



:: BUILDING :: COMMUNITIES

Through Local Government

Alberta Municipal
Affairs

Supporting Teaching and Learning
about Municipal Governments

**A Resource for
Municipal Officials**

This resource was developed with the assistance of grade 6 teachers, students, municipal officials and staff of both Alberta Education and Alberta Municipal Affairs.

Readers should be aware that Internet websites offered as citations and/or sources for further information may have changed or disappeared between the time this was written and when it is read.

Teachers are cautioned that all websites listed in this resource should be checked for appropriateness and suitability before being provided to, or used with, students.

Every effort has been made to acknowledge sources used in this resource. In the event of any question arising as to the use of any material, we will be pleased to make the necessary corrections in future printings.

Building Communities Through Local Government – A Resource for Municipal Officials

ISBN 978-0-7785-6823-0 (printed version)

ISBN 978-0-7785-6826-1 (online version)

Building Communities Through Local Government – A Website for Students and Teachers

ISBN 978-0-7785-6824-7 http://www.municipalaffairs.alberta.ca/edu_grade6.cfm

Building Communities Through Local Government

Supporting Teaching and Learning about Municipal Governments

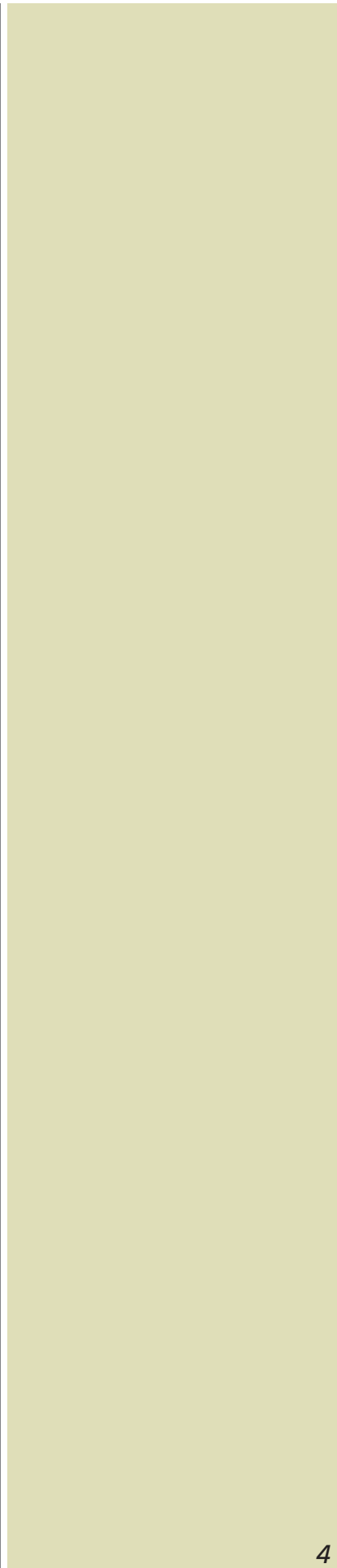
A Resource for Municipal Officials

Table of Contents

<i>Building Communities Through Local Government</i>	5
How to Use this Resource	6
Thinking about Working with Students	10
Suggestions, Strategies and Options	13
What Students Learn in Grade 6 Social Studies	25

This resource for municipal officials is designed to support, enrich and extend the experiences that grade 6 students have in their study of local government. At the heart of this resource are approaches, strategies and tools that encourage citizen involvement and participation – by students, teachers, municipal officials and community members.







Building Communities Through Local Government

Supporting Teaching and Learning about Municipal Governments:

A Resource for Municipal Officials

Teaching about local government involves more than just providing information about municipalities and municipal councils. It involves the development of understandings of community, belonging and identities, and consideration of the multiple perspectives that are brought to each of these concepts. As grade 6 students learn about local government, they are encouraged to consider the relationships, interactions and tensions between individuals, communities and neighbouring governments. They also develop an appreciation for the ways that individuals can become involved, demonstrate commitment, contribute and effect change. The *Building Communities Through Local Government* resources encourage interest in local affairs and issues and a willingness to contribute opinions, time and energy to making the municipality a better place to live and work.

The *Building Communities Through Local Government* resources provide a learning sequence that addresses **selected outcomes** from the Grade 6 Social Studies program. This learning sequence comprises approximately six to ten weeks of time out of the school year. In addition to this resource, teachers and students will also have access to core textbook resources, which support all of the outcomes for the grade 6 program. Teachers may plan to implement this learning sequence at any time during the school year.

Building Communities Through Local Government provides learning experiences focused on four topics:

- **Get Personal** introduces the concepts of local and municipal governments and revisits understandings of community
- **A Good Place to Live** focuses on the processes, structures and functions of municipal governments
- **Make Connections** explores opportunities and choices for getting involved with community issues and participating in local government processes
- **Participate** emphasizes action and change.



How to Use This Resource

Building Communities Through Local Government encourages students to explore different perspectives and opportunities for becoming involved as a citizen.

The learning experiences in *Building Communities Through Local Government* offer numerous possibilities for students to explore and develop the following understandings and perspectives:

- Local government, democracy and citizenship
- Municipal government as a type of local authority
- Types of municipalities in Alberta
- Roles and responsibilities of municipal governments
- Processes, structures and functions of municipal governments
- The electoral process
- Accountability and responsibilities of elected municipal officials
- Ways that representatives and citizens interact
- How the decision-making process is applied to issues and challenges
- Ways to be involved in the decision-making process and effect change.

