

VERMONT CLASSROOM BLUEPRINT FOR CONNECTING WITH LOCAL LEADERS

FOR K-12 EDUCATORS

Host classroom visits
with local government
officials

Plan schoolwide civic
engagement events

Explore government in
action through field
trips!



This resource was developed by a subcommittee of our Teacher Advisory Group.

Thank you for all of your input and support for this project.

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We'd also like to thank Andrew McClellan from Mount Mansfield Union High School, Brattleboro Town Clerk Hilary Francis, and Hartford Town Clerk Lisa O'Neil for their contributions.



Some resources are included as hyperlinks. Use this QR code to access an electronic version of this guide.



FROM THE SECRETARY

Welcome to our classroom guide for civics education in Vermont! I hope this is a helpful resource as you engage your students in their communities and with their government. Civics education is so important for a young person to feel engaged with their community and invested in fixing the big problems we face. Civics is about so much more than reciting the three branches of government or being able to define checks and balances; it's about building the skills and understanding to become an empowered citizen in our participatory democracy.

The work you do as educators is therefore crucial to our civic health from the local to the state and federal levels. As you utilize this guide, please reach out to my office so we can work together to support the next generation of informed, engaged citizens.

A handwritten signature in black ink, which reads "Sarah Copeland Hanzas". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Sarah Copeland Hanzas
Vermont Secretary of State



Questions or suggestions?

Contact Robyn Palmer, Director of Civic and Voter Engagement at robyn.palmer@vermont.gov.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

03

CLASSROOM VISITS

Tips for Planning Classroom Visits.....	3
Take a Stand.....	4
Policy Discussion.....	4
After the Visit.....	5
Thank Yous.....	5

06

SCHOOL EVENTS

Assemblies.....	6
Community Conversation.....	6
Voter Registration Drive.....	7
Mock Election.....	7
Candidate Forum.....	8
Civics Expo.....	9

10

FIELD TRIPS

Town Clerk.....	10
Visit the Capital.....	11

12

TEMPLATES & RESOURCES

Outreach Templates.....	12
Elected Official Positions.....	13-15
Tips for Elected Officials.....	16

15

SUPPLEMENTAL LESSON PLANS

Policy Discussion.....	17
Bill Tracking.....	18
Voter Registration Assignments.....	19
Voter Guide Lessons.....	20

CLASSROOM VISITS

Inviting a government official to your classroom is a great way for students to learn more about their role and directly experience the accessibility of Vermont government. It's also a great way for students to practice using their voice to let those in elected office know what matters to them.



Keep reading for some suggestions on how to make the most of the time together!

Tips for Planning Classroom Visits

Be clear with the details

Make sure your initial outreach is clear, concise, and includes information like date, time, location, and length of visit. What class will they be visiting? How many students will be there?

Share student questions

This will help your students and your guest be prepared to make the most of their time together. It will also help keep the conversation on topics that students have identified as areas of interest.

Communicate your goals

Provide information regarding the topics you are focusing on in your classroom and if there are specific things you are hoping they will highlight during the conversation.

Don't forget to follow up

Send a thank you note. If possible, include some student comments about what they learned from the visit!

Prepare students in advance

Make sure students know a bit about the role and responsibilities of the guest. The more informed they are ahead of time, the more meaningful the conversation will be.

Check important logistics

Does the guest need ID to get a visitor pass in the front office? Do participating students have image release permissions? Make sure to double check any key logistics.

Check out the Templates section at the end of this resource to find communication scripts as well as a tip sheet you can send to your guests ahead of the event!

CLASSROOM VISITS

If you'd like to expand on the general Presentation and Q&A style classroom visit, explore some other options below!

TAKE A STAND

This activity will get students moving around and encourage meaningful conversation!

1. Assign each corner of your classroom (Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree) or create a continuum (Strongly Agree on one end and Strongly Disagree on the other).
2. Provide statements related to current issues and have students move to stand based on their position. Ex. Flavored tobacco products should be banned in Vermont.
3. You and your invited guest can ask students to share their reasons for where they stand to get the conversation started.

This can be a simple one-day activity or part of a larger lesson. Check out the [Take a Stand Educator Guide](#) for resources on expanding this activity and for successfully navigating these challenging conversations in the classroom.

POLICY DISCUSSION

This discussion offers an opportunity to delve deeper on a single issue. This can foster really meaningful conversation with your guest but does require some additional preparation time to ensure students are ready.

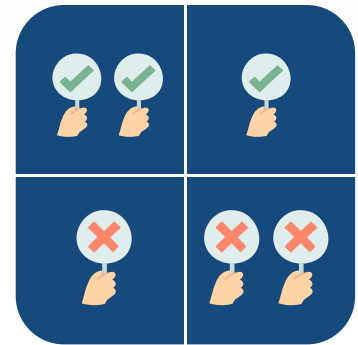
What is it? Teachers choose a policy that is in the news, relevant to students, or that the visitor has some expertise about. Students ask the visitor questions and share their own opinions.

