

University of Virginia Center for Politics



**Democracy Corps Lesson Plan 11:
Attend a Government Meeting or Shadow a Political Leader**

Purpose:

This lesson is a part of YLI's Democracy Corps service learning program. Students increase their understanding of the political process by experiencing it first-hand as they shadow a government leader for a day or attend a government meeting.

Materials:

- Student Guide 1: *Attend a Government Meeting*
- Student Guide 2: *Shadow a Political Leader*

Central Questions:

- What are the responsibilities of political leaders?
- How does my local government work?
- What current needs are priorities for my community?
- How does my target issue relate to community priorities?

Procedure:

1. Warm Up

Ask students to explain how they learned to ride a bike.

- Where were you when you learned to ride a bike?
- What helped you learn to stay on the bike?
- Did you enjoy riding the bike? If yes, why?
- Are there strategies used when learning to ride a bike that can be applied to learning about the political process and staying involved in it? If yes, what are they?

2. Begin class by offering students a choice between shadowing a government leader *or* attending a political meeting. Once students make a decision, distribute the appropriate guide to each participant.

Student Guide 1: *Attend a Government Meeting*

Student Guide 2: *Shadow a Political Leader*

3. Allow time for students to work on the guides in class or assign them for homework. Monitor questions as needed.

4. Provide students with a deadline to complete the activity and a date to deliberate.

5. Deliberate – Divide students into small groups based on those who shadowed political leaders and those who attended a meeting. Ask students to share experiences as well as answer to deliberation questions.

- What are some responsibilities of local leaders?
- What did you learn about how local government operates?
- What current needs are priorities for your community?
- How does your target issue relate to community priorities?
- From your experiences, is the structure of local government effective?
- Considering your target issue, is local government the best way to impact change?



Lesson 11
Student Guide 1

Attend a Government Meeting

Attending a political meeting involves identifying a government body that addresses your target issue and determining when that group holds public meetings. These meetings demonstrate the political process in action and provide information on the professional responsibilities of the officials in attendance.

Democracy Corps Target Issue _____

Step One

Begin by identifying a political organization that makes decisions related to your target issue. Examples of local political organizations follow.

Target Issue	Political Organization
Cruelty to animals	Animal Control
Homelessness	Department of HUD
No bike trails	Parks and Recreation
Teacher salaries	School Board

Government agency related to your target issue.

Government Agency _____

Phone Number _____ E-mail Address _____

Describe how the government agency impacts your target issue.

Reminder: Be sure the organization selected is not a non-profit organization or a business.



Step Two

Schedule a time to attend a political meeting by calling the government office and asking for a public meeting schedule.

Be sure to confirm meeting is OPEN to the public. Student attendance at the meeting should exceed one hour.

Schedule for Political Meeting

Date of Meeting ____/____/____ Time _____

Location _____

Step Three

It is important to prepare questions to ask prior to the meeting.

Suggestions for questions follow, but you also need to draft at least three original questions that relate to your target issue or explore the political process.

- How frequently does the government body meet?
- How many members are in the group?
- Are members appointed or elected? Do you agree with the method used to select a leader? Why or why not? How long is the political leader's term of office?
- Describe three primary responsibilities of the government body.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

- Describe two or three issues discussed during the meeting.

1. _____

2. _____

- Were there topics you think the group should have addressed that they did not?
- How does the group make a decision? Formal vote or group consensus?
- Additional questions related to your target Democracy Corps issue.

Reminder: *Student attendance at the meeting should exceed one hour.*



Consider these guidelines as you prepare to attend a government meeting.

- Be on time.
- Be appreciative of any time offered by the group or individuals within the group.
- Be respectful of differing views.
- Ask questions to clarify information that is confusing.

Deliberate: **Be prepared to share your experiences with the class. Reflect using the following questions.**

- What are some responsibilities of local political leaders?

- What did you learn about how local government operates?

- What current needs are priorities for your community?

- How does your target issue relate to community priorities?

- From your experiences, is the structure of local government effective?

- Considering your target issue, is local government the best way to impact change?



Shadow a Political Leader

☆ The shadowing experience involves scheduling time with a political leader in order to observe him/her performing daily tasks. This experience shines a light on the political process and provides information on the professional responsibilities of the person you are observing.

(Refer to procedures that accompany Student Guide 1: Attend a Government Meeting.)

Democracy Corps Target Issue _____

Step One: Begin by identifying a political leader who is involved in making decisions that impact your target Democracy Corps issue. Some examples of local political leaders follow.

Target Issue

Cruelty to animals
Homelessness
No bike trails
Teacher salaries

Political Leader

Chairman of Animal Control
Dir. of Housing & Urban Dev.
Parks and Recreation Director
School Board Member

Name and contact information for political leader related to your target issue.

Political Leader _____

Phone Number _____ E-mail Address _____

Describe how this political leader impacts your target issue.

Reminder: Be sure the person selected is a political leader and not the director of a non-profit organization or a business.

Step Two: Schedule a time to shadow a political leader by calling or writing his/her office.

Explain the following in your correspondence.

- The purpose of the shadowing experience.
- How you will use the information observed and discussed.

Reminder: The shadowing experience should not be shorter than 30 minutes

Schedule for Shadowing Experience

Date of Meeting ____/____/____ Time_____

Location _____

Step Three: In order to be successful, it is important to anticipate questions to ask during the shadowing experience.

Suggestions for questions follow, but you also need to draft at least three original questions that relate to your target issue or explore the political process.

- Who are the political leader's primary constituents? _____
- Is the political leader elected or appointed? _____
- How long is the political leader's term of office? _____
- Describe three primary responsibilities of the political leader.
 1. _____
 2. _____
 3. _____
- Describe two to three current issues that are most important to the political leader.
 1. _____
 2. _____
- Describe how this individual makes decisions. Are they made individually or in a group? If made by a group, how often do they meet and do they make decisions by building consensus or with a formal vote?



Shadow a Political Leader Continued

- How does the political leader communicate with his/her constituents?

- What are the challenges of the position?

- What does the political leader enjoy most about the position?

- Additional questions related to your target Democracy Corps issue.

Consider these guidelines as you prepare for the shadowing experience.

- Be on time.
- Be appreciative of the individual's time.
- Be respectful of his/her expertise and differing views.
- Ask questions to clarify information that is confusing.

Deliberate: Be prepared to share your experiences with the class. Reflect using the following questions:

- What are some of the responsibilities of local political leaders?
- What did you learn about how local government operates?
- What current needs are priorities for your community?
- How does your target issue relate to community priorities?
- Based on your shadowing experience, is the structure of local government effective?
- Considering your target issue, is local government the best way to impact change?