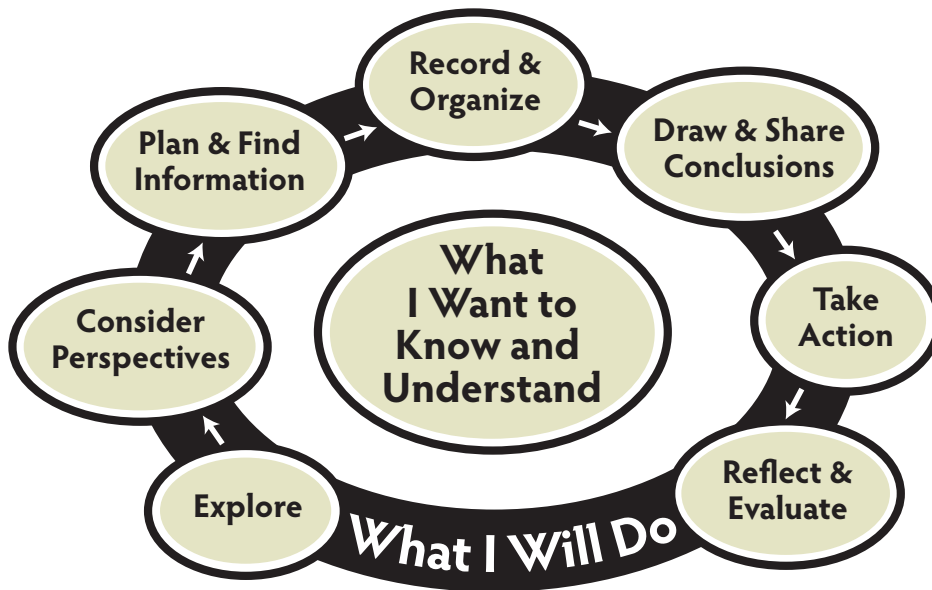
The Alberta Grade 6 Social Studies program of studies focuses on citizenship, identity and democratic processes of decision-making within our society. Students explore ways to participate in democratic processes, be involved in their communities and develop beliefs, values and attitudes that empower them to effect change. The topic of local government is a natural place for students to investigate how issues, challenges and decisions are dealt with in their municipalities.

The *Building Communities Through Local Government* resources provide opportunities for students to explore local government in the context of their own and other municipalities. The resources are based on a fundamental assumption that students should be involved in decision-making and encouraged to consider ways that they can become active, participatory and engaged citizens.

Building Communities Through Local Government includes the following components:

- The *Building Communities Through Local Government* Teaching and Learning Resource
- The *Building Communities Through Local Government* website, found at www.municipalaffairs.alberta.ca/edu_grade6.cfm
- This *Building Communities Through Local Government* A Resource for Municipal Officials
- A poster, student trading cards and a CD with PDF files of the resources, assessment tools and website visuals.

The resources ask students to research the structures, functions and processes of municipal government in Alberta and to investigate the similarities and differences between different municipalities, including urban and rural, large and small. Students are also encouraged to participate in their municipality through current affairs that are related to municipal government and decision-making.



Inquiry is a learning process that encourages students to ask and explore questions, develop research and independent problem-solving skills and engage in critical and creative thinking.

The inquiry model used in the *Building Communities Through Local Government* resources provides multiple opportunities for students to develop and apply research and social participation skills. Students explore questions and issues by starting with their own knowledge and perspectives, using research skills to collect information and applying critical thinking skills in developing conclusions and considering social action.



INTERACT

Throughout this resource, the Interact icon identifies information and suggestions for working effectively with students and teachers in appropriate, meaningful and inquiry-based contexts. Sidebars provide additional information about what students are doing in the classroom.

When students **Explore**, they are asked to think about what they know and why this inquiry is important, interesting and relevant to themselves and to others.

When students **Consider Perspectives**, they identify research questions and consider who is affected by this issue. They are also asked to find out about different opinions and perspectives that may influence decisions.

As students **Plan and Find Information**, they identify and organize the sources of information that will help them research and understand the issue.

As students **Record and Organize**, they record what they find out, and look for patterns, connections, similarities and differences in the information.

When students **Draw and Share Conclusions**, they discuss and present their conclusions and the evidence that supports them. They explore the perspectives involved, form opinions and make decisions.

When students **Take Action**, they decide what they will do with what they have learned. They are encouraged to make a plan to act on their decisions.

As students **Reflect and Evaluate**, they consider how effective their decisions and actions were. They think about what they could change, do next, or find out more about.

This resource for municipal officials provides:

- Considerations for planning to interact and work effectively with grade 6 students and their teachers
- A summary of what students will be doing, creating and researching as they work with the *Building Communities Through Local Government* resources in their grade 6 social studies classes
- Strategies and approaches to help you enrich student knowledge and understandings and engage them with local issues and democratic processes.

Municipalities can play an important role in supporting students as they learn about local government. The *Building Communities Through Local Government A Resource for Municipal Officials* outlines meaningful ways for individuals who work in municipal government to become involved with students and teachers in effectively supporting the Alberta Grade 6 Social Studies program on local government. This resource is meant to help you interact and connect with students and teachers as they study local government.

→ There are a number of ways that you can support students' learning. Think about what types of activities you can realistically participate in and what you are comfortable doing in the classroom.