How does it work? Choose a policy/topic. Arrange the visit with the guest(s). One or two weeks before the visit, begin to prepare students for the visit.

Resources: Look for recent news articles discussing policy. Have students review committee notes, live streams, and documents found on the Vermont Legislative Website

People to invite:

- Member of the legislative branch
- Member of the executive branch who will implement the law
- Member of an advocacy group



Suggested Classroom Norms for Taking a Stand

1. Listen for understanding. Try to understand before rushing to judgment.
2. Make comments using "I" statements.
3. Think with your head and your heart.
4. If someone says something that hurts or offends you, do not attack the person, acknowledge that the comment - not the person - hurt you and explain why.

Questions for guests:

- Why do you believe this policy is needed?
- How do you become more informed on this issue? What does your "homework" look like?
- Why is this the threshold? (ex. How come residents need to make less than \$25,000 a year to qualify?)
- How is this enforced? What does your work with the executive branch look like?
- How do you find advocates to testify?
- What were the hardest pieces to compromise on?
- How did you gather constituent input on this policy?

Look in the appendix section for an example policy discussion on housing affordability led by Annie Schneider at Winooski High School.

AFTER THE VISIT

CLASS DEBRIEF

Make sure to spend some time after the visit discussing with your students about how it went.

Format Questions

- Did you like how the guest presented their information?
- How would you have done it differently?
- Was it too long? Too short? Why?
- Discussion about images/slides/videos/handouts
- Would it be worthwhile to have the same person come back for future students?



Content Questions

- What stood out to you because you agreed with it?
- What stood out to you because you disagreed with it?
- What were some of the most interesting discussion points?
- What do you wish we spent more time discussing?
- What would you like the guest to know about the visit?

You can compile comments from the debrief to send along to the guest and save notes for the next time you plan a classroom visit!

Assessment Opportunity!

Asking students to write a thorough thank you note can serve as an opportunity to assess their learning and provide specific feedback to your guest. Collect thank you notes that include key takeaways as an assignment and send them along to your guest after grading!

THANK YOU

Make sure you send a thank you to your guest! Here are a few considerations for expressing your gratitude!

- A thank you can be an email or handwritten.
- You can write a simple note from yourself but it can be especially meaningful if you are able to include some feedback or direct quotes from students.
- Students can also write their own thank yous and you can send them along in a batch.
- If you took any photos, make sure to include one!

SCHOOL EVENTS



Inviting a government official to your classroom is a great way for students to learn more about their role and directly experience the accessibility of Vermont government. It's also a great way for students to practice using their voice to let those in elected office know what matters to them.

Keep reading for some suggestions on how to make the most of the time together!

ASSEMBLIES

Assemblies will function much like a classroom visit but there are some things to keep in mind with the larger audience.

- Keep it brief! Be very clear with the official about how much time they have and offer to give them visual cues when they are reaching their time limit.
- Make it engaging! Ask the official to bring an engaging slideshow or other visuals to go along with their talk.
- Treat questions differently than in a classroom setting. If officials are taking audience questions in a large format, make sure students have access to a microphone or other way to amplify their voice. You could prepare a few students with questions in advance so that you know there will be at least some questions being asked.

COMMUNITY CONVERSATION

Promote local civics participation by inviting the community into your school to discuss a topic that is relevant to students and adults alike. You will find that many people who live in your school district are very knowledgeable and anxious to share their thoughts with students.

Some hints for a great community conversation:

- Serve food/coffee/desserts
- Choose a question or topic that will be the focus (e.g., housing, curriculum, volunteering, service)
- Prepare your students to facilitate the conversations in a structured format (circles, chalk talks, wagon wheels, etc.)
- Make sure to advertise widely through social media, your school newsletter, and Front Porch Forum
- Ask students with babysitting experience to volunteer to watch children so parents can participate

SCHOOL EVENTS



VOTER REGISTRATION DRIVE

Hosting a voter registration drive at your school is a great way to get a class involved in the democratic process! They can learn the ins and outs of voter registration and encourage their peers to get more civically engaged!

Read below to learn about the steps that Mr. McClellan's American Law class at Mount Mansfield Union High School took when planning their drive in 2024.

1. Attend an online presentation from The Civics Center to learn more about how to run a drive.
2. Reach out to your Town Clerk or the Office of Vermont Secretary of State to learn more about the specifics of registering to vote in Vermont.
3. Invite the Town Clerk, a representative from the Secretary of State's Office, and/or a Justice of the Peace to class to do a presentation on voter registration and answer student questions.
4. Have students create posters that they put up around the school to promote the drive.
5. Assign each student a role in preparing for the drive from writing a message for the school website, to running a table in the cafeteria to promote the upcoming drive, etc.
6. The day of the drive, ensure that each student has an assignment to support the event.
7. After the event has concluded, have each student write a reflection on their role in the drive, reaction to the drive, and a summary of Vermont's Voting laws compared to other states.

