

**Junior Council or Board Meetings have proven to be one of the most popular and effective Awareness Week activities. This guide is offered to help those local governments that are planning to hold a Junior Council or Board meeting for the first time.**



**LOCAL GOVERNMENT AWARENESS**

## INITIAL STEPS:

1. Contact the local school board, inform them of your plans and request permission to contact the secondary school (s) in your area.
2. If the Board's response is positive, contact should then be made with the secondary school principal(s). The principal(s) may act as the coordinator for the project or he/she may assign someone else to assist in recommending participants.
3. If there is only one secondary school in your area, it is recommended that you take students from Grade 10 or 11. Students at this level appear to be a "keen" group and may have had some experience with debating and student councils. For those communities with more than one secondary school, representatives could be taken from different schools thereby providing for more extensive participation. Student roles could be determined by elections, appointment or if possible, the students could assume the role they wish.
4. The number of students required will vary depending on the size of your council / board and the level of participation you desire. In addition to the regular number of council or board members, students could fill the senior staff positions. You may also wish to set up student placements with the local newspaper and radio stations (to cover the meeting) and to other Departments such as the Department of Parks and Recreation.

## PREPARATION:

5. Preparation time will vary depending upon the time your coordinator has available.
  - a. If preparation time is available, extensive preparation can be done. A series of afternoon sessions could be held to introduce students to the council/board and staff members, to discuss their roles, and provide an overview of municipal / regional district obligations to the public. Additional discussions on procedural bylaws, budgets and the Local Government Act have proven very helpful. Again, if time permits, students could have a practice session with an old agenda prior to obtaining the "real" agenda for the following week. Students should also be provided with the names of people to contact if they have any questions about the material.

Please note that this model requires a great deal of time and commitment on the part of the students, and this should be made clear to those who express an interest in participating.

- b. If preparation time is limited, there is an alternative. Students can be invited to meet with council/board and senior staff at an 'in camera' dinner meeting prior to a regular meeting. This provides students with an opportunity to talk to council/board members and staff informally about their role and it may help them decide which role they would like to play. Students are then invited to stay for the regular meeting and observe. Prior to the regular meeting students are provided with the same package as regular council/board members (additional background information should be provided if the issue was discussed at a previous meeting). Again, students should also be provided with the phone numbers of their council/board or staff counterparts in case they have any queries on the material or meeting procedures. Time is also set aside prior to the meeting for last minute directions and guidance.
7. Prior to the start of the meeting, the Mayor or Chairman should introduce all the Junior members. Students assume the seats of the regular members and staff. Regular personnel may want to sit with their junior counterpart to provide consultation, if necessary. The junior members can then begin to go through the agenda.
  8. Once finished, the real council/board members assume their regular seats. At this point, the council/board can either go through the agenda in the same manner as the Junior members or they may choose to 'ratify', 'amend' or 'override' the decisions of their Junior members on an item by item or group basis.
  9. After the meeting, a small reception could be held. Perhaps at this time, every student who participated could obtain some sort of recognition. This could take the form of certificates from City Hall, their own "name-plates" or a free ticket to an activity at your recreational centre.
  10. When the minutes of the meeting are prepared, they should reflect the junior council and 'real' council decisions. Minutes can be signed by both Junior and Regular Mayor/Chairman and Clerk. All participants should receive copies.
  11. Junior council/board involvement does not have to end at this point. Many local governments continue to contact their Junior counterparts requesting input on issues that the council will face in future meetings. This is an excellent way to keep students 'aware' beyond the week devoted to local government.

Although this format involves less preparation time, it has proven successful and more convenient for those local governments with limited time.

In both (a) and (b) a 'real' agenda is used. The decision to use a real or mock agenda is entirely up to each council or board. You may prefer to use a mock agenda if you have the time to prepare one or feel that the real agenda may be too difficult for your group.

#### COUNCIL / BOARD MEETING:

6. The meeting usually takes place on the regular meeting day in the council chambers. Publicize the meeting to encourage students, teachers, parents and the local media to attend. Those students placed with local newspapers and radio stations can provide coverage of the story. Community Cable T.V. personnel should also be invited to attend, if your meetings are not already covered, and conduct interviews with the junior members.

Special thanks to Margaret Warwick and Corinne Lonsdale for their valuable input and advice while preparing these guidelines.

**For those local governments who want to involve elementary school students in Local Government Awareness activities, the following suggestions are provided:**

1. Elementary school students can participate in junior council/boards but most communities that invite elementary school students do not use a 'real' agenda, since this may be beyond the capability level of the students. Instead, council can prepare a mock agenda with a few issues for discussion which may prove more valuable.
2. Have your regular council / board meeting in the school gymnasium and invite students to observe. This will provide them with an opportunity to see how local government works and it will also lay the ground work for future Junior Council / Board participants.
3. Have member(s) of your Council / Board visit classrooms to discuss the role and function of local government. If available, audio-visual aids would be effective.
4. Request student input on issues facing your council or board. This is similar to #1 but does not entail the creation of a junior council or board. In the past, students have provided valuable input on community recreational needs. Other issues for consultation could include: vandalism, naming of streets, animal bylaws, and twinning and sister city programs.

These are just a few ideas. If you think of any others, please tell us so we can pass on your advice and experience to other local governments.