

Lesson 3: Preparing to Meet Your Council Member

GUIDING QUESTIONS

- What is the role of my local council in shaping my community?
- What meaningful questions do I want to ask my local council member?
- How can I engage in respectful, constructive dialogue about issues I care about?

OVERVIEW

Council members play an important role in shaping their communities. They debate local priorities, listen to constituents, and help direct how services and programs are delivered. They also work to bring community concerns forward at council meetings.

In this lesson, students will review the responsibilities of municipal government and the role of city or town councillors. They will brainstorm and prioritize thoughtful, relevant questions to ask during an upcoming council member visit. Students will also practice effective and respectful communication skills in preparation for the discussion. In the consolidation activity, they will summarize what they've learned, what they hope to ask, and what they are eager to share or explore further.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

By the end of the lesson, students can:

- identify and discuss issues that affect their local community;
- describe the structure and function of local councils;
- formulate and communicate purposeful, relevant questions;
- demonstrate respectful and constructive dialogue.

STARTER

1. Invite students to reflect individually or with a partner on one or both of these prompts:

- If you had one minute with your city or town councillor, what would you say?
- If you could change one thing about your community, what would it be — and why?

Encourage a few volunteers to share, focusing on why the issue or idea is meaningful to them.

2. Let students know they will soon meet with their local council member. Share their name and the date/time of the visit. Build excitement and clarify that students will be responsible for asking questions and representing the school community.

ESSENTIAL LEARNING

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

- Municipal governments provide services and make decisions that directly affect daily life — including parks, transit, waste management, emergency services, libraries, community housing, and more.
 - Do you use a local park or community centre?
 - Do you walk, bike, or take transit around your neighbourhood?
 - Have you noticed any issues — like broken sidewalks, traffic congestion, or missing services?
- 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. **Brainstorm:** Use the following discussion protocol to help students collaboratively brainstorm questions they want to ask their 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 they will generate questions for the council member. These might include:

- Local issues or concerns
- Ideas for improving the community
- Their motivation for running for office
- Key accomplishments or priorities
- How they handle disagreement at council
- Any new or upcoming projects
- **Optional:** Personal interest questions (favourite local spot, school memories, etc.)

b) Give each student sticky notes or paper slips to write one or two questions. Post them on a wall or whiteboard.

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.

- What does respectful listening look like?
- How can we disagree respectfully?
- Why is tone important when asking questions or raising concerns?

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. Afterward, 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