For more detail, look for Mr. McClellan's task list and assignment in the Appendix section at the end of this resource.

MOCK ELECTION

You can host a mock election in your school as a stand-alone event or pair it with a Voter Registration Drive! Participating in a mock election helps students understand the power of their voice! There are lots of formats to explore:

- Do something fun! Students at Champlain Valley Union High School held a mock primary election along with their Voter Registration Drive. Students could choose between three options in two different parties to elect the best milk. The Dairy Party (Whole, 2%, and Skim) and the Non-Dairy Party (Oat, Almond, and Soy).
- Up the stakes! Woodbury Elementary School invited their Town Moderator to help lead a mock Town Meeting day. The school received a \$500 donation and students debated and ultimately voted to decide whether the funds should go towards a field trip or new playground equipment.
- Get realistic! At Mount Mansfield Union High School, the Town Clerk provided realistic ballots and ballot boxes for the Presidential Primary so that students would better understand what to expect when they cast their first vote.

Resources:

Contact the VT Secretary of State's office and/or your Town Clerk! We are happy to help with planning these events. Check the links below for more information too!

[VT Voter Registration Tips](#)

[Order Form](#) for stickers and buttons

[The Civics Center](#) - a national nonpartisan nonprofit organization working to make voter registration part of every high school.



SCHOOL EVENTS

CANDIDATE FORUM

As Hosted by Woodstock Union High School from 2002-2019

What: Meet-And-Greet Candidates Forum

Who: 8th grade students and local candidates for elected offices

Where: The school library

When: In the weeks leading up to the November elections

Why: Students will:

- Learn the names, jobs, and responsibilities of different elected offices in order to compose questions to bring to the event on clipboards
- Practice social skills like shaking hands, making eye contact, introducing themselves, dressing appropriately (especially student ambassadors), and wearing name tags themselves
- Write a reflection from their conversation notes
- Participate in a mock election for the whole 8th grade class

Preparation:

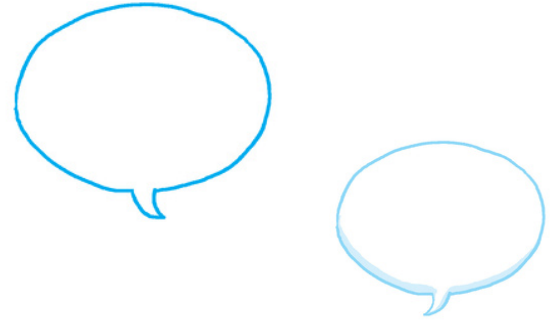
- Reserve library space (pro tip: set a table with flowers in the center of the space to encourage flow and mingling around the room and prevent adults from lining up on one side of the room and students on the other)
- Make a schedule for groups of max. 30 students at a time to circulate through the library in 30-minute sessions (10 minute breaks between sessions, no more than 3 sessions)
- Order light refreshments for your guests to enjoy during breaks
- Notify local news outlets and/or enlist student journalists and photographers to attend
- Student ambassadors make phone calls to invite candidates, mentioning to look for invitations in the mail,
- Ask for RSVP at every stage
- Follow up with mailed invitation signed by student ambassadors, asking for RSVP
- Send reminder emails 1-2 days before the event, ask for RSVP (then follow up phone calls for stragglers)
- Greet guests as they arrive to issue name tags (string is better than pinned), then some students posted in strategic places to direct guests to the library
- Begin each session by briefly welcoming the guests and announcing the start of the meet-and-greet
- Conclude each session by initiating a round of applause to thank guests (gets attention over the noise!)

In The Classroom:

- Classroom study of elections, jobs, and responsibilities of different offices, review of current events/issues affecting different offices for generating questions, composing appropriate questions, and practicing social skills and manners. Ideally, this is a Social Studies - English class partnership.
- Student role-play practice is helpful, especially around taking notes while someone is speaking with you and maintaining occasional eye contact. Practice asking follow-up questions so it's a dialogue and not a monologue.

After The Event:

- Students compose reflections based on notes taken on clipboards during the event, answering prompts, for a summative grade
- Thank you notes are mailed to each candidate who attended signed by classes or student ambassadors, ideally with a photo and some quotes from student reflections
- Have some students write articles to accompany photos for the local newspaper and school newsletter
- Hold a class mock election using copies of a canceled ballot from the local town clerk



SCHOOL EVENTS

CIVICS EXPO

A Civics Expo is an event to bring together individuals with civic responsibilities and interests at your school to give their perspective on an issue, or just to help students understand what they each do in government. You can ask elected officials, heads of nonprofits, appointed committee members or administrators, etc. The goal is to demonstrate how the various levels of government and others work together to solve problems.



