

Section 3

3. Make Connections

The teaching and learning activities in **Section 3: Make Connections** ask students to consider different ways that municipal government and elected representatives are accountable to their communities. Students also explore how decision-making is a responsibility of citizens in local elections as they decide how to vote.

Students also research different ways that citizens can participate in their municipalities. They extend understandings of what participation means and build understandings of ways they can participate.

This section provides opportunities for students to explore community-based issues and challenges. Students apply strategies that involve interaction with community members, including interviews and a community participation fair. Select those activities that are appropriate for your community and students. Students will build on these strategies in the final section of this resource.

Select, modify and adapt the activities that follow to best meet the needs of your students and to build understandings and skills related to opportunities for participation with municipal government.

Commitment
Commitment
commitment

Preparing for Learning

This section encourages students to explore ways to make connections by considering a number of different options for getting involved with municipal government. Students should understand the **roles, responsibilities, structures** and **functions** of municipal government. Section 2: A Good Place to Live developed these concepts.

There are five critical issues in this section.

Why are municipal representatives elected?

2 to 5 class periods*

How are elected officials accountable to community members?

2 to 3 class periods*

How do local issues in the municipality affect decision-making and participation?

1 to 2 class periods*

How can people influence decision-making?

3 to 4 class periods*

Why is this local issue important?

3 to 5 class periods*

* Based on 50-minute class periods

WHAT YOU NEED

Student Resources

- Student Resource 3-1: Municipal Elections (pp. 156-157)
- Student Resource 3-2: Accountability Matters (pp. 158-160)
- Student Resource 3-3: Make Connections (pp. 161-166)
- Student Resource 3-4: Local Issues (pp. 167-168)
- Student Participation Committee (Appendix B: pp. 217-223)

Graphic Organizers

- Storyboard (p. 210)
- Cause and Effect Chart (p. 212)
- Mind Map (p. 207)

Materials and Sources

- Poster paper
- Local newspapers and magazines

Teacher Backgrounder

- The Decision-Making Process (pp. 169-170)

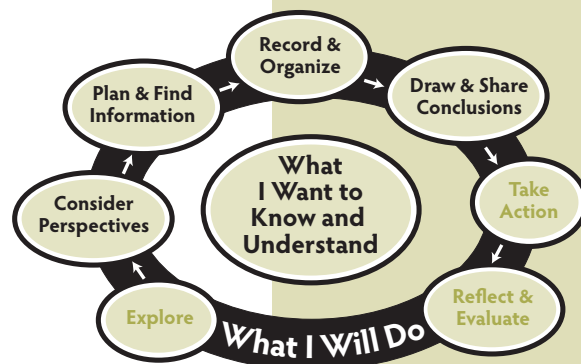
This teacher backgrounder provides a description of the processes involved in decision-making. These processes include the administrative functions of the government. Most decision-making is formalized around a process that includes:

- Setting an agenda to establish the business of meetings. Agendas usually take into account current political issues, the best timing of delegations or groups of citizens wanting to present to council, and the natural order of discussion.
- Developing request for decision documents. The request for decision document usually contains the topic, background or history, financial implications and references to policy.
- Holding meetings. A council meeting is a forum for debate and discussion about municipal matters.

These elements establish the process used for informed decision-making about policies, bylaws, planning and projects.

LEARNING OUTCOMES AND INQUIRY

Section 3: Make Connections encourages students to develop understandings and processes involved in a number of stages of the inquiry process. The five critical issues in this section include a performance assessment task.



Inquiry Steps and Processes	Questions that Guide the Inquiry	Critical Issues that Emphasize the Inquiry Focus
<p>Consider Perspectives</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify research questions Identify individuals and groups involved with the question or issue Consider different perspectives and opinions 	<p>What questions do I have?</p> <p>Who is affected and why?</p> <p>What different opinions exist?</p>	<p>Why are municipal representatives elected?</p> <p>How do local issues in the municipality affect decision-making and participation?</p>
<p>Plan and Find Information</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Focus on research process Identify, locate and organize sources and information Allocate tasks 	<p>How will I find out what I need to know and understand?</p> <p>What type of information do I need?</p> <p>What sources do I need to consult?</p> <p>What is the best way to research?</p> <p>Who can we find out more from?</p>	<p>Why are municipal representatives elected?</p> <p>How are elected officials accountable to community members?</p> <p>Why is this local issue important?</p>
<p>Record and Organize</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Record information Organize information collected Analyze the information Make connections and comparisons 	<p>How will we record our research?</p> <p>What similarities and differences do we see?</p> <p>What comparisons can we make?</p> <p>What connections do we see?</p>	<p>How do local issues in the municipality affect decision-making and participation?</p> <p>How can people influence decision-making?</p>
<p>Draw and Share Conclusions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Present the information Draw conclusions Assess information Consider solutions, perspectives, alternatives and predictions Make decisions 	<p>How will we share our information?</p> <p>What would happen if...?</p> <p>What conclusions can we make?</p> <p>What evidence supports our conclusions?</p>	<p>Why is this local issue important?</p>

Social Studies Learning Outcomes 6.1:

General Outcome 6.1

Citizens Participating in Decision-Making

Students will demonstrate an understanding and appreciation of the dynamic relationship between governments and citizens as they engage in the democratic process.

Local and Current Affairs

In order to allow opportunities for students to engage in current affairs, issues and concerns of a local nature, the program of studies provides the flexibility to include these topics within the time allotted for social studies.

Specific Learning Outcomes Supported and Developed in Section 3: Make Connections

Values and Attitudes

6.1.1 recognize how individuals and governments interact and bring about change within their local and national communities:

- (1) recognize and respect the democratic rights of all citizens in Canada (C, I)
- (4) value citizens' participation in a democratic society (C)
- (5) value the contributions of elected representatives in the democratic process (PADM)

Knowledge and Understandings

6.1.2 demonstrate an understanding of the fundamental principles of democracy by exploring and reflecting upon the following questions and issues:

- (3) What are the rights and responsibilities of citizens living in a representative democracy? (C, PADM)

6.1.4 analyze the structure and functions of local governments in Alberta by exploring and reflecting upon the following questions and issues:

- (1) How are representatives chosen to form a local government (i.e., electoral process)? (PADM)

6.1.6 analyze how individuals, groups and associations within a community impact decision-making of local and provincial governments by exploring and reflecting upon the following questions and issues:

- (1) How can individuals, groups and associations within a community participate in the decision-making process regarding current events or issues (i.e., lobbying, petitioning, organizing and attending local meetings and rallies, contacting elected representatives)? (C, PADM)
- (3) In what ways do elected officials demonstrate their accountability to the electorate (e.g., respond to constituents, participate in local events, represent and express in government meetings the concerns of constituents)? (C, PADM)

Skills and Processes

6.S.1 develop skills of critical thinking and creative thinking:

