

Albuquerque Model City Council Curriculum

Model City Council: Lesson 9

Lesson Topics: Participatory Budgeting Process; Communicating Ideas to Public Officials; Community Based Organizations

Aims: To decide, as a class, which would be the best participatory budgeting project; to decide how to communicate your ideas to public officials; to learn about community based organizations and political advocacy.

Skills to be Addressed:

- Oral and visual presentation skills
- Reasoning, evaluation, making decisions
- Discussing ideas with peers
- Letter writing (optional)

Objectives:

- Students will
- Present and argue for their participatory budgeting projects proposals
 - Vote for the best project proposal.
 - Learn how to advocate for their proposal and/or participatory budgeting
 - Learn about community-based organizations.

Common Core Standards Addressed:

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.5
Make strategic use of digital media (e.g., textual, graphical, audio, visual, and interactive elements) in presentations to enhance understanding of findings, reasoning, and evidence and to add interest.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.2
Integrate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) in order to make informed decisions and solve problems, evaluating the credibility and accuracy of each source and noting any discrepancies among the data.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.1.B
Work with peers to promote civil, democratic discussions and decision-making, set clear goals and deadlines, and establish individual roles as needed.

Timeframe: One 60-minute period.

Materials:

- PB Evaluation Form
- PB Ballot
- PB in Schools Info Sheet (in English and Spanish)
- “Writing Public Officials”
- Sample PB postcard to mayor

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Procedure:

I. Participatory Budgeting Exhibition

- Students set up exhibits for project proposals, similar to a science fair.
- Students walk around the exhibits, talking to the creators, who answer questions and advocate for their proposals. Students evaluate the proposals asking themselves: **which project provides the greatest good for the greatest number and fits within the budgetary limitations?**
- Students vote for the best project.
- Announce the winner and runners up.

II. Class discussion about Participatory Budgeting

- Do you think it would work in our city? In APS? In our school?
- Distribute the PB in Schools Info Sheet, to show how it's been used in schools. Students could take these sheets home to talk about PB with their parents.
- Show the postcard used to register support for projects in Greensboro, N.C.: PB-post-card-mayor. Students could write similar postcards to Albuquerque's mayor.
- Decide if and how you want to let your city councilor know about the winning project proposal, through a meeting, with a letter, or in a class visit. You could write together as a class or students could write individually (see optional homework.) If you've invited the city councilor or a council staff person to visit your classroom, you could explain the project then. You could also arrange a meeting with the councilor at City Hall.
- How else could you advocate for your project? With a letter to the editor of the newspaper? Through a community-based organization?

III. Community Based Organization Lecture

One of the ways that councilors decide what's important in their district is by listening to community members and community-based organizations. There are a number of different kinds of community organizations, including:

- **Service organizations**, which work to meet a specific need or provide a specific service within the community. Organizations of this type include charities, soup kitchens, after school programs for youth, etc. and are often affiliated with churches and other religious institutions.
- **Neighborhood associations**, officially recognized groups representing residents within established boundaries who work together to improve the quality of life in their neighborhood.
- **Advocacy groups**, which use political strategy to try to meet certain social or political goals. This type of organization includes environmental groups, women's groups, gun owners' groups, etc. Common Cause New Mexico, which created the Model City Council curriculum, is a non-profit advocacy organization.

Because service organizations are more familiar to most people than advocacy groups, here's a description of advocacy groups and what they do.

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Advocacy groups can be divided into what is known as the “three-legged stool”: *grassroots organizing, lobbying, and media outreach*. There is a great deal of overlap between the categories, as one advocacy effort can serve many functions.

Grassroots organizing refers to activities that use “people power.” Just as the roots of the grass are the beginning point and the part closest to the ground, grassroots advocacy efforts work with individuals who form the base of community efforts. Examples of grassroots organizing activities include holding a meeting in the community to educate people about the problem, writing letters to elected officials, protesting, and writing a petition.

Media outreach refers to activities that use the power of the media to raise public awareness of issues and opinions. In the same way that corporations use the media to sell products, organizations use the media to “sell” their message on an issue. Some media outreach activities include Facebook pages, Tweeting, making posters or flyers that discuss an issue; inviting the media to a large protest to show the public and elected officials that lots of people are worried about a problem; running TV, radio, or print advertisements; and writing letters to the editor.

Lobbying refers to activities that involve meeting with an elected official in person. Students can remember this word because it makes reference to all of the people who wait in the lobby (often for hours at a time) to meet with public officials (often for only a few minutes). Some lobbying activities include going to speak at a public hearing and calling or meeting with a public official one-on-one. Many large companies and advocacy organizations hire lobbyists to try to influence public officials to make one public policy decision or another. Often, much of the information a public official has on an issue will come directly from lobbyists who bring him or her facts and figures to support their employer’s opinion or preference. Public officials can choose who they meet with, so some people find it easier to arrange meetings than others. Still, anyone can try.

If there is enough good public advocacy, then elected officials will have the information and diversity of perspectives they need to make informed decisions that reflect both their best judgment and the clear will of the majority.

IV. Discussion

Imagine what kind of service or advocacy-oriented community based organization you would like to have in your neighborhood, community or council district. What issues would this organization address? You could ask these questions:

- *What are the most serious problems identified on the District Score Cards?*
- *Are the problems long-standing or relatively new? Will it be more effective to approach a new problem or one that has existed for a long time?*
- *Can the district’s main problems be best addressed by providing a service or by advocating for action by the city government?*
- *Keeping in mind that organizations are specialized and have limited resources, what would your organization do? How would you convince others that your organization is important?*

V. Possible Homework

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- Write your city councilor about an issue concerning your district or about a project you would propose for your district. Use the “Writing Public Officials” handout to help you.
- Post about the class’ PB project proposals on the Model City Council Facebook page.