Rotating Interviews with Local Government Officials

Overview
Students will learn about local government and the roles and responsibilities of public officials by participating in rotating interviews with visiting elected and appointed officials.

Grade
10

Course
American History: The Founding Principles, Civics and Economics

North Carolina Essential Standards American History: The Founding Principles, Civics and Economics
• FP.C&G.2.1 - Analyze the structures of national, state and local governments in terms of ways they are organized to maintain order, security, welfare of the public and the protection of citizens (e.g., federalism, the three branches, court system, jurisdictions, judicial process, agencies, etc.)
• FP.C&G.2.2 - Summarize the functions of North Carolina state and local governments within the federal system of government (e.g., local charters, maintain a militia, pass ordinances and laws, collect taxes, supervise elections, maintain highways, types of local governments, etc.).
• FP.C&G.2.7 - Analyze contemporary issues and governmental responses at the local, state, and national levels in terms of how they promote the public interest and/or general welfare (e.g., taxes, immigration, naturalization, civil rights, economic development, annexation, redistricting, zoning, national security, health care, etc.)

Essential Questions
• What types of jobs do local government officials perform?
• What are the responsibilities of local government officials?
• How is the work of local government officials relevant to each of us?
• What challenges do local government officials face?
• What types of conflicts arise between local government agencies?
• What is our responsibility as citizens regarding our local government?

Materials
• Utilizing Resource Persons in Your Classroom, teacher reference handout attached
• Sample thank you note, attached
• Local government officials
• Name tags for elected officials and students
• Reflecting on Local Government Interviews, response sheet attached
• Name that Local Government Job, worksheet and key attached

Duration
• 45 minutes for student preparation time
• One block period for interviews

Procedure
1. Teacher Preparation:
   • The goal of this activity is to allow students to learn about local government through first hand interviews with local officials. Interviews can be based on learning about general responsibilities and
roles of officials, or can also include questioning on a specific area of student concern (i.e. global warming, environmental issues). The teacher should consider these components when choosing which officials to schedule for the interviews.

- Students will be placed in small groups of 4-5 to conduct their interviews, and will rotate between all visiting officials. Thus, you will need to schedule enough visiting officials so that each group has someone to interview. It is recommended that each group have around 10 minutes with each official.
- Research and begin recruiting local government officials (elected and/or appointed) at least four weeks in advance of the interview date. Contact the Clerk to the Board for your county and/or municipality for recommendations and advice about the best approach for inviting these officials. After making an initial contact with each desired interviewee in which you explain the activity and its purpose, follow up with an e-mail/written letter including the date, time, location, parking arrangements, school procedures for guests, and a list of possible questions to give officials an idea of what will be asked (see the attached Utilizing Resource Persons in Your Classroom for more information).

2. Student Preparation:

- One-two weeks before the interview date, give students an overview of the upcoming interview activity. Explain to students that in small groups, they will be able to further explore the roles and responsibilities of various officials from their local government by interviewing them when they visit! If your class is focusing on a particular area of concern in their local government (such as global warming/ environmental issues) let students know they will also be able to respectfully question officials regarding their thoughts and actions on that topic. Have students mark their calendar with the date of interviews, and help them prepare by going over behavior expectations and generating appropriate interview questions.