- (1) assess significant local and current affairs from a variety of sources, with a focus on examining bias and distinguishing fact from opinion
- (2) critically evaluate ideas, information and positions
- (3) re-evaluate personal opinions to broaden understanding of a topic or an issue
- (4) generate original ideas and strategies in individual and group activities
- (5) seek responses to inquiries from various authorities through electronic media

6.S.4 demonstrate skills of decision-making and problem solving:

- (1) propose and apply new ideas, strategies and options to contribute to decision-making and problem solving, supported with facts and reasons
- (2) consider multiple perspectives when dealing with issues, decision-making and problem solving
- (3) collaborate with others to devise strategies for dealing with problems and issues
- (4) select and use technology to assist in problem solving
- (5) use data gathered from a variety of electronic sources to address identified problems
- (7) use graphic organizers, such as mind mapping/webbing, flow charting and outlining, to present connections among ideas and information in a problem solving environment

6.S.5 demonstrate skills of cooperation, conflict resolution and consensus building:

- (1) demonstrate the skills of compromise to reach group consensus
- (2) work collaboratively with others to achieve a common goal
- (3) record group brainstorming, planning and sharing of ideas, using technology
- (4) extend the scope of a project beyond classroom collaboration, using communication technologies such as the telephone and e-mail

6.S.7 apply the research process:

- (1) determine reliability of information filtering for point of view and bias
- (2) formulate questions to be answered through the research process
- (3) use graphs, tables, charts and Venn diagrams to interpret information
- (4) draw and support conclusions based on information gathered to answer a research question
- (6) formulate new questions as research progresses
- (8) access and retrieve appropriate information from the Internet, using a specific search path or form given uniform resource locations (URLs)
- (11) reflect on and describe the processes involved in completing a project

6.S.8 demonstrate skills of oral, written and visual literacy:

- (1) express opinions and present perspectives and information in a variety of forms such as oral or written presentations, speeches or debates

6.S.9 develop skills of media literacy:

- (1) detect bias present in the media
- (2) examine and assess diverse perspectives regarding an issue presented in the media
- (3) analyze significant current affairs
- (4) identify and distinguish points of view expressed in electronic sources on a particular topic

ASSESSING STUDENT LEARNING

Ongoing Assessment

Choices can be made about assessing student work in this section. The criteria checklist provided in this section can be used to:

- Observe student work in group and classroom settings
- Develop checklists for assessment of student work in the activities in this section.

Performance Assessment Task

The performance assessment task, *Accountability Matters*, involves students in reflecting on the importance of accountability in elected officials and gathering evidence of what accountability looks like in a local context. Students gather information through interviewing community members from a variety of age groups as well as from available media resources, including websites. Students communicate their information in a newspaper article format.

A *Student Reporter Tip Sheet* helps students organize and prepare to conduct interviews to gather information. Additional support for asking questions can be found on the Alberta Education Online Guide to Implementation: www.onlineguide.learnalberta.ca/content-og/ssmt/html/askingpowerfulquestions_mt.html.

Criteria for Evaluation

Students provide evidence of their learning in this performance assessment task as they:

- explain the importance of accountability (6.1.1.5, 6.1.4.1)
- provide evidence of accountability (6.1.6.3)
- formulate interview questions (6.5.7.2)
- communicate information (6.5.8.1).



Assessment Tip: Cross-Curricular Assessment

This performance task has been written for the purpose of gathering evidence of student learning in social studies. However, it can also be used to gather evidence of student learning in language arts. When working with cross-curricular assessment tasks, care must be taken to clearly identify which evidence applies to social studies and which evidence applies to language arts.

In social studies, the communication outcomes refer in a broad sense to the way in which students communicate their message related to the content of social studies. While we always want students to demonstrate their best work, detailed marking of spelling and other conventions is more appropriate in a language arts context where learner outcomes are specifically related to those skills. The content of the message remains important in language arts and should not be overpowered by detailed marking of conventions and mechanics.

Teachers wishing to use this assignment as a language arts assessment might consult the Alberta Education Functional Writing Scoring Guide 2005 for assessment descriptors: www.education.alberta.ca/k_12/testing/achievement/samples/2005-ELA6_functionalwriting.pdf.

Section 3: Make Connections Checklist

Criteria Students provide evidence of their learning as they:	Yes	Almost	Not Yet
Listen and respond respectfully to understand (6.1.1.1, 6.1.2.3)			
Describe the electoral process (6.1.4.1)			
Explain the importance of accountability (6.1.1.5, 6.1.4.1)			
Provide evidence of accountability (6.1.6.3)			
Describe and assess ways to participate in decision-making processes (6.1.1.4, 6.1.6.1, 6.S.4.1, 6.S.4.2)			
Examine, evaluate and assess sources of information (6.S.1.1, 6.S.1.2, 6.S.7.1, 6.S.7.3, 6.S.7.4, 6.S.7.8, 6.S.9.1, 6.S.9.2)			
Access and organize information from different sources (6.S.1.5, 6.S.4.5, 6.S.7.8)			
Discuss and share original ideas, strategies and options with others (6.S.1.4, 6.S.4.1)			
Express and support opinions (6.S.1.3)			
Participate in problem solving and decision-making processes (6.S.4.1, 6.S.4.4, 6.S.5.3)			
Identify different points of view and perspectives (6.S.4.2, 6.S.9.4)			
Analyze current affairs (6.S.9.3)			
Use graphic organizers to make connections between ideas (6.S.4.7, 6.S.7.3)			
Formulate interview questions (6.S.7.2, 6.S.7.6)			
Communicate information (6.S.8.1, 6.S.5.4)			
Work collaboratively and cooperatively in a group setting (6.S.4.3, 6.S.5.2)			
Contribute to group processes (6.S.5.1, 6.S.5.2)			
Reflect on processes used (6.S.7.11)			

Section 3: Make Connections

Rubric: Accountability Matters!

Level Criteria	4 Excellent	3 Proficient	2 Adequate	1 Limited *	Insufficient / Blank *
Explains the importance of accountability (6.1.1.5, 6.1.4.1)	Provides a comprehensive explanation of the importance of accountability.	Provides a thorough explanation of the importance of accountability.	Provides a basic explanation of the importance of accountability.	Provides a superficial explanation of the importance of accountability.	No score is awarded because there is insufficient evidence of student performance based on the requirements of the assessment task.
Provides evidence of accountability (6.1.6.3)	Provides pertinent evidence of accountability.	Provides relevant evidence of accountability.	Provides suitable evidence of accountability.	Provides irrelevant evidence of accountability.	
Formulates interview questions (6.S.7.2, 6.S.7.6)	Formulates purposeful questions that would likely encourage a pertinent response.	Formulates meaningful questions that would likely encourage a focused response.	Formulates routine questions that would likely encourage a general response.	Formulates superficial questions that would likely encourage a sketchy response.	
Communicates information (6.S.8.1, 6.S.5.4)	Communicates information in a memorable manner to engage the audience.	Communicates information in an effective manner to interest the audience.	Communicates information in a straightforward manner that generally holds the attention of the audience.	Communicates information in an ineffective manner that does little to sustain attention of the audience.	