For suggestions on planning to work effectively with teachers and students, GO TO pp. 10-12.

→ Teachers may contact you with one or more of the following requests. This resource provides specific suggestions, strategies and planning tools for responding to each type of request. **For suggestions and strategies for working with students in the classroom, GO TO each of the following sections.**

➊ A request for a presentation or participation in a classroom activity....

GO TO pp. 13-16.

➋ A project submitted to the municipal office by a class....

GO TO pp. 17-18.

➌ A request for information about the municipality and municipal government....

GO TO pp. 19-21.

➍ A request to have students visit the municipal office for a field study tour....

GO TO pp. 22-24.

- It may be helpful to take some time to familiarize yourself with the expectations of the Social Studies program.

For information about the Alberta Social Studies program, expectations and the sequence of learning in the local government unit, GO TO pp. 25-27.



WEBSITE

The *Building Communities Through Local Government* website provides students with the opportunity to explore different aspects of municipal government. An illustrated landscape provides the entry point into the website. Once students enter the landscape, they can scroll around the map to find different types of municipalities, from large and small urban centres to rural areas. They also find information on other types of local authorities and a Métis Settlement. Students obtain information by clicking on icons beside each municipality.

The website also allows students to investigate different facilities and services within three of the municipalities in greater depth – large urban, small urban and rural. Within each of these three municipalities, students can:

- Investigate the roles of Mayors or Reeves, councillors, Chief Administrative Officers and others involved in municipal government
- Find out about some of the services and facilities provided by municipal government
- Follow a decision-making process with a student who lives in each municipality and responds to an issue
- Obtain information about social participation strategies.

The *Building Communities Through Local Government* website is found at www.municipalaffairs.alberta.ca/edu_grade6.cfm.



Thinking about Working with Students

Students need to develop a connection to their communities and their governments. Awareness of political processes and a desire to become actively involved as citizens is important for the development of our communities, province and nation. It is also central to building commitment to the values and attitudes of a democracy.

Connecting with teachers and students

By grade 6, students are becoming increasingly interested in becoming active members of society. Motivated students are integral to the viability of every community. These students want opportunities to volunteer and take part in extra-curricular activities. They have concerns and opinions on the issues of the day and need constructive ways to understand, analyze and take action on their opinions.

You have an important role to play in increasing students' understanding and interest in local government. Students need help as they start the journey of becoming active and responsible citizens. Many students do not understand the political process and the language of government.

Effective communication and involvement with students

Students can be interesting and exciting to work with. They need to realize that you are interested in them, what they are doing and how they are learning. Plan ways you can interact effectively with students by:

- Thinking of questions you can ask students and ways you can personalize the information you are providing to them
- Using visual aids to help students focus on the information you are presenting but ensuring they are appropriate for grade 6 students
- Bringing original artifacts connected to the municipal government, if available
- Thinking of ways you can vary the pace of your presentation and maintaining good eye contact with students while you are talking
- Focusing on acting as a facilitator of learning, rather than a lecturer
- Ensuring that you plan ways to encourage students to share their own insights and experiences
- Moving around the classroom while you are presenting
- Taking some time before you go into any classroom to talk with the teacher about his/her particular group of students
- Enjoying the time you spend with a class above all
- Providing a memento of your visit such as pens, pins, maps or brochures.

Anticipating student questions and interests and preparing for different possibilities will make your visit with students more enjoyable.

Strategies for preparing to work with students

Rather than a lecture, it is suggested you work with the classroom teacher to provide an environment in which students are free to ask questions and participate in activities. When the classroom teacher contacts you, plan to obtain additional suggestions and ideas on the activities in which students are involved in their classroom. This can help you obtain ideas and strategies for interacting effectively and purposefully with students. Consider ways that different individuals in your municipal office and council can participate and work with students.

Prepare to be questioned by students when you are in the classroom. Many students will be interested in your personal stories as well as knowledge you have about the municipality. Think of some anecdotes that you are willing to share with students; however, ensure that your anecdotes relate to the topics you are discussing and are sensitive to the diversity of students in the classroom. Students will appreciate your interest in their stories as well. You may also think of some questions you can ask of students, such as how long they have lived in the municipality, and what issues and concerns they are most interested in. Respond directly to student questions. Recognize effective questions and provide concrete examples in your responses.

Providing students with hands-on experiences is critical in enhancing students' understandings of what their municipality looks like and how municipal government has influenced its development. Plan in advance the information you wish to share with students. Information about the ways the environment of your municipality affects decision-making will help students understand that, although the functions of different government departments can be similar across municipalities, the issues and choices that municipal governments deal with can be very different. Be prepared for questions that ask "why" decisions were made about different programs or facilities.

Prepare stories and examples that illustrate the roles and responsibilities of the council and administration. Students will be interested in hearing about some of the personal challenges you face as you work for your municipality. Help the classroom teacher find municipal officials who represent a diverse range of roles to work and interact with students.

Students will also be interested in the personal aspects of your job. They will want to hear how you react to the issues that you face as a municipal official. Plan to ask students to share examples of the types of decisions they have to make in their classroom or school. Ask them about decisions they make as they learn, rules they have to follow and what they do to work together effectively. Think about comparisons you can make between what happens in the municipality and what happens in a school.

Select issues that students find relevant and meaningful and that students can relate to some aspect of their lives. Consider using issues that:

- May affect students directly (*such as decisions that affect recreational facility use and curfews*)

Contact the schools in your municipality to discuss ways that you or others in your municipal office could support students' learning as they study local government.