- Prepare Questions in Advance: Break students into their small groups several days before the interview, letting them know that they will be working together to create questions for the upcoming interviews. Let students know that the questions they prepare in advance are intended to get the conversation started, but they should feel free to ask appropriate questions on their own during the interview, and allow the conversation to go where it takes them.
  - Instruct students to brainstorm the various things they would like to know about visiting officials, their responsibilities, their views and/or intended actions on a particular topic, etc. Explain to students that the success of their interviews and the amount of information they get will depend largely on having good, open ended questions (questions that cannot be answered with a simple yes or no). If possible, the teacher should provide a list of the officials who are scheduled to visit, so that students can research those officials and tailor some questions for that particular person. (If possible, allow student’s access to the Internet to research the visitors; otherwise the teacher may choose to print relevant information off of the Internet and provide it to students in handout form while they are preparing questions.)
  - Monitor groups as they work, offering guidance as needed. Tell students that when the interviews occur, they should each ask at least two questions per interview. (After reviewing each group’s questions, instruct students to bring them the day of the interview. The teacher may wish to keep a copy of each groups questions as well incase they are needed by a group that day.)
  - Examples of General Questions:
    - How long have you been serving as an elected or appointed official?
    - When you first ran/applied for office, what were your reasons for wanting to serve?
    - For officials who have served multiple terms: Have your reasons for serving changed since your first term?
    - For elected officials: How much time do you spend each month on your duties as an elected official?
    - For appointed officials: What does a typical day look like for you?
- What areas of municipal or county operations interest you the most and why? What areas do you find most complex?
- What are your favorite parts of serving the public?
- What do you find most challenging about your job?
- What accomplishment are you most proud of? Why?
- Did any aspect of the job come as a surprise after you started? Is there anything you wish someone had told you about the job before you began?
- What is the toughest decision you've ever had to make as an elected/appointed official? What made it especially difficult?
- Has your perception of state and local government changed in any way since you have been working in this position? Has your perception of federal government changed? Explain.
- What, if anything, would you suggest as a prerequisite for serving in local government? What qualifications and interests does one need?
- Why should citizens care about the decisions that are made in your office? How are we directly impacted?

3. Before the Officials Arrive:
   - Before elected officials arrive, organize the room into sections with a round-table structure. If a larger space such as the library is open, you may want to reserve it in advance so that there is more space to separate the interviews. Leave one desk/chair free at each section for the visiting official.
   - Review your behavior expectations with students before the officials arrive. Explain to students that their group will have 8-10 min. at each section to interview the official. At the beginning of each interview, they should introduce themselves, thank the visitor for coming, and begin asking questions. Use a signal (bell, lights on/off, etc.) to let groups know when their time is up. Explain to students that they will end the interview by again thanking the official for their time, and then quietly rotate clockwise, promptly beginning the same process for their next interview. Remind students of appropriate behavior for moving about the classroom as well.
   - You may want to station some student ambassadors in the main office to greet the officials as they arrive, welcome them, and walk them to your classroom or interview location.

4. Conducting Interviews
   - Students should be seated at the section they are starting in. As officials arrive, welcome them and again explain their role. Once all officials have arrived, place them at a section and allow students to conduct their interviews, asking questions from their list of questions that arise in the course of their conversations.
   - Check on groups throughout the process but try not to get involved in the discussion unless a group really seems to be struggling. Near the end of each time period, give a two-minute warning, then signal the end of the interview. Guide students clockwise to the next elected official/round table section.

5. Closure
   - Thank the elected officials for participating. You may wish to present them with a school token (such as a t-shirt) and assign a student to tour them out of the building if desired.
   - In review, ask each student to state one fact about local government or their local government’s beliefs/actions regarding environmental issues they learned in the course of the interviews and/or assign the attached Local Government Interviews: Reflection Sheet for homework.

Culminating Activities
- Thank-you notes: Have students write each official a thank-you note. This will also improve your chances at having these same officials assist with this activity in the future. See the attached sample.
- Have students complete the attached Name That Local Government Job in groups or individually.
• Play *Local Government Jeopardy*, available in Carolina K-12’s Database of K-12 Resources: [http://k12database.unc.edu/?s=jeopardy](http://k12database.unc.edu/?s=jeopardy)
Utilizing Resource Persons in your Classroom

Inviting a resource person to your class can not only provide valued assistance, but will also to give your students a chance to interact with and learn from a local government official or community member. Exposure to resource people can encourage young people to develop deeper contact with their local governments and communities, as well as consider public service as a viable career option.

Recruiting Resource Persons from your Community

Make a preliminary contact well in advance (at least 4 to 6 weeks) to make sure busy people can fit your class into their schedules; then contact the community resource again closer to the date with details of lesson and what is expected of the guest.