* When work is judged to be limited or insufficient, the teacher makes decisions about appropriate intervention to help the student improve.

GLOSSARY

The following terms and concepts are developed in the activities and student resources of Section 3: Make Connections. Although they are grouped under the critical issue in which they are introduced, many recur and are used throughout the entire section. Definitions and explanations are presented in the context in which they appear in the teacher and student information.

Critical Issue 1: Why are municipal representatives elected?

A candidate for election is elected by **acclamation** when there are no opponents running against him or her.

The **electoral process** is an important aspect of the democratic system and refers to the manner in which voters elect representatives from those nominated as candidates.

Electors of municipalities can **elect**, or vote for, representatives who are responsible for making decisions and representing the people who live and work there.

The people who are eligible to vote are called the **electorate** or **electors**.

If an elected municipal official has to step down or resign part way through his or her three-year term of office, then a **by-election** may be held to elect someone else. A by-election is an election held to fill a vacant position at a date other than the general election date.

Critical Issue 2: How are elected officials accountable to community members?

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

Decisions that councils and councillors make are often seen in the **policies** and bylaws of a municipality. Policies are made by councils to set guidelines that the administration follows. The guidelines can describe how services and programs will be provided by the municipality.

A **bylaw** is a law or a policy passed by the council. Bylaws that are regulatory in nature are enforced by bylaw enforcement officers, police and constables in the municipality.

Councils are also responsible for passing **budgets**. A budget looks at **revenue**, or money that comes into the municipality as well as **expenses**, or money that needs to be spent or saved.

Elected representatives are responsible to the electors in the municipality. Electors are sometimes called **constituents** or **voters**.

Critical Issue 4: How can people influence decision-making?

A **lobby group** is a group that tries to change or influence policy or legislation towards its interests.

A **special interest group** has an interest in a specific area and works to promote its views.

Critical Issue 5: Why is this local issue important?

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

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

Collaboration occurs when people work together to make a decision.

Critical Issues and Activities

Why are municipal representatives elected?

2 to 5 class periods

❶ Although the electoral system is not the only method of participating in the democratic system, it is one of the most often referenced as a symbol of political participation. Municipal government representatives are an important aspect of the democratic process. Have students revisit what they know about their municipal representatives by responding to questions such as:

- How do you know about your representatives – from parents, family, community or the media?
- What work do they do?
- What issues are they involved with?

Revisit the concepts of **democracy** and **representation**, introduced in Section 1: Get Personal, with students. Ask students to consider the question:

- What are the qualities of an effective representative?

❷ Invite students to use sources such as local newspapers or magazines to find stories about their municipal representatives. Have students work with a small group to create a character poster that identifies the qualities of an effective representative.

- Groups can draw a silhouette outline of a person, and identify the qualities of an effective representative on the poster.
- Have groups consider how they can use analogies to identify both the quality and a reason for why it is important. (*For example, the heart can signify “commitment to the community” or “caring about citizens.”*)

❸ Have students use **Student Resource 3-1: Municipal Elections (pp. 156-157)** and a graphic organizer, such as the **Storyboard (Appendix A: p. 210)** to explore the electoral process. This student resource:

- Provides information about the electoral process
- Asks students to create a comic strip, game or storyboard that addresses one 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?



DIFFERENTIATE

Students can be asked to explore and research the municipal electoral process in Alberta individually, with a partner or in a small group. Have students select the questions they are most interested in, or negotiate the assignment of different questions to different groups.



WEBSITE

The *Building Communities Through Local Government* website provides students with the opportunity to explore the views and opinions of three candidates who are running for council. Each candidate will influence different decisions about policy and actions if they are elected. The candidate's views and opinions apply to each of the three different municipalities on the website.

Students can access the **Vote for a Representative!** interactive activity through the **Participate** feature on the website. Information and instructions for the activity are provided when students click on the ☺ icon beside the character with the voting booth. When students vote, their votes will be added to a running tally for the day, and the result will be displayed. The votes will be reset daily. Election results are displayed for the current and previous days. Students can see their vote added to the running tally for today's results. The elected representative's views are reflected on the landscape of each of the three municipalities.

- Have students use a graphic organizer, such as a **Cause and Effect Chart (Appendix A: p. 212)** to analyze what effects they think each candidate's views could have in a municipality if he or she was elected.
- Suggest that students develop an election campaign slogan, based on each candidate's messages.
- Discuss what happens when there is only one candidate for a council position in an election. Introduce the term "acclamation" to students. A candidate for election is elected by **acclamation** when there are no opponents running against him or her.

Have students discuss questions such as the following:

- How important is it that people know what candidates stand for? (*Reinforce the idea of making informed decisions by finding out what candidates represent and value. Encourage students to make links to the types of changes that governments have influenced in the municipality, for example choosing to build new recreation centres, implementing recycling programs, rejuvenating older areas of the municipality or establishing financially conservative policies.*)
- How do you think each candidate's views and opinions would affect the municipality? (*Revisit the values and priorities that each candidate discusses and make connections to new programs or facilities that may be established. Encourage students to revisit the website to see what the election of different candidates may result in for each municipality.*)
- What current examples can you find in the local media of the impact your mayor, reeve or council members have had on bringing change to the municipality?



THINK ABOUT

Remind students that an election involves serious consideration of current issues and is not a popularity contest. Spend time discussing fair, reasonable and safe criteria for conducting student campaigns.



THINK ABOUT

The Student Vote website, found at www.studentvote.ca, provides information and resources for involving students in voting simulations that run parallel to federal, provincial and some municipal elections.



ASSESS

Look for evidence of cooperative group work and students' abilities to share and discuss original ideas as well as present supported opinions, as they campaign and conduct their election.



PARTICIPATE: Student Participation Committee Election

Discuss the procedures involved in holding local elections across the province, and the fact that most municipal elections in Alberta are held on the third Monday in October. The exception is summer villages, where elections are held in August. How can students be involved in an electoral process that is meaningful and relevant to them? Invite students to form a Student Participation Committee for their classroom or school.

Have students go through the process of electing representatives to this group:

- Nominate candidates for election
- Prepare statements of candidates' views and opinions
- Share statements in a "public" classroom meeting
- Hold the election
- Establish responsibilities for the group.

Students may be asked to create their own list of qualifications, modeled on the qualifications for voters listed in Student Resource 3-1: Municipal Elections (pp. 156-157). **Appendix B: pp. 217-223** provides information, templates and forms for the Student Participation Committee election.

The Student Participation Committee should be established in an authentic context. This group can provide representation for the classroom and school in the following types of settings:

- Representing students in the classroom. Set a bi-weekly or monthly meeting that the Student Participation Committee can use to discuss questions and suggestions. Follow through with these in the classroom.
- Representing students in the school. Consider working with other grade 6 classrooms to hold an election for a Student Participation Committee that represents all grade 6 students, or all students in the school.
- Providing leadership for school or community projects. Have the group consult with students in the class or school to identify a project that would benefit all students, a community or the municipality.