- Connect to other issues students learn about in school (*such as smoking bylaws, healthy communities and environmental issues*)
- Reflect topics students of this age tend to be interested in (*such as emergency or disaster response plans, bylaw enforcement, fairness and consistency*).

Discussions and interaction with students in their classroom setting provides opportunities to work with smaller groups of students. Plan to prepare ways to discuss municipal issues that you deal with on a daily basis. Ask students for their opinions and thoughts on different issues and topics. Students appreciate the opportunity to offer and share their own perspectives. Personalize your discussions. Tell them about challenges you have faced in dealing with issues as a municipal official. In informal discussions, draw from students' questions and the experiences they share to help illustrate the points you want to make with them.

Supporting students as they learn about the democratic process and becoming involved in reaching decisions about issues can be very rewarding. It is important to let students learn by doing and to provide constructive feedback and suggestions as they experience the decision-making process. Plan to provide a personal response to students' opinions and action plans. Talk to them about the importance of listening to different views and consider perspectives during council and community meetings. Explain to students the accountability you have to residents, the electorate and interest groups, providing examples such as ways you work with individuals and groups in the municipality. Make sure students know that you are accountable to them as well.

Some general tips:

- Be yourself
- Be open, approachable and honest with students
- Avoid using political or government jargon or be prepared to explain it
- Treat students with respect
- Remember that not all students will require the same approach
- Meet students in both classroom and community settings if possible
- Reinforce students' need to get involved with things that affect them directly
- Interest yourself in the specific issues that students are involved with
- Make an effort to be flexible in the methods you use
- Look for opportunities for new ways of engaging students
- Respect young people's diversity and explore ways of reaching out to different groups of students
- Actively listen to what students are saying and take them seriously.



Suggestions, Strategies and Options

① If you are asked to make a presentation or participate in a classroom activity...

There are a number of ways to encourage students to become involved with municipal government. Teachers may contact your office to ask how you can support students' learning as they study, research and discuss municipal government. Let teachers know the extent to which you can participate with students and what resources may be available.

One of the first requests you may receive is to participate in a **class interview** or provide a **presentation** to students about municipal government. Ask the teacher to provide interview questions to you in advance. You may wish to indicate whether these questions can be e-mailed or faxed to you.

If you cannot participate directly in a classroom interview, consider responding to four or five interview questions from the class. If possible and appropriate, you may even wish to consider posting FAQs and other information for students on your municipality's website. Students are required and encouraged to use the Internet for research.

Planning to Be Interviewed

Start by asking students what questions they have. Consider ways that you can incorporate their questions into your time with the class:

- Have students write their questions on strips of paper or chart paper, or ask the teacher to record the questions
- Select some of the questions to focus your presentation on
- Check the questions as you talk with students and try to organize your planned discussion around them.

Planning a Presentation

Share perspectives with students when you make a presentation. Students may have prepared interview questions, so ask teachers to share these with you before you come to the class. Also, consider discussing:

- Anecdotes that represent your own personal history, how and why you became involved in serving at the local level

You may be asked to focus specifically on current issues facing the municipality or recent decisions the council has made. As they research local issues, students will plan questions that help them explore these issues in the context of the following broader questions:

- What issues are people currently concerned about in our municipality?
- What are people doing to deal with these issues?
- Have these issues been in the newspapers or in local news reports on television or radio? What perspectives are presented in the media? What evidence of bias might there be?
- What more could be done?
- In what ways can and should residents and students of the municipality get involved?

Students also explore ways that municipal representatives demonstrate accountability as they:

- Respond to residents and constituents (citizens, businesses, interest groups and newcomers)
- Participate in the municipality
- Sit on committees
- Take part in local events
- Represent and express the concerns of constituents in government meetings
- Participate in municipal initiatives.

- Your ideas about why it is important to be part of the democratic process in your municipality
- What “being a citizen” means to you
- The responsibilities you have and some of the challenges you face
- The importance of people who serve as elected officials for their municipalities
- The ways that you balance different priorities and perspectives in the municipality
- Insights and experiences with local issues that are current and meaningful to the municipality that would interest students
- Stories about interesting meetings or challenging decisions
- The importance of hard work, commitment and dedication to your job
- The financial responsibility and accountability the municipal government has to the community.

Participating in a Classroom Activity

Teachers may also invite you to participate directly with students as they are engaged in a classroom activity. These activities would generally take one to two 50-minute class periods.



INTERACT

The activities that students may invite you to participate in include:

- A **carousel sharing strategy** where students set up displays to share information on the municipal government department they have researched. As students visit each other’s displays, they are asked to focus on the following questions:
 - How do you think each of these local government departments provides benefits to the community?
 - What different types of choices and decisions do you think are made when municipalities implement these services or build facilities?
 - What did you learn that you did not know before from this group’s research? What did this group do really well?
- A **community participation fair** where students have invited individuals from various organizations in the community to provide information, ideas and insights on participating with municipal government in the municipality. Alternatively, you may be invited to view a **gallery** of student projects focused on ways of participating with municipal government. A gallery tour involves travelling through a series of displays that students have set up in their classroom.
- A **newsletter** that students create to inform the municipal office about issues that affect quality of life in the municipality. Students may invite you to listen to a presentation on what they have found out about these issues and recommendations they have.

