

Create a City!

Overview

Students will examine the organization of local governments, charters, and elections by creating their own city.

Grades

8-12

Materials

- Create a City, handout attached
- Art supplies

Duration

60+ minutes

Procedure

Your City – Likes and Dislikes

1. As an opening small group or class discussion, or as an individual written warm-up, ask students what they like about the city in which they live. After a few moments of noting positives, ask students what they would like to see improved about their city. Finally, tell students that they are going to have a chance to put all of their thoughts into some creative action, as they design their own city from scratch.

Create Your Own City!

2. Divide students into small groups and hand out the *Create a City* assignment sheet (attached) and explain to students that they will create their own city then present it to classmates in an attempt to convince them to move there. Give an overview of the steps they must follow, and explain that by the end of this activity they will have created a city that they present to classmates via a sales pitch, a visual aid with a city motto/slogan, and a rap/jingle.

Step I: Brainstorming

3. Instruct groups to first conceptualize the type of city they would most like to live in. Instruct groups to begin brainstorming by considering the questions in Section I of their handout. Allow for around 10 minutes of beginning thought, encouraging students to be creative, but realistic.
4. After 10 minutes, tell students they will have time to come back and finalize some of their initial brainstorming later. Move them on to thinking about city government. Discuss:
 - Why was the **US Constitution** created? What is its purpose?
 - Can anyone connect the Constitution to any types of local documents? What is a **charter** and what is the purpose of a town **charter**? (Highlight the connection that a charter is like a city's Constitution.)

- How are municipalities created in real life? (*Facilitate discussion that cities are incorporated by the General Assembly after the place has a settlement developed, has defined geographic boundaries, and an approved charter.*)
- Given that a charter sets up the framework of how our city or city is governed, what specific types of information would a charter include?
- Who makes the laws and regulations for a city? (*Facilitate discussion of charters, pointing out municipalities must not contradict state laws and regulations unless asking for a local act.*)

Step II: Charters

5. Tell students that in Step II, they will determine the type of charter their city will have. Again, allow groups time to discuss how they want their city government to be structured. Use the student handout for a starting point of explanation/discussion of the types of charters. You may wish to additionally refer students to a reading in their text books on charters, and/or.

Step III: Elections

6. Finally, have students continue to Step III, again using the handout to begin a preliminary discussion on **elections**. Again, you may wish to refer students to a reading in their text book for additional details.

Step IV: Pulling it All Together and Finalizing Your City's Details

7. Once students have had a preliminary discussion regarding the aspects of their city, review the requirements for their presentation under Step IV. Instruct students to begin finalizing their thoughts and drafting their city. Let students know when their presentations will be given, and tell them that the class will vote at the end of all presentations on which city they would most like to live in. It is also important to remind students that along with all of their creative city decisions, they must also explain their charter type and election system, and explain why they set it up this way. Teachers may wish to offer an incentive to the winning city, such as homework passes.

Teacher Note: Students are naturally excited by the creative aspects of this activity. However, teachers need to monitor groups as they work and remind students to include charter and elections details in their presentations as well. This ensures that students will hear this information repeatedly in their final presentations, and thus be more likely to remember the information regarding charters, local government, and elections.

8. Before students begin their city presentations, review expectations of respectful audience members with the class. Instruct students to take notes on each city presented in order to help them make an educated vote at the end of all presentations. After students have voted, debrief this activity by discussing:
 - What are the main purposes of local charters? Why are local charters created?
 - How does the purpose of a charter compare to the US Constitution?
 - What are the roles of mayors and city managers? How do they differ?
 - What are the differences between partisan and nonpartisan elections?
 - What are the typical consequences of holding at-large city elections versus elections by small wards?
 - How are individuals, public officials, and local agencies impacted by charters?

- How do local charters impact citizens and how do citizens in turn impact local governments?

Group Members: _____

Create a City!



You and your group are responsible for creating a new city somewhere within the state of North Carolina. You must design this city from scratch, following many of the realistic steps that are taken when cities are **incorporated**. You will consider and plan many aspects of your city, including but not limited to all of the steps below. When finished, you and your group will attempt to convince citizens to move to your city.