INTERACT

Have the Student Participation Committee take responsibility for keeping the classroom informed about opportunities, challenges, issues and decisions that the municipality is involved with. The group may be asked to present a brief information session every two or three weeks, in a format such as:

- In the News: What has the local media reported about council's activities? *(Encourage students to check local or online newspapers and newsletters.)*
- In Council Chambers: What have council members been discussing in council meetings? *(Encourage students to look for examples of bylaws that have recently been passed or decisions the council is considering. Students may obtain some of this information from local news. They may also be encouraged to check the municipality's website for minutes of meetings.)*
- In the Municipality: What are events or news that we think council members should be aware of? *(Encourage students to identify school, community, provincial or national events that have an impact on quality of life in the municipality. For example, a national issue such as school safety may be something that students are concerned about in a local context. A school or community celebration may be an event that students would like council members to know about. Have students revisit their community scans to identify issues and events.)*

The Student Participation Committee can also be encouraged to work with other students in the classroom or school to create a one-page newsletter that presents information and student perspectives. The newsletter can be mailed or e-mailed to the municipal office. Students may also be encouraged to invite a municipal official to the class to listen to a presentation they prepare on issues that affect quality of life in the municipality.



DIFFERENTIATE

As an alternative to having students conduct family discussions, ask them to find examples of ways that municipal representatives demonstrate accountability. Have students consult various sources, including local newspapers, newsletters, council minutes and websites.



ASSESS

This student resource provides the performance assessment task for this section. A rubric is provided in the assessment notes and should be shared and discussed with students prior to beginning the task.

How are elected officials accountable to community members?

2 to 3 class periods

1 What does **accountability** mean? Introduce students to the idea that there are many situations in which people are expected to be responsible for their actions and may be required to explain them to others. Invite students to share examples of contexts in which they have to demonstrate accountability (*for example, home, school and community*).

Have students work in small groups to create questions for a family “dinner time” discussion, focused on questions related to the following ideas:

- Why and how should municipal representatives be accountable to the residents of a municipality? (*Provide students with examples of questions related to accountability that they can use for their discussion, such as “Have you ever contacted a councillor? How did he or she respond? Were all of your concerns addressed?”*)
- How should municipal representatives communicate with and get ideas and input from the residents they represent? (*Provide students with examples related to ways that municipal representatives communicate and request input, such as “Have you ever attended a council meeting or public consultation? How were you able to communicate your views? What other strategies encourage you to communicate with representatives and share your views?”*)

Have students prepare their questions in advance and bring their results back to class for a whole class discussion.

2 **Student Resource 3-2: Accountability Matters (pp. 158-160)** provides students with information on ways that councils make decisions and provide direction – through policy and bylaws. This student resource also:

- Presents students with the task of writing an article for the local newspaper, focused on the following questions:
 - o What is the most important role that council has in our municipality?
 - o How important is it for council members to consider the perspectives and opinions of residents of the municipality when they make decisions about policies and bylaws?
 - o Why should councillors be accountable to the residents of the municipality?
- Provides suggestions for constructing interview questions that ask why and how municipal representatives should:
 - o Respond to different community members (citizens, businesses, interest groups and newcomers)
 - o Take part in local events
 - o Represent and express in council meetings the concerns of constituents
 - o Participate in community and municipal initiatives.

How do local issues in the municipality affect decision-making and participation? 1 to 2 class periods

1 Student involvement with municipal government is most effective if it is centered on real issues that are relevant to the municipality and to students. Students need to believe that they can participate and make a difference.

Work with the class to identify issues that are of current interest in the municipality.

- Conduct a class discussion, asking students to brainstorm issues that are of current interest to them.
- Use local media sources to help identify some of these issues.
- Ask students to talk to family or community members to identify issues that they are concerned about.
- Check the municipal government’s website for any issues that are currently being dealt with by the council. Look for any upcoming public consultation events.
- Create a list of these issues and post it in the classroom. Explore what each of the issues means and involves.
- Ensure that issues are acceptable and appropriate to the community.



INTEGRATE: Language Arts: 4.1 Enhance and Improve

Have students analyze the messages in media sources about an issue. Chart facts, inferences and supported opinions.

Facts	Inferences	Supported Opinions
A curfew bylaw will be discussed by the municipal council.	A curfew would work in our municipality, because in other municipalities with a curfew young people are not out late in the streets.	I think we need a curfew to keep young people at home late at night. Police say this would help prevent fighting and vandalism.

- Have students identify key words or phrases that are used to denote fact or opinion, e.g., I think, I believe, it seems to be, the report says, from the statistics.
- Have students write a newspaper article, their own letter to the editor, or create a community newsletter or newspaper about a current issue. Students can be asked to focus on facts, opinions or both.

Adapted from: Alberta Education (2000). *English Language Arts (K-9) Illustrative Examples. Grade 6: p. 15.*



ASSESS

Students' mind maps can be assessed for evidence of understandings and appreciation of multiple perspectives and the opinions and points of view of others. Look for evidence that students can identify bias in research sources.

2 Invite students to use a graphic organizer, such as a **Mind Map (Appendix A: p. 207)** to brainstorm questions, ideas, perspectives and topics that relate to the issue. Students' discussion and brainstorming can be structured around questions such as the following:

- What issues are people currently concerned about in our municipality?
- What are people doing to deal with these issues?
- Has this issue 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 of the municipality get involved?



INTEGRATE: Health

The Health and Life Skills Guide to Implementation (K-9) (Alberta Education: 2002) provides Student Activity Master 12 for analyzing bias. The student master is available online, at www.education.alberta.ca, by clicking on Curriculum by Subject, then Health and accessing the online guide. The activity master is in Appendix C, p. C.12.



INTERACT

There are a variety of ways that you and your students can identify examples of issues that a municipality is facing. Start by looking in local newspapers or by trying to obtain council minutes from the municipal office. If your students live in different municipalities, consider which issues the class may be most interested in focusing on for their research.

- Identify whether there are any initiatives in the municipality that will have public input, such as decisions about new developments or the placement of a new facility. Contact the municipal office to ask about any upcoming public consultations. Provide students with a description of the initiatives and discuss the issues or decisions that are associated with these initiatives.
- Have students use the municipality's website to find out if there are issues that the council is facing. The municipality's website may provide insights and information about decisions they are facing. Budget information and financial reports may provide additional information about decisions and priorities. Alternatively, if the municipality does not have a website, look for information in local newspapers. Issues common to many municipalities in Alberta may be discussed in provincial contexts. Check the Alberta Municipal Affairs website at www.municipalaffairs.alberta.ca.
- If appropriate, invite a councillor to come to the class to discuss a current decision made by council. Ahead of time, inform the councillor about the issues that students have identified.
- Invite the Chief Administrative Officer to the class. Ask that any information regarding council decision-making be brought to the classroom.
- Check for any programs in your municipality that may provide students with opportunities to gain a better understanding of the types of decisions that are made. Examples of these programs may include:
 - o Job shadowing
 - o Councillor "for a day" programs
 - o Open houses.