As you plan to work with students in their classroom, you may wish to:

- Ask the teacher for specific information about the projects that students have created
- Provide each group of students with a comment on their project
- Prepare a list of questions that you could ask students about their projects. Questions may include:
 - What is something new that you learned about municipal government from your research?
 - What was the most interesting part of your research for you?
 - If you could change something in our municipality, what would you change?
 - What questions arose during your research that you were not able to answer?
- Consider inviting the class to submit recommendations resulting from their research to the municipal office
- Send a thank-you card or letter to the class after your visit.

Consider whether there are ways to involve students in the decision-making process in the municipality. There may be specific projects that interest students and motivate them to become involved, such as:

- A skateboard or sports activity park
- Youth curfews
- New recreational facilities.

Establish the parameters for student involvement. For example, students may provide their opinions and perspectives through activities such as:

- Participating in a survey
- Making a presentation to council or a committee
- Attending meetings.

Planning a Presentation

Topic

How to start (a warm-up activity or ice-breaker)

Questions I can ask students

Information that focuses on topic

Visuals I can use

Activities I can ask students to do

What I can leave with students

What the classroom teacher needs to know

Pre-Plan

School and Class

Number of Students

Student Interests or Questions

Related Topics or Issues in the Municipality

2 If classes submit a project to the municipal office...

Students work on a number of different projects while they learn about municipal government. They may submit one or more of these projects to your municipal office. Teachers are asked to contact the municipal office before sending any student work. Establish any limitations with teachers when you discuss these projects with them. For example, you may wish to ask the class to select some of the student posters to send to the municipal office instead of sending all of them.



INTERACT

Students will complete some or all of the following projects during their study of municipal government.

- Students work in groups to complete a **community scan**. Groups are asked to compile their community scans into a classroom or school project before sending it to the municipal office.
- Students work in groups to explore a local issue and create a **file folder action plan**. The class is asked to select some of the action plans to share with the municipal office. You may also be asked to visit the classroom as students create their file folder action plans and work with each group. Section 1 provides suggestions for working with students in the classroom.
- Students work in groups to create a **poster**, describing their vision for the future of the municipality. Students create their poster around the question, "To what extent should people and organizations work together to build a vision for the future?"
- Students are asked to form a Student Participation Committee to monitor and report on opportunities, challenges, issues and decisions the municipality is dealing with. One of the responsibilities of the Student Participation Committee involves the creation of a **class newsletter**. Classes may choose to share this newsletter with the municipal office.

There are a number of ways you may choose to respond to students' work:

- Send a letter or e-mail in response to the work that students have shared with you
- Ask teachers if you can visit the classroom to view and discuss students' work with them
- Display selected student work in the municipal office
- Follow up with the class or school to share how the students' work has provided insights into decisions or issues that council is dealing with.

A **community scan** is a description of conditions and issues that influence and affect the community. A community scan collects information about the community, and identifies issues and challenges that municipal governments may be dealing with. Community scans gather information and examples about different conditions, ways of life, questions, issues, interests and decisions in the community. Community, or environmental, scans can be used by municipal officials to identify and examine issues that relate to and affect the quality of life, sustainability and business planning in the municipality. A scan can be described as a set of observations with a common goal.

A **file folder action plan** is created on a file folder with the following elements:

- A cover design on the front of the file folder that states and explains the issue
- Supporting evidence on the inside of the file folder, such as:
 - Position statements that provide the students' stand on the issue
 - Visuals or photographs that support students' opinions
 - Statements or quotations from other individuals or media that supports the opinion
 - Related facts and information from students' research that supports their opinion or counters opposing viewpoints
- Options for action on the back cover of the file folder.

Plan to respond to classroom submissions by:

- Sharing reasons why research is important in dealing with issues and controversy and in making a decision about a course of action
- Providing constructive feedback and responses to students' work
- Encouraging students to evaluate the effectiveness of their actions by providing your insights and suggestions about their ideas
- Clarifying or expanding student knowledge and understanding by providing information about your municipality
- Providing any documents or resources that the municipality may have that are pertinent and relevant to students' research.

In your responses to students, you may also choose to share information about current issues and decisions that council is facing. Consider including responses that address one or more of the following ideas:

- The council's questions and research currently underway regarding the municipality's issues and initiatives
- Specific projects and initiatives that relate to young people in the municipality
- Background information about any issues that students raise
- The types of decisions you have to make as part of council or administration
- The opportunities, challenges and issues you face
- Suggestions for ways that students can get involved in public input processes or sit on committees or boards, if appropriate and possible in your municipality.



INTERACT

If there are opportunities to invite students to submit their research, projects or opinions for posting on your municipality's website, you may wish to send a notice to elementary schools in your municipality. Inform teachers of the requirements and limitations of work that students may submit. Consider suggestions for student submissions that:

- Encourage students to contribute their perspectives and opinions on current issues and decisions
- Encourage students to express and share their concerns as members of the municipality
- Contribute ideas for building a "good" quality of life.

3 If teachers or classrooms request information about the municipality and municipal government...

Students will discuss, research, investigate and explore the roles, responsibilities, structures and functions of municipal government. They also focus on ways that elected representatives are accountable to residents of a municipality and how young people can become involved with local government. Teachers or classrooms may contact your municipal office to request information about the municipality and its government.

There are different ways you can provide information to grade 6 classrooms.