Things to consider:

- Prepare your students around a certain issue of local importance ahead of the planned expo. Examples could include homelessness, zoning, roads, a park project, crime, etc. Tell your guests that students will come prepared to ask about that particular topic, and that they will be asking for the perspective of the expo guests.
- Create a scavenger hunt for students to help them engage with the expo guests. Prompts could include “find the person responsible for licensing dogs”, “find a person who could help get a pothole repaired on your street” and “find someone who is elected and someone who is appointed.”
- Consider asking your expo guests to bring something to give to kids like a pamphlet or a sticker
- Consider a panel discussion to begin or conclude the expo so that students can ask questions and have them answered.



CONNECT WITH YOUR TOWN CLERK

A field trip to your local Town Clerk's office provides many opportunities for learning and local engagement. Check out some of the ideas we have crowdsourced from clerks across the state.

ELEMENTARY

- Introduce students to the role and responsibilities of a Town Clerk.
- Ask students to bring in a stuffed animal to be licensed.
- Give an introduction to the concept of elections and have them vote on a fun topic. One clerk lets students vote on the shape and color of next year's dog tags!
- Give a tour of the building with some fun historical facts about the town.

MIDDLE SCHOOL

- Check out the vault! Students can explore maps, birth and marriage records, and land records.
- Have each student research a different building in the town.
- Review historical documents for practice reading cursive or to find a relative.
- Send students to job shadow for a "Day in the Life."
- Explain the election process and vote on a classroom issue.

TIPS!

- Election season is a very busy time for clerks so make sure to give lots of advance notice.
- Provide as much information ahead of time as possible so the clerk can be prepared to answer questions!
- Give the clerk some details about your class demographics so they can best engage them!

HIGH SCHOOL

- Register students to vote and do a deep dive on the nuts and bolts of elections.
- Learn about the role of the town clerk and other positions in municipal government.
- Dig into primary sources!
- Connect with planning and zoning officials to talk about current neighborhood projects that may be of interest.

VISIT THE CAPITAL



STATE HOUSE

Walk through the State House and learn about the building's history and functions. The history and civics focused tour includes a comprehensive overview of the State's legislative process of writing and passing laws and allows students to see their government in action. School tours focus on the idea of citizenship - what does it mean to be a full engaged and responsible citizen? How does voting and participating in the political process produce a responsive government?

[CLICK HERE](#)
TO BOOK
YOUR
MUSEUM AND
STATE HOUSE
TOURS!

VERMONT HISTORY MUSEUM

Visit the award-winning permanent exhibit Freedom and Unity at the Vermont History Museum. Explore an Abenaki wigwam, send a telegraph message, and immerse yourself in a World War-II era living room. Special exhibits in the National Life Gallery, Calder Gallery and Local History Gallery tell more Vermont stories. Staff will supply focusing questions, along with clipboards and pencils, to help guide student explorations of the museum.

SUPREME COURT FIELD TRIP



Take a peek inside the Vermont judicial system with a mock trial experience. This program is led by Supreme Court Law Clerks and will be adapted to suit the age of your students. Trials focus on relatable topics like dog ownership, texting while driving, and the proper quality of Vermont maple syrup. After just one hour, students will leave with a stronger understanding of the role of the Supreme Court within the judicial branch of government.

ROLES

Students will have the opportunity to act as:

- Chief Justice
- Associate Justice
- Prosecuting Attorney
- Defense Attorney

As the teacher, you will be asked to assign roles to students after the case is introduced.

Teachers and chaperones will also need to support the attorneys on both sides as they prepare their arguments.

TIPS:

We asked some of the law clerks what they'd like teachers to know in advance of the trip and here is what they shared:

- If students arrive with a baseline understanding of the three branches of government and separation of powers, it leaves a lot more time for more in-depth conversation and student questions.
- If students are prepared to ask questions and participate in the interactive portions, it helps keep the energy up and makes it more of a conversation than a lecture.
- Please notify the Court in advance of any special needs or accommodations that may be required.
- Spring is a popular time for field trips but the court is open year round. Consider a trip in the fall as spring dates can fill up quickly.
- Please remind students that they are visiting a working building and prepare them to be quiet once they arrive.

OUTREACH TEMPLATES

Sample Invitation:

[Title, Last Name]

My name is [your name here] and I am a teacher at [your school's name]. I would like to invite you to visit students and have a question and answer session on [date]

We are currently exploring [topics] in our class. A visit from you would highlight how these ideas operate within our state government. Below are a few questions that our class has been thinking about:

The event would consist of my class of [number of students and grades]. We would meet for [duration of event] in my classroom (or substitute location of the event).