DIFFERENTIATE

Students can alternatively be asked to consider how community members can participate with local government by revisiting the community murals created in Section 1: Get Personal. Students can be given choices to:

- Create a character who lives in the community and describe ways that this character is involved with the community and local government
- Add places to the community mural that facilitate involvement with the local government – volunteer and community centres, media offices, community meeting places and community organizations.



THINK ABOUT

A “sufficient” petition requires signatures of electors and other legal criteria to be officially recognized.

How can people influence decision-making?

3 to 4 class periods

❶ Citizen’s participation and interest in local issues translates into active involvement and commitment to the community. There are a number of ways that citizens become involved with local issues, and evidence of many of these strategies can be seen in local media, volunteer activities and community events.

Invite students to consider ways that people, including adults and kids, can voice their opinions and perspectives. Brainstorm a class list of these ideas. Encourage students to consider strategies that people can use, such as the following:

- Staying informed about what is going on in your municipality
- Reading local newspapers
- Asking for information
- Communicating with municipal offices
- Participating in public meetings
- Responding to requests from the municipality for their opinions or input
- Attending or hosting community meetings or dialogues
- Volunteering with groups that are involved with programs in the municipality
- Presenting research briefs to municipal councils or officials
- Writing letters or e-mails to council members or community organizations
- Participating in local phone-in radio or television shows
- Organizing or participating in a rally
- Organizing or presenting informal petitions that express points of view
- Having a press conference or preparing a press release
- Preparing public service announcements that inform the municipality about issues
- Joining a **lobby group** that tries to change or influence policy or legislation towards its interests
- Supporting a candidate for election who would do a good job as a councillor
- Running for council.

❷ Have students work in pairs or small groups to research the actions and “how-to’s” that are involved with one action strategy. Students can be provided with **Student Resource 3-3: Make Connections (pp. 161-166)**. This student resource provides information on different strategies for action and participation.

Use this information to construct a page for a “Yellow Pages” action directory for the classroom. To construct each page, invite groups to consider the following questions:

- What do people do when they use this strategy? *(Create an action word bank that reflects the options for participating with municipal government, such as talk together, write letters, share opinions, attend meetings, organize meetings, walk in rallies, contact government, join a group, volunteer and research.)*
- Why do people use this strategy? How effective is it? When is it most effective? *(Encourage students to consider how proactive, involved strategies that encourage sharing and voicing opinions, listening to others, getting involved with volunteer and community groups, participating in public meetings and responding to requests for input can often be more effective than confrontational types of strategies, such as rallies and demonstrations. Ask students to consider whether strategies encourage people to become part of a solution to an issue or contribute to an existing problem. Many municipalities consider strategies that involve effective and proactive communication the most effective strategies for participation with municipal government. Students can be encouraged to consider the pros and cons of their strategy.)*
- What roles do people have in using this strategy? *(Consider individuals who work with municipal government, community members, volunteers, community organizations and the media. Discuss what their responsibilities are when implementing a strategy, and whether these responsibilities are similar or different, depending on their role. For example, a news reporter may use the media to present many points of view, while a community organization may use the media to write a letter that promotes one point of view. Individuals can communicate directly with council members about their personal opinions while community organizations may have to ensure their communication represents the views of their members. Some strategies may require a strong leader to organize a group successfully while other strategies can be used by individuals. Encourage students to consider how roles involve active participation.)*



WEBSITE

The *Building Communities Through Local Government* website provides students with the opportunity to research different strategies for participating with local government. Students can access this information in the **Participate** feature of the website. This information repeats what is provided in **Student Resource 3-3: Make Connections (pp. 161-166)**.

When students enter the **Participate** feature, they can click on the ☺ icon beside each character. Text windows provide information on different participation strategies. This information provides students with the opportunity to explore different perspectives on, and strategies for, community participation and involvement.

- 3 Compile the pages into a “Yellow Pages” directory. Each group can summarize its information on a yellow sheet of paper for inclusion in the directory. The pages can be bound or placed in a small binder.



INTERACT

Plan to hold a Community Participation Fair in your classroom or school.

- Work with students to identify individuals and organizations that are involved with municipal government and decision-making in your municipality.
- Invite individuals or representatives in municipal offices, and selected volunteer groups, clubs, non-profit agencies or community-based organizations to participate.
- Set up table areas around the classroom for the fair and have each invited participant provide insights, ideas and information to student groups. Have students prepare questions for each group in advance of the fair.
- Use a **carousel sharing strategy** to have groups visit each table to add to their research on community action and participation Yellow Pages.
- A flow chart and template for organizing the Community Participation Fair can be found in **Appendix B (pp. 224-225)**.

Students may also be asked to develop and hold a local government fair for their school. Invite students to work in small groups to research a volunteer group, club, non-profit agency or community-based organization. Some groups may also take on municipal government roles. Have each group set up a display and invite other classrooms to participate. Alternatively, displays could be posted or set up around the classroom, and a **walking gallery tour** organized for parents or invited municipal officials. Encourage students to develop one question for individuals who view their display. Responses could be recorded on a poster paper by each display or taped on an audiotape.

If it is difficult to plan a fair in the classroom or school, consider asking students to write a class letter to different individuals and organizations, requesting information about ways they participate. Use the information in the Classroom Participation Fair in a format such as the following:

- Set up centres or stations and use the carousel strategy to have groups explore the information
- Gather the information in pizza boxes and use them as a research resource in the classroom
- Have students create their own pizza box centres that they use as a repository of information they collect.



DIFFERENTIATE

A **walking gallery tour** asks students to travel through a series of displays, much like they would in an art gallery or museum. Students can travel through the displays individually, with a partner or in a small group. As they visit each display, they can collect information, respond to focus questions or provide a response to the creator of the display.

Why is this local issue important? 3 to 5 class periods

1 Organize students into small groups and have each group select an issue from the class issue list created in the previous activity. Alternatively, have the class select one issue that all groups will research.

Discuss a process for researching and collecting information on the issue. Help students identify sources of information such as the following:

- Newspaper articles
- Resources (print and website) that provide background information on the topics connected to the issue
- Personal interviews with individuals or groups involved with the issue.

2 Work with students to investigate whether any **lobby groups** or **special interest groups** are concerned about the issue. A special interest group has an interest in a specific area and works to promote its views.

- If appropriate, help students contact people who are part of a lobby or special interest group on a particular issue and use a telephone interview to find out about their stand on the issue.
- Encourage students to look for lobby or interest groups on all sides of the issue.
- Discuss with students how **controversy** is often part of dealing with an issue.
- Consider inviting an individual or group who has campaigned for change to visit the class to talk about the experience.

Student Resource 3-4: Local Issues (pp. 167-168) provides a discussion about lobby groups and controversy. This student resource helps students organize their research into five sections:

- What this issue is all about
- What the media says
- What citizens and lobby or interest groups say
- What the controversy is
- What our group thinks.