- Compile and send any print resources that you may have available that would be appropriate for grade 6 students.
- Offer to bring resources or materials to the classroom and share them with students through a classroom presentation or sharing session.
- Provide teachers with specific website links that may provide information that is relevant to students.
- Invite classrooms to visit the municipal office to learn more about your municipality and its governance.

The following suggestions provide an outline of the types of information that students would find useful and relevant.

1. Information about the municipality

- Stories and local artifacts, such as photographs or media sources, that highlight the history of the municipality
- Information about the types of places that are impacted by decisions made by municipal government, such as places where:
 - People live
 - People obtain goods and services
 - People work
 - People play
 - Community activities happen
 - Natural places are protected
- Visuals such as community maps and photographs
- What makes your municipality a “good” place to live and what initiatives and programs contribute to the quality of life in the municipality
- Insights on the differences between large and small, urban and rural municipalities.

2. Perspectives on municipal government processes and democracy

- Perspectives on democratic governance, including examples of how democracy is enacted in local government through:
 - Elected representatives
 - The electoral process

Some municipalities have developed brochures or booklets that provide information on the municipality and its government. Students would find these useful as sources of information.

If you are planning to produce a booklet or brochure for students on the municipality, consider including information such as:

- The municipality – its history, features, logo, flag and cultures
- Who works in the municipal government – mayor or reeve, councillors, chief administrative officer
- Municipal departments, structures and responsibilities
- Accountability for financial decision-making and planning
- Ways to participate in municipal government
- How to contact the municipality – telephone numbers, e-mail, website.

If you have considered developing resources to provide information to students about your municipality, you may wish to use one of the following formats:

- Fact sheets
- Briefing notes, or summaries of important issues and decisions in the municipality
- FAQ handouts or feature on the municipality's website.

Students explore the electoral process through some or all of the following questions:

- Who can vote?
- Who should be able to vote?
- How and when do elections take place?
- Should all citizens be required to vote?
- Is voting a right or a privilege?
- Should citizens take responsibility for knowing what candidates stand for on issues and community concerns before they vote?

Students learn about different decision-making models and would be interested in whether decisions were made collaboratively or required compromises.

- o Involved citizens
- o Governments that are accountable for their actions
- o Volunteer activities

- The concept of representative democracy and the qualities of effective representation
- The role of bylaws
- Strategies for participating with municipal government
- How councils arrive at decisions and the use of majority votes in arriving at decisions, compared with achieving decisions by consensus
- How councillors can provide different perspectives and opinions when making decisions; how discussion and debate is part of the decision-making process.

3. Information about current issues and decisions in the municipality

- The opportunities, issues and challenges that municipalities have to deal with and the different types of decisions they have to make
- The differences between your municipality and neighbouring municipalities and when and how they work together
- Decisions and initiatives that strengthen the municipality's viability and sustainability
- Local issues, challenges and controversies
- Future goals, plans and initiatives for your municipality.

Important Concepts that Students Should Know

The following terms and concepts are developed in the activities that students complete as part of their study of local government. Consider ways you can reinforce these understandings as you work with students.

A **representative democracy** provides citizens with the ability to elect a representative to govern and make decisions on behalf of citizens.

A **democracy** is a political system in which citizens have a voice in decision-making. **Democracy** is often defined as a political system or system of government in which citizens have a voice in decision-making. Democracy involves consideration of equality, fairness, freedoms and justice.

Most communities in Alberta are governed by a **local government**, the level of government given the power to make decisions that relate to local issues and services. Local government is also called **municipal government**. Municipal government is created by the provinces to provide services.

There are different types of **municipalities**. Each has similar structures and functions and may deal with similar or different issues. Cities, towns, villages and summer villages are examples of municipalities. **Municipal districts** are also municipalities and may include many different landscapes – rural areas and farmland, forested areas, mountains and parkland. Students are introduced to the concept of **community** in the Kindergarten Social Studies Program of Studies. Community is defined as “a group of people with commonalities that may include culture, language, values and beliefs, interests, practices and ways of life, history and/or geographically defined

shared space.” *Building Communities Through Local Government* uses this definition to encourage students to explore the relationship between communities and municipal government. **Municipalities** are administrative entities comprised of clearly defined boundaries and the populations within them. Geographic communities can be municipalities; however, they can also be smaller communities within municipalities.

Source: Kindergarten to Grade 3 Social Studies Program of Studies (2005): p. 6.

The concept of **sustainability** is important to municipalities as councils make decisions about the ways resources are used to provide services and facilities. Generally, something that is sustainable is maintained at a particular level to conserve a balance by avoiding the depletion of resources. This description comes from definitions related to environmental sustainability, as a definition of municipal sustainability has not been agreed to at this time.

A similar concept is viability. Something that is **viable** has the ability to grow and develop.

When choices are **prioritized** they are often placed in order of importance. **Priorities** represent those choices that are most important. The way that a municipal government makes decisions about the use of the land depends on the ideas and ideals that are important to the municipality. Priorities are also established around budget choices. These ideas and choices are called the municipality’s **priorities**.

Before municipalities decide whether to build or provide facilities and services, they have to think about the **costs** and the **benefits**. A cost is a consequence of an action. A benefit occurs when a decision results in improvements in well being or the common good.

Accountability involves situations in which people are expected to be responsible for their actions and may be required to explain them to others.

A **controversy** can occur when there is strong disagreement. Debates, discussions and disagreements can be part of a controversy.