I look forward to hearing from you soon and providing additional details for your visit.

Sample Welcome Letter :

[Title, Last Name]

Welcome to my classroom!

This is to confirm that you will be visiting my {Class Title} on {Date} at [Start Time]. We are located at [School Address]. *Use this space to provide any pertinent info on parking and where to check-in.* If you need to reach me on the day of your visit, please call [phone number].

About my class: use this space to share demographic information, what the class has been learning in connection to the visit, and any other considerations.

Questions students have brainstormed for you: [populate a list of questions]

Thank you for taking the time to engage with my class! Students are excited to learn from you and share their ideas with you as well. We appreciate all that you do for our community.

ELECTED OFFICIAL POSITIONS

STATEWIDE ELECTED OFFICIALS

[CLICK HERE TO REQUEST A VISIT FROM SECRETARY COPELAND HANZAS!](#)

GOVERNOR

Vermont elects a governor who is the chief executive officer of Vermont. The governor oversees the operations of the executive branch and carries out the state laws. They appoint heads of state agencies and state judges. The governor presents a legislative agenda for the state and a budget to the Legislature every year and has the power to sign or veto bills that the Legislature passes. The governor declares states of emergency, commands the National Guard, and can deploy troops when needed. The governor is the face of Vermont's state government. The governor serves for a two-year term.

LT. GOVERNOR

Vermont elects a lieutenant governor who is the second-in-command to the governor, playing a key role in legislative and executive matters. They preside over the Senate and cast tie-breaking votes. If the governor is out of state or unable to serve for any reason, the lieutenant governor steps in and assumes the responsibilities of the governor. The lieutenant governor may also advocate for important issues and lead public discussions. The lieutenant governor serves for a two-year term.

SECRETARY OF STATE

Vermont elects a secretary of state who is the state's top elections official, ensuring that Vermont's elections are secure and that candidates follow the state's campaign finance laws. The secretary's office also registers businesses, nonprofits, and trademarks, and handles licensing and regulatory practices for over fifty professions and industries. The secretary oversees the upkeep of Vermont's historical records and state archives. This role is essential for keeping state operations transparent, organized, and efficient. The secretary of state serves for a two-year term.

TREASURER

Vermont elects a state treasurer who oversees Vermont's finances, including state funds, investments, and debt obligations. The treasurer manages the state's cash balances, administers retirement benefits for public employees, issues state bonds, and serves as a central bank for the state agencies. The treasurer also helps return unclaimed property to its rightful owners. Importantly, the treasurer engages in accountability by reporting on the shape of Vermont's finances to the public and to various stakeholders. This role is crucial for maintaining the state's financial health. The treasurer serves for a two-year term.

STATE AUDITOR

Vermont elects a state auditor who assesses state agencies to guarantee accountability. The auditor conducts financial and performance audits of state departments and programs, checks financial statements and agency records, and oversees the use of federal funds. The auditor produces reports on their findings that are used to guide government practices and preserve their transparency. This role is vital to identify waste, fraud, and inefficiency, ensuring taxpayer money is used wisely. The auditor serves for a two-year term.

ATTORNEY GENERAL

Vermont elects an attorney general who is Vermont's chief legal officer, representing the state in civil and criminal legal matters. The attorney general provides legal aid and advice to state agencies, officials, and the Legislature. They enforce laws on consumer protection, civil rights, and environmental issues. They prosecute criminal cases and manage various programs to reduce criminal activity, diverting individuals from the court system through restorative justice. The attorney general plays a key role in protecting the public interest and ensuring justice throughout the state. The attorney general serves for a two-year term.

ELECTED OFFICIAL POSITIONS

FEDERAL DELEGATION

U.S. SENATORS

Vermont elects two senators to serve at the federal level in the United States Senate. Senators have a significant role in shaping national legislation—they propose, debate, and vote on bills that affect matters across the United States. Senators also confirm presidential appointments, such as federal judges and cabinet members, and ratify treaties with other nations. Vermont’s two senators are tasked with advocating for Vermont’s interests in Washington, D.C., and assisting constituents with issues involving federal agencies, ensuring that Vermonters’ voices are heard on the national stage. U.S. senators serve for a six-year term.

U.S. REPRESENTATIVE

Vermont elects one U.S. representative at the federal level in the United States House of Representatives. The population size of a state determines the number of representatives representing each state in the House of Representatives. Representatives have a significant role in shaping national legislation—they propose, debate, and vote on bills that affect matters across the United States. Like senators, Vermont’s representative is tasked with advocating for Vermont’s interests in Washington, D.C., and assisting constituents with issues involving federal agencies, ensuring that Vermonters’ voices are heard on the national stage. U.S. representatives serve for a two-year term.