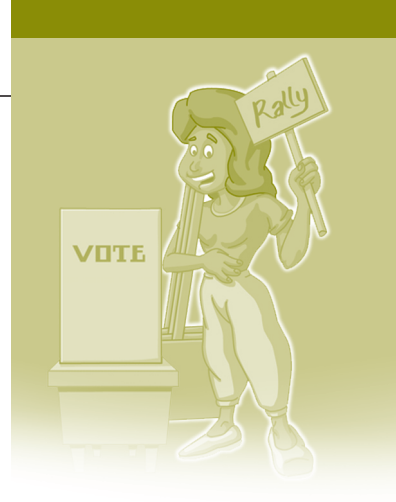


ASSESS

Look for evidence that students can locate, organize and analyze information from a variety of sources.

Student Resource 3-1

Municipal Elections



Talk and write about the following questions:

1. When have you been asked to vote on something to make a decision?

2. Did the majority of votes determine the decision? Or did all the voters have to agree on a decision together?

3. Which do you think is the most effective method of making a decision? Why?

4. Which do you think is the most efficient method of making a decision? Why?

Electing Representatives

The **electoral process** is an important aspect of the democratic system and refers to the manner in which voters elect representatives from those nominated as candidates. Citizens of municipalities can **elect**, or vote for, representatives who are responsible for making decisions and representing the people who live and work there. The people who are eligible to vote are called the **electorate** or **electors**. A person can vote in municipal elections if the person meets all of the following criteria:

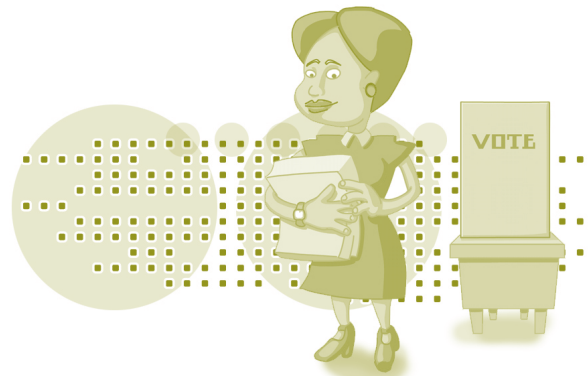
- Is at least 18 years old
- Is a Canadian citizen
- Has lived in Alberta for six months before the election day
- Resides in the area on election day.

Local elections are one of the most important elements of a democratic government. In the election, citizens of the community vote for individuals who will represent their interests and will work to make decisions about services and facilities that will help build a good quality of life. Local general elections are held every three years, and councillors are expected to serve their communities during this three-year term. Councillors take an oath of office to guarantee that they will carry out their powers, duties and functions.

If an elected municipal official has to step down or resign part way through his or her three-year term of office, then a by-election is held to elect someone else. A **by-election** is an election held to fill a vacant position at a date other than the general election date.

Use classroom and community resources to create a storyboard or comic strip that responds to one 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?



Student Resource 3-2

Accountability Matters

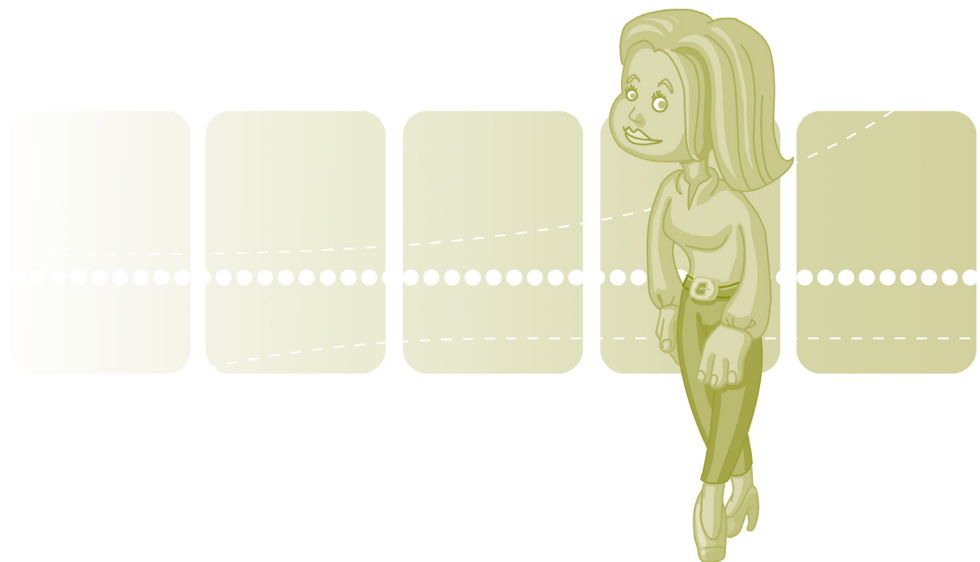


Decisions that councils and councillors make are often seen in the policies and bylaws of a municipality. **Policies** are made by councils to set guidelines that the municipalities follow. The guidelines can describe how services and programs will be provided by a municipality. The Chief Administrative Officer and his or her staff are responsible for following these policies.

A **bylaw** is a law or a policy passed by the council. Bylaws can be enforced by bylaw enforcement officers, police and constables in the municipality. If people in the municipality do not follow the rules set out by a bylaw, they can be fined or given penalties.

Councils are also responsible for passing budgets. A **budget** looks at **revenue**, or money that comes into the municipality, as well as **expenses**, or money that needs to be spent or saved. Councils can develop long-term plans that help them make decisions about what is best for the municipality. They plan what they will do for the municipality over a period of time. Councils or departments often create an action plan that describes the goals and processes they will use.

Elected representatives are responsible to the electors in the municipality. These people are called **voters** or **constituents**.



Accountability Matters!

The local newspaper is doing a series of feature articles on municipal government. Since grade 6 students are learning about municipal government, the newspaper editor has invited your class to submit articles for possible publication. The upcoming feature article is based on the following questions:

Why should elected representatives be accountable to the citizens?

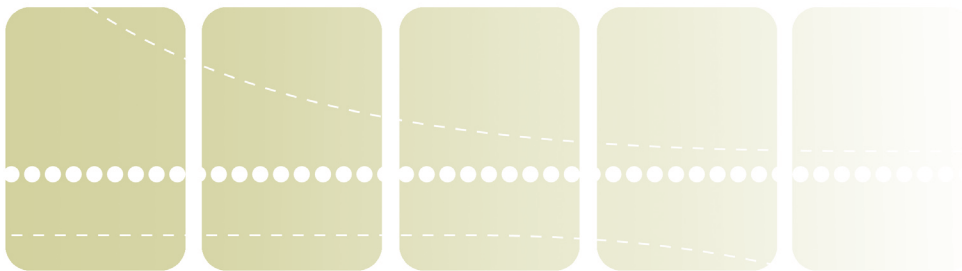
- How is accountability part of the electoral process?
- Why is accountability important from our elected representatives?