In some cases, groups that disagree try to reach a **compromise** to deal with the choices that have to be made. Each side gives up some of their demands so they can come to an agreement that everyone can live with.

Collaboration occurs when people work together to make a decision.

A **strategic plan** is used to set the direction for the future of the municipality. It is a statement of beliefs, principles or guidelines that guide the work of an organization. It considers the roles and responsibilities of the people involved.

Students are asked to discuss any meeting they attend using the following questions:

- What was the purpose of the meeting? Are these types of meetings held on a regular basis?
- Did this meeting deal with a specific concern or issue? What was this issue?
- Who was present at this meeting? What were their roles?
- How were decisions made at this meeting?

Consider who else in your municipality students might like a chance to meet.

4 If you receive a request to have students visit the municipal office for a field study tour...

One of the requests you may receive from teachers is for students to visit the municipal office as part of a field study tour. Students will be conducting research into the roles, responsibilities and functions of different municipalities, which include:

- Financial Services (property taxes, municipal revenue and business licences)
- Protective Services (police services, bylaw enforcement, fire protection, ambulance service, disaster and emergency services)
- Public Works (roads and streets, sidewalks and lighting, storm water management, equipment management, engineering and public transit)
- Utility Services (water, wastewater and solid waste management)
- Land Use Planning (subdivision development and building permits)
- Family and Community Support Services (municipal programs, community groups and seniors' services)
- Recreation and Cultural Services (recreation facilities and programs, pathways and parks, cultural facilities, libraries and volunteerism)
- Economic Development (business and community promotion).

Students will want to use their field study tour of the municipal office to learn more about the types of decisions that local governments are responsible for making. Plan to lead or guide students on their tour and provide insights and information regarding:

- Departments or areas that look after different needs of the municipality – simplified examples of job descriptions that are part of the municipality would also be useful to students in their research
- Issues, challenges and solutions of local municipal planning and the development of services and programs
- Any roles and responsibilities that are unusual or unique, or provided in a different fashion.

There are a number of considerations in planning for a field study tour for students:

- Establish the time parameters and options with teachers in advance for what the students can take part in.
- If you can share information such as brochures, pamphlets or handouts, plan to provide one set for each classroom.
- If this is a program you would like to encourage, or already have developed, you may wish to consider sending information out to the schools in your municipality.

Teachers may also ask whether there is an opportunity for students to attend a portion of a public meeting, community or council meeting. Identify opportunities where it may be appropriate for students to attend these meetings. Alternatively, consider informing teachers whether any meetings are aired on local cable channels or if minutes are available to them. As most urban municipal council meetings occur in the evening, you could recommend a public or committee meeting that occurs during the day.



INTERACT

Consider how you can provide students with opportunities to experience how responsibilities of local government are carried out, such as:

- Council meetings – consider running a mock council meeting with students taking on the roles of the mayor or reeve and municipal councillors
- “Hands on” experience in municipal planning – consider how you can share the planning process with students
- Committee meetings that illustrate the decision-making process
- “Real life” experiences, for example, applying for a land use permit using authentic forms or applying for a job in a municipal department
- Authentic examples of the processes of municipal government, including an election ballot and examples of public or council decision-making processes
- An experience being Mayor or Reeve, councillor or Chief Administrative Officer for a day.

Planning a Presentation

The time frame of the tour

How and where to start the tour

The sequence of the tour

How students will be actively involved

Who will facilitate the tour

What students will leave with

What the classroom teacher needs to know

What students should be told to bring or wear



What Students Learn in Grade 6 Social Studies

The Alberta Social Studies program emphasizes the development of understandings of citizenship through awareness of the political process and a commitment to become actively involved as citizens. In grade 6, students concentrate on building understandings of democracy, rights and responsibilities through an exploration of local, provincial and federal levels of government.

The Alberta Social Studies program is organized around two core concepts – citizenship and identity. Knowledge and understandings, values and attitudes are developed through a focus on multiple perspectives (including Aboriginal and Francophone), **pluralism** and **deliberative inquiry**. The core concepts and **multiple perspectives** are reflected in each grade level and provide connections from grade to grade:

- Kindergarten emphasizes a strong sense of identity and self-esteem and introduces students to the concept of citizenship.
- Grade 1 is an introduction to active and responsible citizenship and introduces the concept of community.
- Grade 2 expands on the concept of community through an examination of specific characteristics of communities in Canada. Students also examine how a community changes over time.
- Grade 3 continues to build on the knowledge of community and citizenship by examining diverse communities in the world. Grade 3 students are introduced to the concepts of global citizenship and quality of life.
- Grade 4 introduces specific geographic skills through an examination of Alberta and its cultural and geographic diversity. Historical thinking is reinforced through stories and legends.
- Grade 5 examines the foundations of Canada through its physical geography, ways of life and heritage of its diverse peoples. Grade 5 presents events and issues that have impacted citizenship and identity in the Canadian context over time.
- Grade 6 emphasizes the importance of active and responsible participation as the foundation of a democratic society. Students will examine how the underlying principles of democracy in Canada compare to those of Ancient Athens and the Iroquois Confederacy.

Alberta Social Studies Program of Studies (2005): p. 11.

The interrelated concepts of citizenship and identity are at the core of the Social Studies program.

The sense of being a citizen, enjoying individual and collective rights and equitable status in contemporary society, impacts an individual's sense of identity. Individuals need to feel that their identities are viewed as legitimate before they can contribute to the public good and feel a sense of belonging and empowerment as citizens.