STATE LEGISLATORS

STATE SENATORS

Vermont elects state senators who represent their Senate district in the Vermont Senate. There are 30 state senators in total. Their main responsibilities include proposing and voting on new state laws, crafting the state budget, and addressing the concerns of their constituents with the ultimate goal of improving all aspects of life in Vermont. State senators confirm the appointment made by the governor and serve as a direct link between the residents of their district and the state government. State senators serve for a two-year term.

Who represents your school?

Use the [Vermont Legislative Website](#) to search for representatives and senators. Remember to search the town where your school is located. Click the profile of your school’s representative or senator. Their profile should have a phone number and an email address.

When should they visit?

The Vermont General Assembly is in session from January to roughly May. They are in Montpelier from Tuesday to Friday. A visit outside the legislative session might be best. Plan to reach out up to a month ahead of time of the planned visit.

STATE REPRESENTATIVES

Vermont elects state representatives who represent their House district in the Vermont House of Representatives. There are 150 state representatives. Their main responsibilities include proposing and voting on new state laws, crafting the state budget, and addressing the concerns of their constituents with the ultimate goal of improving all aspects of life in Vermont. State representatives serve as a direct link between the residents of their district and the state government. State representatives serve for a two-year term.

WHO IS WHO

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

MAYOR

Vermonters living in most cities elect a mayor who is the chief executive office of the city. Duties vary by city charter but typically include implementing policies set by city council, enforcing local laws and ordinances, and representing the city at official functions. Mayors typically hold two or three year terms depending on the city charter.

CITY COUNCIL

Vermonters living in cities elect city council members who pass local laws and ordinances, set policy, approve budgets, and oversee municipal services. City council members typically hold two or three year terms depending on the city charter.

SELECTBOARD

Vermonters elect a group of 3-5 selectboard members who have supervision and control over town. They enact ordinances, regulations, and policies, oversee town property and personnel, prepare and manage the budget, and and oversee roads. Select board members sit on the local board of health, liquor control commission, and sewer commission.

JUSTICE OF THE PEACE

Vermont elects justices of the peace who handle several important local judicial and administrative duties. They serve on the Board of Civil Authority, which oversees local elections and tax appeals. Justices of the peace have the power to officiate weddings, administer oaths, and act as notaries public. They can also serve as magistrates in some cases (a judge for family-related legal matters). Their work is essential for local governance and community functions. Justices of the peace serve for a two-year term.

HIGH BAILIFF

Vermont elects a high bailiff who steps in to assume the responsibilities of the county sheriff if the sheriff cannot perform their duties. While the position is limited, it is essential for maintaining continuity in law enforcement at the county level. High bailiffs serve for a two-year term.

SHERIFF

Vermont elects a sheriff who is the chief law enforcement officer in a Vermont county. Sheriffs are responsible for maintaining public order and enforcing laws within their jurisdiction. Their duties include managing the county jail, serving warrants, and providing security at the county courthouse. Sheriffs also oversee the transportation of prisoners and may assist with emergency response efforts. They work with other law enforcement agencies to ensure public safety across the county. The sheriff plays a crucial role in upholding the law and maintaining peace within the community. Sheriffs serve for a four-year term.

TOWN CLERK

Town Clerks oversee elections. They manage a town's public records including marriages, births, deaths, mortgages, and land transactions. They also record and preserve the public record of the town. Some town clerks are appointed and others are elected.





TOWN MODERATOR

Vermont towns elect a town moderator who runs the annual town meeting as well as any special town/school meetings. Town moderators are elected.

TIPS FOR CLASSROOM VISITS

FOR GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS



	<p>1. Ask the classroom teacher for students' questions ahead of time if possible. This allows you to focus on their interests, and to prepare high-quality responses.</p>
	<p>2. No need to do a stump speech! Be mindful that this is not a campaigning event. It's OK to ask the educator whether it is permitted to leave printed materials.</p>
	<p>3. Ask students questions about themselves! Dialogue with students rather than monologue. Ask their opinions about current legislation under debate, especially if it's in the news.</p>
	<p>4. See it from their perspective. Avoid using specialized jargon and acronyms and put yourself in the students' shoes - whether it's 1st or 11th graders, how can you translate your message into their terms?</p>
	<p>5. Leave students with a positive message. They are proud of their communities and are often looking for opportunities to participate and engage.</p>

POLICY DISCUSSION

Grades
9-12

Thank you to Annie Schneider at Winooski High School for providing this example

Context: 10th-12th grade students identified housing affordability as a major problem in their community. We invited the mayor to come speak to the class about this issue and prepared the class for the visit.