How do our elected representatives show that they are accountable?

- What evidence can you find that our elected representatives:
 - Respond to residents
 - Consider the views and perspectives of residents
 - Participate in events in the municipality
 - Represent and express the concerns of residents in council meetings?

As you research this topic, gather information by interviewing community members from a variety of age groups. You might also gather information from local media (newspaper, radio and television) and websites. Use the *Student Reporter Tip Sheet: Interview Strategies* to help you with your research.

You will need to present your findings in a well written article suitable for publication in the local newspaper. Perhaps your ideas will be published in the next special edition. What do you have to say about accountability in our municipality?



Student Reporter Tip Sheet: Interview Strategies

Successful reporters plan their interviews. The tips below will help you plan and conduct effective interviews.

1. Plan your interview.

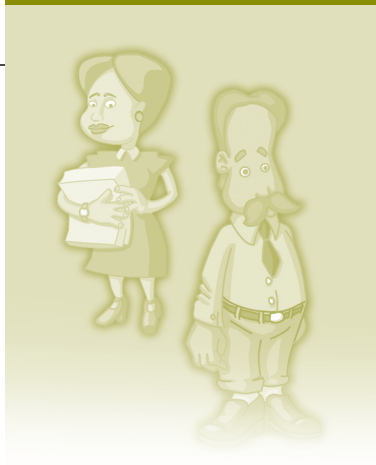
What do I need to find out?	Who should I contact to be interviewed?
What questions should I ask?	What do I need to say when I make appointments for the interviews?

2. Conduct the interviews.

3. Remember to thank the persons you interviewed and share something you learned from their responses.

4. Record and organize the information you gather. Create a chart such as the one below to help you organize your interview results. Ask your teacher for a T-chart to create your chart.

Interview Questions	Responses



Student Resource 3-3

Make Connections

How have you expressed your opinion or tried to convince someone to make a decision that was important to you? There are many different ways to get involved in issues and decisions. Each of the individuals below share some examples of ways that you and others can participate with your municipal government. Think about each strategy by talking or writing about the questions in each box.

Hi, my name is Aaron. I believe that individuals can bring about positive change in their communities, but it helps if you do not try to do it alone. One of the best ways to get involved with issues and decisions in your community is to find other people or groups who want the same thing. There are other ways to get involved too.

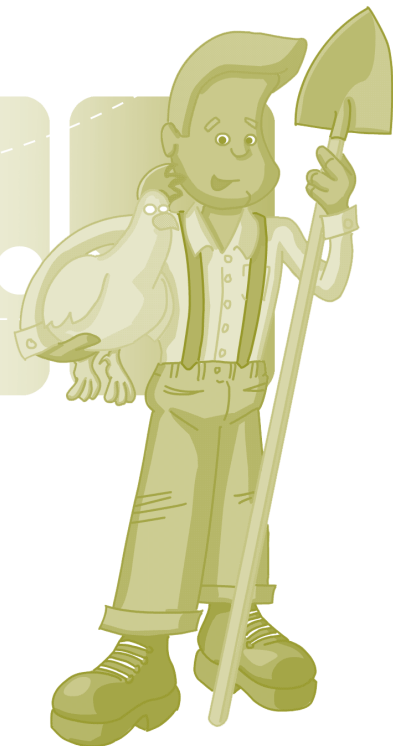
Have you ever attended a council meeting or talked to a councillor or Chief Administrative Officer about an issue? Do your research and work with the people in the municipal office to help find a solution. Volunteer for something that will help your municipality. What are some ways you and your friends can work together to make your opinions known on an issue? What could you do to act on your opinions? What opportunities are there for you to volunteer in your community?





It is important to the candidates who run for municipal offices that they have opportunities to share their positions and opinions on how they will represent the citizens of the municipality. This often happens in local media, such as newspapers, television and radio news programs and community magazines. It also happens during election time through campaign materials, debates and forums. When is the next general election or by-election in your municipality? What do you know about the views or positions of the people who represent you?

Last year, our community held some community dialogues about changing from a volunteer to a full-time fire department. A community dialogue gets people from as many parts of the community as possible to share information, stories and experiences face-to-face, express our perspectives and develop solutions to community concerns and opportunities. A community dialogue is not like a debate. It emphasizes listening. A community dialogue encourages people to find out what they have in common. It can involve as little as five people around a kitchen table to five hundred people in a large community hall. What could be done with the information and perspectives that might come out of a community dialogue? When and how could community dialogues be used to participate with municipal governments?





Meetings are a necessary part of planning and decision-making. How should a community meeting be organized? How do you think community meetings can be used to encourage participation in local decision-making and government?

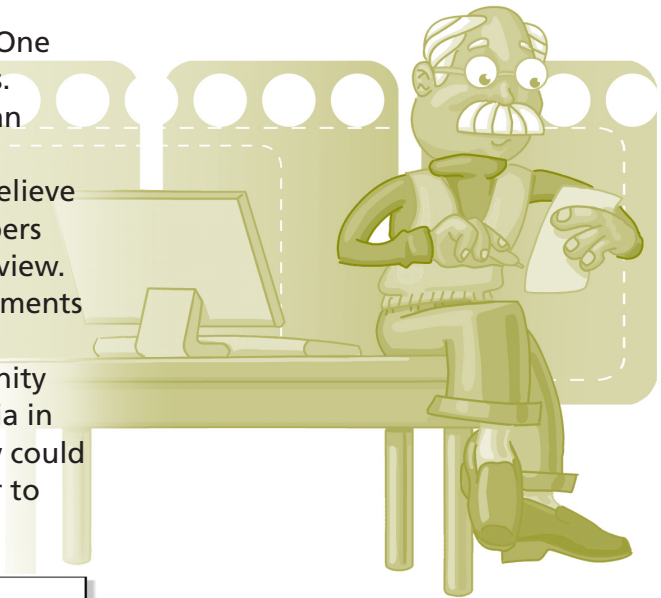
Organizing a Community Meeting

- Fix a time, date and place to meet. Meeting places can include libraries, community centres, some churches, neighbourhood houses and schools.
- Decide on a regular monthly meeting time, or think of another way of staying in touch.
- Use an agenda to identify the meeting place, starting time, time for each item, ending time, goals for the meeting and what should be discussed.
- When you hold the meeting, work through the agenda items.
- Record the actions that were decided, who will carry them out and what should be accomplished before the next meeting.

Making Decisions in a Community Meeting

Quick decisions can be made by asking for a show of hands to see how the group feels about a particular issue. Voting is also a decision-making method that can be used with large groups. Decide how many votes will determine the decision – do you need half or two-thirds of the total vote to determine the decision? Or should consensus be used to try to make a decision? A consensus tries to bring a group to a mutual agreement. Consensus tries to address all concerns of the group. It can take longer than voting, but it can encourage more creativity and cooperation in making decisions.

