



A New Way to
**Teach Your Students
About Democracy**



How Does Democracy Work? When teaching your students about government, that's the heart of what you're trying to communicate, isn't it? It may be getting harder to teach your students about the benefits and responsibilities of democracy when there are few stories of compromise or of politicians working on behalf of the common good at the state and federal levels of government.

That's why teaching high school students about local government can be extremely beneficial. Local government is where democracy is most tangible and government is most accountable and accessible to its citizens. Of the three levels of government, local government has the greatest impact on the quality of our daily lives.

Democracy in Action

Responding to the needs of their residents, local governments provide the services that help our communities thrive. Though they may differ significantly from state to state, local governments may have total or partial responsibility for:

- Making our communities safe by providing police, fire, and EMS services.
- Creating jobs by attracting and retaining businesses.
- Ensuring children have access to an education by providing funding for schools and teachers.
- Improving the quality-of-life by securing land for parks and building community centers.



- Providing transportation by constructing and maintaining roads, creating train and bus systems, and building airports and bike paths.

In local government, professional managers make sure it all happens.

Hired by the elected governing body, they are the key decision-makers, the senior-level city, town, and county executives whose decisions affect

people in thousands of communities across the United States. Professional local government managers are like CEOs of corporations, but they see the community in its entirety, without being tied to one department, one interest group, or one political point of view. Working in partnership with elected officials, citizens, and business leaders, professional managers translate policy into actions and visionary ideas into real results. They oversee the day-to-day operations of local government and ensure that public services are provided effectively, efficiently, ethically, and equitably. They are the catalysts for making good things happen in our communities.

Want to show your students democracy in action? Teach them about local government and the role that professional local government managers play in building communities we're proud to call home.

Encourage Your Students to Consider a Career in Local Government

A leadership gap within local government is looming. The current generation of professional local government managers—inspired to enter public service by President John F. Kennedy's 1961 Inaugural Address—is nearing retirement. Local governments are looking for a new brand of leadership.

In the next few decades, local governments will lead the way in developing creative solutions to extraordinary problems. This will require leaders who understand the old rules no longer apply and look beyond traditional and political boundaries to innovate and make meaningful change.

“When we're done making policy, our city manager is focused on turning that into reality.”

—Michael Belsky,
Former Mayor, Highland Park, IL

These could be your students. As you help them think about their futures, encourage them to enter public service and consider a career in professional local government management.

Resources for Teaching about Local Government

The *Life, Well Run* campaign, an ICMA (International City/County Management Association) initiative has developed materials that can help you teach local government to your students:

- **Show “Local Government 101,”** a free, 10-minute Prezi produced by *Life, Well Run*, which explains the origins and functions of government and the role of the professional local government manager. Go to LifeWellRun.org/join-the-campaign to download this and other campaign resources for your students.
- **Visit LifeWellRun.org** for more information about how local government works and the role professional local government managers play in building and shaping communities. Here, your students also will find career advice on how to become a professional local government manager.
- **Check out the interactive map on LifeWellRun.org** for success stories from professionally-managed communities. These stories will really help your students get a sense of the exciting work that occurs in communities around the country and the role of professional local government managers in building communities we’re proud to call home.

For more information about using these materials or to learn more about the *Life, Well Run* campaign, contact Catherine Smith, campaign manager, at 202-962-3632 or csmith@icma.org.



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Leaders at the Core of Better Communities