Lesson: Housing Policy: Students read two short articles on housing affordability solutions. They then chose one solution to do more in-depth research about and created a poster to share this solution with their classmates. Students did a gallery-walk style share of their posters to gain more information about the policy solutions. The first half of the students stood by their poster and explained it to another student, switching every five minutes, and then the second half of the students switched and explained their posters. All students then participated in an activity where they had to choose a policy they thought would be the most helpful by choosing a side of the room. Students in groups near the policy they thought would be the best tried to convince the other students that their policy was the most useful. Students finished the activity by writing a reflection arguing for their chosen policy. This took about a week of in-class time.

Policy Discussion with the Mayor: Students prepared questions for the mayor about housing policies they had researched, such as “How is the city working to increase black homeownership?” A sampling of these questions was shared with the mayor in advance of the visit. Each student was expected to ask at least one question. I also let the mayor know that the students had a lot of interest and knowledge about housing and their own experiences, and she was welcome to ask them for ideas and advice about housing issues in their communities. I sent her a “Welcome Letter” (see format on page 12) and also followed up to confirm her visit the day before.

During the visit, each student asked their question(s). The mayor had some answers prepared (written) and was able to infuse them into her answers, and she also answered several questions she was not prepared for. She engaged the students in a discussion of their experiences with housing and their views on how to make the housing situation in the city better.

As the teacher/facilitator, I introduced the mayor and then took a step back, allowing students to ask questions and let the conversation flow. I inserted myself into the discussion when students needed further context or defining terms from the mayor. I also called on several students who were shy and asked them to ask their questions. All students had their notebooks with their written questions, and several students took notes during the discussion. The mayor took many notes based on what the students said and engaged well.

After the Discussion: I checked in with students about their experiences and evaluated their learning. First, I asked them to write in their daily journal about what they learned from the mayor’s visit. Then, they each wrote a thank you email to the mayor, cc’ing myself (and not sending the email until I had checked it) thanking her, telling her one thing they had learned, and asking any follow-up questions. Finally, I brought back the policy posters and asked students to re-evaluate their top choice from before based on the realities we had learned from the mayor. I also sent a Thank You email and followed up asking for any feedback on the visit so that we could do a better job next time.

C3 Civics Standards D2.Civ.2.9-12	C3 Civics Standards D2.Civ.12.9-12	C3 Civics Standards D2.Civ.13.9-12
Evaluate citizens’ and institutions’ effectiveness in addressing social and political problems at the local, state, tribal, national, and/or international level.	Analyze how people use and challenge local, state, national, and international laws to address a variety of public issues.	Evaluate public policies in terms of intended and unintended outcomes and related consequences.

BILL TRACKING

Grades
9-12

Thank you to Joe Emery at BFA Fairfax for providing this example

Assignment: After looking at multiple bills in this legislative section, choose one and conduct a "deep dive." You can share this information in multiple ways. You will create a poster, video, podcast, or Google Slides presentation that analyzes a bill and illustrates whether or not the Vermont legislation will effectively achieve what it is designed to accomplish.

Required Information:

- Background information
 - Why was your Bill proposed? (ask a legislator! Read the bill!)
 - What issue(s) does your bill deal with (Read the bill!)
- What were the important arguments for or against your Bill? (Ask a legislator! Look at news sources!)
 - What would this Bill specifically do? Change? (Read the bill! Ask a legislator! Look at news sources!)
 - What are the debates surrounding this Bill? (Ask a legislator! Look at news sources!)
- Who will be the most impacted by your Bill? (Read the bill! Ask a legislator! Read the bill!)
 - Explain the impacts
 - What Committees, Departments, and Agencies are involved with the Bill?
 - What does this bill do?
- What is the current status of your Bill? Where is it in the legislative process? What were the votes?
- What is the future of your Bill (opinion) - What is your personal opinion on this Bill?
- OPTIONAL: Compare your bill to two other states.

News Sources to check out: VT Digger, Seven Days, WCAX, a local newspaper (your teacher can help), the legislator's website, and social media.

- Students can use this template for reaching out to legislators. You may want to review emails before they are sent!

Dear Representative/Senator [Last Name Here]:

My name is _____ and I am a Civics student at _____ in _____, Vermont. I am conducting research on Bill ___, titled _____. I was hoping you could find time to answer the below questions either through email or in person on [date of visit]. My class will be at the statehouse from ___ to _____. I could either contact the Sergeant at Arms when I arrive or if you wanted to schedule a specific time and place I will be there.

[List your questions here.]

Thank you for your time. Sincerely, [your name]

C3 Civics Standards D2.Civ.1.9-12	C3 Civics Standards D2.Civ.5.9-12	C3 Civics Standards D2.Civ.11.9-12
Distinguish the powers and responsibilities of local, state, tribal, national, and international civic and political institutions.	Evaluate citizens' and institutions' effectiveness in addressing social and political problems at the local, state, tribal, national, and/or international level.	Evaluate multiple procedures for making governmental decisions at the local, state, national, and international levels in terms of the civic purposes achieved.