Resource persons may be recruited by contacting:

- Local, state, and national government offices located in your community
- Civic organizations within your community, such as Rotary, Kiwanis, Junior Achievement, League of Women Voters, etc.
- Businesses in your community.
- Local institutions of higher education. Usually the public information office is a good place to start
- Local non-profit organizations related to your theme or topic (i.e. the Sierra Club)
- Relatives of your students and/or contacts they may have

Contact organizations such as Carolina K-12, the North Carolina Bar Association, the local Chamber of Commerce, the North Carolina City and County Management Association, and local offices of political parties for contact recommendations or assistance in setting up a resource person.

Preparing the Resource Person for the Classroom Setting

The resource person may be an expert in his/her field, well-equipped to speak on a variety of topics to colleagues and the public. However, a classroom of high school students may be unfamiliar territory, particularly if your guest has no children in this age group. Teachers can best prepare the resource person by:

- Explaining the overall context of the purpose of their visit, the lesson and/or simulation they will assist with, the lesson objectives, and the time allotted
- Discussing the lesson and/or simulation and explaining how the resource person should participate
- Describing the class, including details such as number, age, and other relevant information
- Stressing the importance of interacting with students and responding honestly to their questions
- Encouraging the resource person to bring related resources or have input into the content of classroom activities, though you should offer to review these materials to ensure they are appropriate for your students and your lesson objectives
- Sending him or her a copy of the lesson/simulation and all relevant handouts
- Sending directions to the school and the classroom
- Arranging parking
- Having a student ambassador meet him or her at the front office
- Be prepared to continue with the lesson and/or simulation in case the person has a last minute conflict (often the same lesson will work using the teacher in the role of the resource person)
- Send a thank you note expressing gratitude for the person’s visit (you might want them to come back again in the future!); see the attached Sample Thank You Note to a Resource Person
Reflected on Local Government Interviews

1. Based on the interviews you conducted in class, what did you learn about local government? Did you hear anything that surprised you? Explain.

2. How would you characterize the jobs of the local government officials you met with? Would you be interested in having any of these jobs? Why or why not?

3. Which interview did you find most interesting and why?

4. Why is it important to interact with your local government officials on an on-going basis? In what ways can you make your opinions known to local governing officials?

5. Why should young people care about the work that local government officials do, and the decisions that local governing bodies are making?

6. In what ways can you, as an active citizen, be involved in your local government and community?

7. How is the work of the people you interviewed relevant to you as an individual citizen?
Sample Thank You Note to a Resource Person

Jamaal Williams  
Smithfield High School  
900 Cornwallis Road  
Durham, NC 27707

May 1, 2007

Mayor Bill Bell  
Office of the Mayor  
101 City Hall Plaza  
Durham, NC 27701

Dear Mayor Bell:

Thank you for taking part in our class interviews of local government elected officials last Tuesday. I hope you enjoyed the chance to talk with us about your service as mayor to Durham, North Carolina. We certainly learned a great deal about Durham in addition to the challenges and rewards of public service. I particularly enjoyed hearing you speak about why you signed the “Cool City Pledge” and the ways Durham is working to improve carbon emissions.

With your help and the help of the other elected officials, we gained a deeper appreciation for the role of local government in our daily lives and appreciate the attention you have show to environmental issues in our city.

Sincerely,

<<signature>>

Jamaal Williams
Name that Local Government Job

Directions:
1. Read the job descriptions provided on the following Name that Local Government Job worksheet.
2. Determine whether or not you believe the job to be performed by your county government, your municipal government, or both.
3. From the Local Government Job Titles provided below, determine what title(s) performs what job. Job titles vary slightly from one organization to another and some descriptions are general enough to apply to multiple positions within the same department. You will receive extra points for finding all the job titles that match the job duties described.

