters, phone calls, petitions, blogs, visits to representatives, etc., citizens' voices *can* be heard. Instruct students to return to class the following day with a brief letter to the city council proposing some sort of change in their city. Encourage them to read that day's newspaper or look at pending legislation of their city's website for ideas.

Culminating Activities

- Have students share their letters and ideas for change with the class. As a class, decide on one issue that people agree is most important. As a class, compose a letter to be sent to city council.

Types of Local Government Departments



Miscellaneous Government Services

- Maintain network of hiking trails
- School Resource Officers
- Promote ease of access to books and other information
- Public Awareness communication
- Provides software support for government staff and citizens
- Animal Control
- Develop budget documents
- Organize and coordinate youth athletic activities
- Organizes recruitment and employment for Town positions
- Fire code inspection
- Oversees taxi franchise approvals
- Garbage collection/Recycling
- Search & Rescue Team
- Oversees all Town computer, telephone and data network systems
- Crime investigation
- Deals with relationships with the media
- Oversees maintenance of computer systems, network and telephone services
- Maintains all employee information and records
- Fire prevention education
- Provides training programs for employee growth
- Aide individuals in their pursuit of self-education and research
- Provide outdoor programs and activities
- Oversee Town and agency purchases
- Maintain athletic fields
- Revenue collection
- Firefighting
- Serve as centers for up-to-date, reliable information
- Monitor Town's financial position
- Sidewalk construction
- Maintain dog park
- Oversees public service announcements
- Develops and maintains Town's website
- Coordination of Neighborhood Watch
- Mosquito control
- Maintenance of storm water system
- Provide safe, clean, and efficient public bus service
- Make official public affairs records accessible
- Payroll services for government employees
- Traffic enforcement
- Installation of street signs and traffic lights

Miscellaneous Government Services KEY

Communications and Public Affairs

Make official public affairs records accessible
Oversees public service announcements
Relationships with the media
Public Awareness campaigns and communication

Transportation

Provide safe, clean, and efficient public bus service
Oversees taxi franchise approvals

Finance

Develop budget documents
Oversee Town and agency purchases
Monitor Town's financial position
Payroll services for government employees
Revenue collection

Public Safety and Emergency Response

Firefighting
Fire code inspection
Search & Rescue Team
Fire prevention education
Coordination of Neighborhood Watch
Crime investigation
Traffic enforcement (this may be a tricky one; students might accidentally include this with "Transportation")
School Resource Officers

Information Technology

Oversees all Town computer, telephone and data network systems
Provides software support for government staff and citizen
Oversees maintenance of computer systems, network and telephone services
Develops and maintains Town's website

Human Resources

Maintains all employee information and records
Organizes recruitment and employment for Town positions
Provides training programs for employee growth

Public Libraries

Aide individuals in their pursuit of self-education and research
Serve as centers for up-to-date, reliable information
Promote ease of access to books and other information

Parks and Recreation

Organize and coordinate youth athletic activities
Provide outdoor programs and activities
Maintain athletic fields
Maintain dog park
Maintain network of hiking trails

Public Works

Garbage collection/Recycling
Animal Control
Sidewalk construction
Mosquito control
Maintenance of storm water system
Installation of street signs and traffic lights (another one that may be tricky)

City Council Personas:

1) **Hyatt, Treasurer:** It is your first year on the city council. You are an avid animal lover. As part of your election, you campaigned for a new and improved spaying/neutering program in the city that would ease the cost for pet owners. The cost to now get the program started is \$3000, which will cover a staff person's salary for a month and initial education materials (pamphlets and posters about spaying/neutering).

Your Responsibility within this Group: Keep track of how much money each person requests for their project. After everyone has presented their request, announce the total amount of funds requested, and point out that only \$10,000 is available right now for new projects.

2) **Simpson, Secretary:** You are in your 2nd term. Because you have 2 young children, and there are many young children in the city, you strongly support the idea of renovating the city park with a new playground. The cost of the new equipment is \$4000.

Your Responsibility within this Group: Take notes when each council member is making their proposals.

3) **Bradshaw, Spokesperson:** You are in your 7th year on the city council. You ran a campaign to get "tough on crime" in response to a recent surge in burglaries in the city. You support the police chief's request to hire 3 more police officers. To do this, \$6,000 is needed for recruitment and training of the new officers.

Your Responsibility within this Group: Summarize the dialogue that takes place during the debate period for the rest of the class once the activity ends.

4) **Williams, Mayor:** You are in your 10th term on the city council. You support a program that provides better training to city employees, since in the long run it will help with efficiency and citizens will save some money on taxes. The program is \$1000. Also, a majority of your constituents favor adding two new stoplights on Main Street which studies show will reduce traffic congestion by 30%. The addition of two stoplights will cost \$2000.

Your Responsibility within this Group: Lead the conversation and keep the debate civil and on track. Even though you have your own proposal, you are responsible for coordinating compromise.

5) **Miller, Time Keeper:** You are the senior city council member entering your 14th term. Your constituents favor starting a new recycling program so that taxes will not be raised to expand the landfill in the future. The cost of the program is \$2000. You are also good friends with the fire chief who has requested upgrades to the fire station, which he feels will help in the recent wave of fires due to a lack of rain. The cost to upgrade the fire station is \$5000.

Your Responsibility within this Group: Timekeeper. 2 minutes for individual proposals; 10 minutes for open debate after each council member has shared their proposal.