VOTER REGISTRATION ASSIGNMENTS

Thank you to Andy McClellan at Mount Mansfield Union High School for providing this example

Each student will be asked to do three tasks in regard to the Voter Registration Drive:

TASK 1 - All students are required to do this task.

Use Canva or Google Slides to create a poster that will be hung in school leading up to the event. Include the following information:

- o Voter registration eligibility and what information a student will need in order to register to vote on the day of the drive
- o Information on upcoming election dates



TASK 2- All students are required to do one of these two tasks.

1. Students will work with Town Clerks, Justices of the Peace, and other volunteers on drive day to help register students to vote and inform students of the details about the upcoming election.
2. Students will run a Mock Election for all students.

TASK 3- These tasks will be divided up and each student will do one.

1. Learn about the details of who can register to vote and speak to other students by doing a presentation in a classroom on voter registration and voting in Vermont.
2. Develop promotional materials/information about the drive and get that information out: this could include writing and reading a morning announcement or writing an announcement and getting it on the school website.
3. Work at a table during the lunch period the week leading up to the drive to promote the event.
4. Tally the votes for the election. Voting for the Mock Election will take place during the Voter Registration Drive and results will be announced at the end of the day on February 8.

Reflection Assignment :

Students will type a reflection on the MMU Voter Registration Drive and Vermont’s voter registration laws. Students should use the classroom notes and presentation materials, class guest speakers/ presentations and discussions, and their experiences during the Voter Registration Drive and Mock Election as information for the reflection. This should include:

- What the student did on the drive and mock election
- The student’s reaction to their role in the drive/mock election
- The student’s reaction to the impact of the MMU voter registration drive and mock election
- An explanation of Vermont’s voter registration and voting laws (and philosophy) compared to other states and your reaction to those laws (and philosophy).

C3 Civics Standards D2.Civ.2.9-12	C3 Civics Standards D2.Civ.7.9-12	C3 Civics Standards D2.Civ.8.9-12
Analyze the role of citizens in the U.S. political system, with attention to various theories of democracy, changes in Americans’ participation over time, and alternative models from other countries, past and present.	Apply civic virtues and democratic principles when working with others.	Evaluate social and political systems in different contexts, times, and places, that promote civic virtues and enact democratic principles.

VOTER GUIDE LESSONS

Grades
7-12

Two former VT teachers who now work in our office offered five lesson/activity ideas for our Voter Guide:

New for the 2024 General Election! Our office created a Voter Guide for statewide and legislative candidates. It includes candidate statements as well as position descriptions for elected offices on the ballot. You can access the Statewide Guide [here](#) and search by district. Students can also ask their parents to access a ballot-specific version of their Voter Guide on the [My Voter Page](#).

Pre-Write and Discussion Question

- Have students pre-write to the prompt: what questions would you ask a candidate? What would you want to know?
- Generate a class list that all/most agree on.
- Then look at candidate statements to see if they answer the class' questions. (Discussion, 4 corners, solo/group work)

Four Corners Discussion

- Set up four corners of your room with “Yes,” “No,” “Maybe,” or “I need more information!”
 - Ask questions that students would need to defend their answers, such as:
 - “Does the Lt. Governor have a vote in the Senate?”
 - “If the person above them is unable to perform their duties, two of these positions would have to step up to fill their role“
 - “Justices of the Peace *only* perform weddings.”

Play “Guess Who / 20 Questions”

- Option for students to be the facilitator of their own group / or, in a role-reversal, of the teacher!
- Students are given characteristics of each government position and must guess the correct one in less than 20 questions. Teachers can quiz students, students can quiz teachers, students can quiz their groups.

Unscramble (*Formative Assessment Challenge*)

- Separate the titles of the positions from their descriptions (pieces of paper) and have students work solo, in groups or pairs to see how fast they can match the correct ones.
- LEVEL 2: Scramble! Add one line into each position description from one of the others, and have students race to identify them and match them back to their correct position.

Research / Relevant Textual Evidence Tie-In

- Students have a “mock text-based question” such as: “What role does each Vermont Official play protecting the public?”
 - Students are to research and find one online, credible source about each current Vermont Official. Students then provide one piece of textual evidence that answers the mock text-based question for each official.
 - Students can use this to write a CPEA/LEAF paragraph; multiply this for larger writing assignments / essay.

C3 Civics Standards D2.Civ.1.9-12	C3 Civics Standards D2.Civ.7.9-12	C3 Civics Standards D2.Civ.5.9-12
Distinguish the powers and responsibilities of local, state, tribal, national, and international civic and political institutions.	Apply civic virtues and democratic principles when working with others.	Evaluate citizens' and institutions' effectiveness in addressing social and political problems at the local, state, tribal, national, and/or international level.