Local Government Job Titles

- 911 dispatcher
- Animal control officer
- Building inspector
- Buyer
- Child support agent
- City/Town clerk
- City/Town manager
- Civil engineer
- Clerk to the board
- Code enforcement officer
- Codes inspector
- Community disease control specialist
- County manager
- Dental assistant
- Detention officer
- Division right-of-way agent
- EMT
- Engineer
- Firefighter
- Habilitation specialist
- Housing specialist
- Librarian
- Mental health counselor
- Mental health specialist
- Paramedic
- Pharmacist
- Planner
- Public health specialist
- Purchasing agent
- Recreation coordinator
- Revenue officer
- Sanitation worker
- Signal systems technician
- Solid waste collector
- Social worker
- Substance abuse counselor
- Tax appraiser
- Tele-communicator
- Traffic engineer
- Zoning officer
### Team members: ____________________________________________________________

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Job Description</th>
<th>County, Municipality, or Both?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Attends all meetings of governing board; drafts minutes for board approval;</td>
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<td>maintains custody of minutes, ordinances, and resolutions; answers questions</td>
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<td>about board actions.</td>
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<td>2. Provides technical assistance to dentist in the care of dental patients.</td>
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<td>3. Inspects buildings under construction or renovation for safety and for</td>
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<td>compliance with local state, and federal regulations.</td>
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<td>4. Responds to questions about submitting sales tax reports; reviews sales tax</td>
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<td>reports from businesses; investigates discrepancies.</td>
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<td>5. Transports patients to local medical facilities and provides emergency</td>
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<td>medical aid and life-saving measures.</td>
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<td>6. Reviews requisitions; performs market research; prepared bid invitations;</td>
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<td>analyzes bids and recommends bid awards; completes contract documents; monitors</td>
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<td>performance by vendors.</td>
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<td>7. Initiates, prepares, and enforces child support orders.</td>
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<td>governing board.</td>
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<td>debris on lots, and abandoned vehicles on both public and private property.</td>
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<td>10. Plans activities for children; supervises groups of children in a</td>
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<td>recreational facility; manages snack time and bathroom breaks; resolves</td>
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<td>squabbles; treats minor injuries.</td>
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<td>11. Designs and reviews plans for public works improvements; obtains permits;</td>
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<td>performs field surveys; prepares and administers contracts; inspects projects</td>
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<td>such as streets, sidewalks, water and sewer lines, and storm drainage systems.</td>
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<td>Research traffic patterns; monitors traffic computers; recommends adjustments in traffic light signals to facilitate the flow of traffic.</td>
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<td>Evaluates and counsels substance abuse clients; develops and serves as primary contact for therapy, including individual, group, or family counseling.</td>
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<td>Investigates cases of specific communicable diseases, such as tuberculosis, AIDS, and sexually transmitted diseases; identifies contacts of the patient; refers individuals for treatment.</td>
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<td>19.</td>
<td>Identifies, negotiates and makes purchase arrangements for properties needed for the construction or expansion of highways.</td>
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<td>Assists patrons by recommending and locating library materials and equipment; classifies materials; recommends materials to be purchased.</td>
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<td>22.</td>
<td>Helps clients and their families to assess needs and develop plans for caring for developmentally disabled or mentally ill clients.</td>
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<td>23.</td>
<td>Researches and appraises residential, commercial, or industrial properties for tax assessment purposes.</td>
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24. Maintains order during daily routine at jail; provides supervision for and ensures security of inmates.

25. Processes prescription orders; registers and counsels patients; maintains inventories of drugs and supplies.

Of all of the jobs you have now learned about, which would you most like to perform and why?

**Name that Local Government Job Answer Key**

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<td>Neither (State government)</td>
<td>Revenue officer (Department of Revenue)</td>
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<td>5. Transports patients to local medical facilities and provides emergency medical aid and life-saving measures.</td>
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<td>EMT Paramedic</td>
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<td>10. Plans activities for children; supervises groups of children in a recreational facility; manages snack time and bathroom breaks; resolves squabbles; treats minor injuries.</td>
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<td>Recreation coordinator Mom/Dad (1/2 point)</td>
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