I am a feature columnist for the local newspaper. One of my jobs involves reporting on community issues. I often interview people to get their opinions on an issue. I usually write about my own opinion in my column too. Not everyone agrees with me, but I believe that this is a healthy way to get community members talking about and considering different points of view. I think the media is one of the most important elements of a democratic community. My column provides information on issues and the opinions of community members. What do you think? How does the media in your community deal with issues and events? How could you use a local community column in a newspaper to participate in your community?



Press Releases

Did you know that anyone can send a press release to the local media? A press release informs the media about an event, a report or an issue. A press release gives reporters all the information they need to write a news story. Here is how to create one.

- Start with a headline that grabs people’s attention.
- Put the most important information in the first paragraph.
- Describe your point of view.
- Suggest actions that people can take.
- Keep paragraphs short and to the point.

When do you think a press release would be most effective?

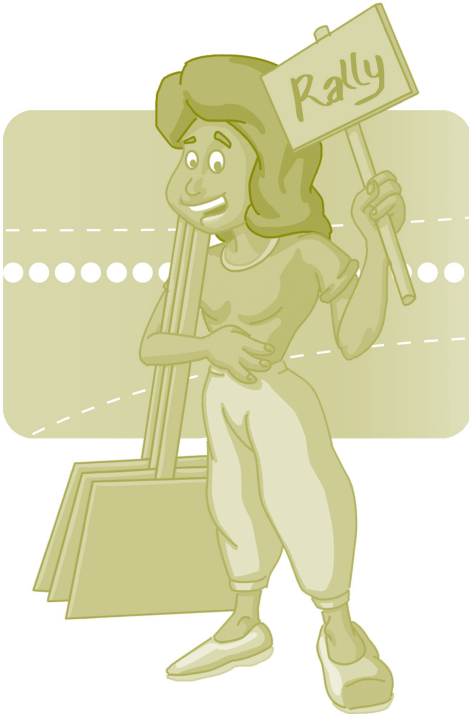
People often value different things. Some people like to see things kept the way they are. Some believe that change is necessary. Some people or organizations **lobby**, or try to influence and put pressure on, representatives from different levels of government to make their opinions known through strategies such as media campaigns and petitions. People or organizations who lobby for their interests are often called **special interest groups**. Special interest groups can use strategies such as:



- Letter writing
- Using local media such as phone-in radio or television shows
- Rallies or demonstrations
- Personal conversations with officials
- Press conferences.



Our organization, Strong Communities, attends council meetings to ensure that our council hears the views of ordinary people in the community. We take the time to express our opinions and help in decision-making. We talk with our councillors and work with them to bring about change. We sometimes use informal petitions to communicate our point of view to our municipal government. A **petition** is a document that presents a point of view on an issue. The more signatures we obtain on our petitions, the stronger our message is. Why do you think this is so? When do you think it can be effective to use a petition?



Demonstrations and rallies are used to gather support around a position or action. Individuals and groups organize demonstrations or rallies by creating a message, setting a date and publicizing the event. Demonstrations and rallies are often very public events and can take place near government offices or in a public place. Why do you think holding a rally near government offices or in a public place could be more effective?



Student Resource 3-4

Local Issues

Often change and development can be good for a municipality because it can strengthen and enhance the quality of life for people who live and work there. New projects, neighbourhoods, buildings, facilities and services can create more jobs. This type of development can bring more resources into the municipality. It can provide services that people believe are important, and can improve the ways that needs are met.

However, some changes can also decrease the quality of life for people in the municipality. A new development or building could harm the environment or things that people value. Ways of life might be affected by changes such as an increase in the noise or activity level, or the loss of important environmental features, such as open space and trees.

Many people get involved while a decision is being made that may change the municipality. When a **controversy** occurs, debates, discussions and disagreements can take place. People have to decide what is more important to them. Sometimes those changes involve making a choice between the environment and jobs. Other times, the changes involve making choices that involve people's values and attitudes. People may choose to work together **collaboratively** to make a decision. In some cases, groups who 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 that they can come to an agreement that everyone can live with.

How would you define controversy in your own words?

What do you think the benefits of collaborative decision-making would be?

How would you define compromise in your own words?

What do you think happens when a compromise cannot be reached?

Use the chart on the following page to investigate an issue that is currently facing your community.

The Issue: _____

Questions to Consider	What We Found Out
What is an issue that has resulted from a decision that your community has to make? Describe what the issue is all about.	
What does the media say about this issue? Collect different articles from newspapers in your community. Listen to news broadcasts. Make a list of the media sources you find and summarize what they say.	
What do local citizens have to say about this issue? What do special interest or lobby groups say? Check the letters to the editor in the local newspaper. Make a list of people or groups you have consulted and summarize their positions on the issue.	
What is the controversy? What are the points of disagreement? Why do people and groups disagree?	
What do we think? What opinions do our group members have on this issue? Why?	

THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

Policies and Bylaws

Policies provide a way of ensuring that consistent decisions are made on similar matters. Policies are set by council to establish general guidelines for the administration to follow. The administration provides programs and services to the residents and community according to those policies. Bylaws are legislative in nature. They are the laws of the municipality passed by council under the authority and rules established by the *Municipal Government Act*, such as snow removal schedules, parking, traffic and land use.

Strategic Planning

Another aspect of governance is long-term planning. Planning determines an organization's direction over a period of time. The planning process includes planning, implementing, evaluating and adjusting. The process itself can be as important as the planning document created.

Typically, the planning process includes the whole organization, but it can be focused on a major functional area such as a division or department. Strategic planning may be conducted once a year with specific action plans reviewed quarterly. Most municipalities work from some kind of plan, even if it is only the annual budget. A plan can be a living document that requires reviewing, assessing and updating.

Bylaw Readings

Every proposed bylaw must have three distinct and separate readings. No more than two readings may be made at a council meeting unless the councillors who are present unanimously agree to consider a third reading.

Bylaws must be signed and are not considered passed until they are signed.

A bylaw comes into force at the beginning of the day that it is passed unless otherwise provided in the *Municipal Government Act*, any other enactment or within the bylaw.

Procedure Bylaw

Councils should adopt a procedure bylaw to provide a standard format for council meetings and make it easier for members of council, staff, the media and the public to understand the process by which decisions are made. In general, a procedure bylaw will name and describe the responsibilities of council members, provide for the order of business and method of distributing the agenda of the council meetings, set rules regarding the proceedings at regular meetings of the council and describe the manner in which items may be put on the council agenda.



TEACHER BACKGROUND

This teacher backgrounder provides a description of the processes involved in decision-making. These processes include the administrative functions of the government. Most decision-making is formalized around a process that includes:

- Setting an agenda to establish the business of meetings. Agendas usually take into account current political issues, the best timing of delegations or groups of citizens wanting to present to council and the natural order of discussion.
- Developing request for decision documents. The request for decision document usually contains the topic, background or history, financial implications and references to policy.
- Holding meetings. A council meeting is a forum for debate and discussion about municipal matters.

These elements establish the process used for informed decision-making about policies, bylaws, planning and projects.