I. Brainstorm:

What kind of city do you want? Be creative, but be REALISTIC! Assume you can create a new city anywhere in North Carolina. Begin to discuss and imagine these questions and others while jotting thoughts on notebook paper:

- What would your city look like? (Consider the physical, architectural, and environmental design of the city.)
- What activities will take place in your city?
- What do you feel is most important for a city to be successful and for residents to have a high quality of life?
- What would you like your city to be known for?
- What services will your city's local government provide to its citizens?
- In what way would ideal citizens behave in your city? What do you hope they will value? What actions will your citizens take on a daily basis? How can the "ideal" be achieved?
- Where is your city located within North Carolina? Why is this the best location? What physical features do you want your city to have?
- What laws/ordinances will be important to initiate? (Remember, you cannot undo any law set by the state or federal government).
- What environmental qualifications do you want your city to meet?
- What is the name of your city?

II. Choose a Charter Type:

Your next task is to set up the outline for your city's government. To do this, you must understand and explore local charters. Consider the pros and cons of each type of government described below. From that understanding, you will design a charter defining the government of your city.

A **charter** functions as a city's constitution by outlining governmental actions, by defining the authority of officials, and by determining how officials will be elected; charters vary in how they define government.

The two most prevalent types of charters are the **mayor-council charter** and the **council-manager charter**:

1. **Mayor-Council Charter:** The oldest and most popular charter in the United States and in North Carolina (over 60% of NC cities use this format). City councils under this type of charter occupy a single chamber and are typically small, with a population generally under 2,500 people. The size of the council varies from as few as 2 members to as many as 50, though 7 is the median size in cities with more than 5,000 people. There are two basic variations of the mayor-council form, **weak mayor-council** and **strong mayor-council**:

Characteristics of the Weak Mayor Council:	Characteristics of the Strong Mayor Council:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mayor is selected by the city council rather than elected by the people. • Mayor's powers are usually limited. • City councils generally possess both legislative and executive authority. • Department heads are directly elected by citizens, not appointed. • There is no single administrative head for the city, and power is fragmented. • Designed for smaller cities with simple governments. • Poorly suited for large cities where political and administrative leadership is vital. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mayor is elected directly by the people and given fairly broad powers. • City councils generally possess only legislative authority. • Department heads are appointed by, and serve at the pleasure of, the mayor. • The mayor is the administrative head of the city. • The system calls for a mayor to be both a good political leader and an effective administrator.

2. **Council (City)-Manager Charter:** It is a system in which the city council hires a professional administrator to manage city affairs. The council serves as a "board of directors" that sets broad policies, while the city manager carries out (implements and administers) these policies in businesslike fashion. This charter type is adopted by the larger cities in North Carolina, with over 80% of cities with more than 2,500 residents using this system.

Decision Time (answer on notebook paper):

- Do you wish to have a **mayor-council charter** or a **council (city)-manager charter** to govern your city? Explain your reasoning.
- If the **mayor-council charter** was chosen, do you wish to have a **strong mayor** or **weak mayor** system? Why?
- How many members will compose your city council? What are the possible benefits and drawbacks from this number of council members?
- What type of citizen involvement do you hope to have in your city's government? (i.e. perhaps your city council will hold bi-weekly citizen informational and comment forums, etc.; perhaps you'll have a youth council to advise the city council, etc.)

III. Determining Elections:

There are many ways in which city officials may gain office. Review the following election methods and decide which will be best for your city.

1. **Partisan** and **nonpartisan** elections:
 - **Partisan** elections are races in which the candidates run under a party platform.
 - **Nonpartisan** elections are races in which the candidates do not affiliate with a party.
2. Elections by **districts/wards** or elections from the **city at large**

Decision Time (answer on your notebook paper):

- ✓ Will you hold partisan or nonpartisan elections? Why?
- ✓ Will elections be determined by small districts/wards, large districts/wards, or from the city at large? Explain your choice.

IV. Create Your City

Review all of your thoughts and create a city! Prepare a **3-5 minute presentation** to deliver to potential citizens in which you explain all of the above information regarding your new city, with the goal of getting them to move there. Your final presentation must contain the following:

- ✓ Develop a **sales pitch** to encourage people to reside in your city. Your pitch must describe your decisions regarding its **charter**, and **elections**, as well as include creative details (while maintaining realism). Your pitch should convince potential residents that your city is where they want to live. A pitch can be a speech, a commercial, a skit, etc.
- ✓ Develop a **visual aid** that will depict your city to potential residents & tourists (such as a poster, billboard, or flyer). Also, develop a **city motto or slogan** that is inviting and welcoming. This slogan/motto must appear on your visual aid.
- ✓ Create a **jingle/rap** that could be played on the radio to advertise your city and convince tourists to visit. Your musical creation should include details of your city that you feel are most important.

Each group member must participate and convey information in the presentation, demonstrate a clear understanding of charters and elections, and participate in all of the above steps.