Alberta Social Studies Program of Studies (2005): p. 4.

Multiple perspectives encourage a view of Canadian society as pluralistic, bilingual, multicultural, inclusive and democratic and emphasizes the importance of diversity and respect for differences.

One of the goals of the Social Studies program is to encourage students to develop understandings of the roles and contributions of linguistic, cultural and ethnic groups in Canada. Social studies helps students to function as citizens in a **pluralistic** society – one that values diversity and cohesion. Pluralism recognizes that citizenship and identity are shaped by many factors.

Deliberative inquiry involves purposeful research, independent problem solving and critical thinking skills, and reflection on what has been learned and how it has been learned.

Critical issues, posed effectively, ask students to develop and apply critical thinking skills, build understandings of multiple perspectives, consider alternatives and recognize that challenges can often involve many different opinions or solutions.

As students build understandings about local government, citizenship and democracy, they explore five critical issues:

- What is a community?
- What should and can a community provide?
- Why share?
- What does it mean to be a citizen?
- How democratic is our community?

As students focus their inquiry on the roles and responsibilities of municipal government, they explore five critical issues:

- Why do people choose to live in a municipality?
- How do people in a municipality contribute to building a good place to live?
- Why do we need municipal government?
- How does municipal government serve communities?
- How do the decisions of municipal government reflect the values and attitudes of its communities?

Expectations and Sequence of Learning

As students are engaged in their study of local government with the *Building Communities Through Local Government* resources, they complete a number of activities that are focused on critical issues. A **critical issues approach** provides dilemmas and inquiries that are relevant and meaningful to students. Students explore local government through the learning sequence outlined below.

Get Personal encourages students to explore what citizenship means to them in the context of daily life in communities. Students develop criteria for an ideal community, discuss connections between community and local government, and identify public services and facilities. They examine municipalities and municipal government in Alberta, investigate what services and facilities can be provided by municipal government, and consider the range of factors that influence individual and community responsibilities and decision-making. Students investigate what democracy means and start to develop an understanding of the roles and responsibilities of municipal government.

How can you help students explore local government in the context of citizenship, rights and responsibilities in a democracy?

As you work with students, plan to reinforce the link between citizenship and local government. Use the concept of community as a place where all forms of participation in government are enacted and through which students have their first, and often most relevant and concrete, experiences with the roles and responsibilities of government. If you visit a classroom to talk to students, or if students visit the municipal office, encourage them to create interview questions for you to answer. Support their use of an inquiry process.

A Good Place to Live invites students to explore different types of municipalities and decisions, challenges and issues they may face. Students investigate municipalities in Alberta and identify similarities and differences between them. They conduct a community scan, identifying issues and challenges that influence decision-making in their municipalities. They develop knowledge and understandings about the structures and functions, roles and responsibilities of municipal government, and consider how municipalities make decisions for sustainability. Students develop an appreciation for the ways that decision-making is influenced by different needs as well as by municipal governments and community members.

How can you help students develop understandings of the structures, responsibilities and roles of local government?

You can help students consider how the sustainability and vitality of municipalities are connected to the work and decisions of municipal government. Support students in their exploration of the day-to-day work of municipal governments. As you work with students, consider ways to illustrate reasons for municipal government structures and functions and to help students analyze different environments and ways of life.

Make Connections provides students with the opportunity to apply their knowledge of municipal government to ways that citizens can influence and shape decision-making. Students explore the electoral process, representation and citizen action and identify ways that municipal representatives demonstrate accountability to their communities. Students also investigate ways that individuals, groups and organizations share perspectives and beliefs on issues and concerns that affect and interest them. They examine strategies that extend understandings of participation and decision-making. Students build appreciation for ways that people can contribute to the quality of life within communities by working together, supporting and participating in their municipal government.

How can you encourage students to explore the opportunities they have to participate in the democratic process?

One of the most important perspectives you can provide addresses the accountability and responsibilities of the municipal government to residents. Try to provide examples of different individuals and groups with whom you and your municipality work – community action groups, social organizations, volunteers, lobby or special interest groups and other levels of government. Consider ways to invite classrooms or schools to submit views and questions about local and current issues. Provide insights into ways that councils make decisions – through policy-making and bylaws.

Participate invites students to investigate a local issue and participate in a decision that affects them and their municipality. Students research, develop and carry out a plan for action. They create a strategic plan to describe a vision, recommendations, rules and principles that should guide decisions for their municipality's future. They build appreciation for the contributions of municipal government officials, and the ways that people of all ages can participate in their municipalities.

How can you reinforce the value of acting and participating in democratic processes?

A critical aspect of learning about local government involves carrying through with research on issues, and learning ways to take positive and constructive social action. Consider ways that your municipality can support students in taking action and becoming involved in decision-making.

As students investigate decision-making in municipalities, they explore five critical issues:

- Why are municipal representatives elected?
- How are elected officials accountable to community members?
- How do local issues in the municipality affect decision-making and participation?
- How do people influence decision-making?
- Why is this local issue important?

As students build strategies for participating in their communities and municipal government, they explore three critical issues:

- What does it mean to participate?
- How can kids participate as citizens?
- To what extent should people and organizations work together to build a vision for the future?



www.municipalaffairs.alberta.ca
www.municipalaffairs.alberta.ca/edu_grade6.cfm