



Lesson 18.25 “Local Government and Town Meetings”

Unit 18: Civics and Government Today

Lesson Objectives

- Students will discuss what local government resources are available in their community
- Students will practice reading primary sources and drawing connections between the past and present
- Students will learn about the role and structure of local government in their community

Lesson Competencies

- I can present grade-appropriate information that is supported with evidence, elaborating when elicited, and respond to questions with relevant ideas or comments. (ELA 7)
- I can analyze primary and secondary sources and draw appropriate conclusions. (Moose SS)
- I can identify, explain, and analyze the core civic practices and foundational principles that guide governments and communities. (Moose SS)

Essential Questions

How has New Hampshire come to be the way it is?
How has New Hampshire been shaped by many voices?
How have New Hampshire’s people shaped its government?

Focus Questions

How do people act as good citizens in a democracy?
What are the people’s rights and responsibilities?
What are the responsibilities of federal, state, and local government?

Estimated Time

One 45-minute class session

Materials & Equipment

Unit 18 Learn It!, “[State and Local Government](#),” pages 6-10.
“Warrant for a Manchester, NH, town meeting, 1841 February 18” for distribution and/or projection
A modern, local warrant for a town meeting (example: from Hopkinton, NH, 2025 - https://www.hopkinton-nh.gov/sites/g/files/vyhlif716/f/pages/warrant_for_03-1120-2024_final-signed.pdf)
Class set of “Local Government Then and Now”



Educator Introduction & Rationale

New Hampshire has a long tradition of strong local government, which gives citizens many opportunities to participate in the decisions made about their government. There are 13 cities and 221 towns in New Hampshire, and many of the municipalities set up their local governments in similar ways. Each city has a mayor and a city council or board of aldermen, elected by the voters, as well as an elected school board to make decisions for the schools. Voters can express their opinions at meetings or to their representatives, but it is the elected boards and mayor who make decisions.

In towns, the people play a more direct role in governing. New Hampshire townspeople elect local officials for town (select board or town council) and school (school board) and every year, make decisions about how they want the town and schools to be governed. At least once a year, each town is required to hold what is called a town meeting, when all of the voters in the town can come together and discuss the issues they will vote on. Most towns now divide the town meeting into a deliberative session and election day where townspeople actually cast their ballots.

Most of the elected officials are regular citizens, volunteering their time and experience for their towns. Only a few town, city, or school elected officials are paid, and most of those are not paid enough for public service to be their regular jobs. Towns and cities need lots of people to serve in these offices and to help out in the community. Please see the Educator Overview for more information. In this lesson, the goal is for students to not only understand the workings of their local government, but also to come away with a sense of responsibility for and investment in their town or city.

This lesson is the fourteenth lesson for middle school students in Unit 18: Civics and Government Today. Students are first asked to consider how information in their town/city is available to inhabitants and learn more about their local government. Students then examine primary sources to compare an example of local government in 1841 to today. Finally, an extension activity encourages students who are ready to participate in local government by bringing a concern they have about their school to the school board.

Please adapt all the material in this lesson, as necessary, to meet the needs of the students in your classroom. Please note, lesson vocabulary and definitions are at the end of the document. You may wish to preview these with your students.

Before the Learning Activity

Student reading and comprehension questions

What is local government and why is it important? Students should read from Unit 18 Learn It!, "[State and Local Government](#)," pages 6-10.

Students should be able to answer:

1. What kinds of work do local governments in New Hampshire handle?
2. How do citizens participate in local government?
3. What is the difference between a town and a city in New Hampshire?
4. What is a town meeting and what is its significance?

Learning Activity

Activation

New to town. Ask students to pretend that they are a new citizen of the town/city your school is in. Ask them how they would learn about their new community. Some questions to consider:

- Where are the police stations and fire departments?
- When and how is trash and recycling picked up?
- How do you find out about community events? Local sports? Use the local pool in the summertime?
- How, where, and when do you pay for local utilities – water, electricity, oil/gas, etc.?
- How, where, and when do you pay property taxes? Register a vehicle? Register to vote?

This activity could be done in a few different ways depending on time constraints and resources available. It could simply be a brainstorming session where students come up with questions and ideas on how to find the answer ("ask a neighbor who has lived in the community a long time," "look online," "check social media for local organizations") Alternatively, you could use this as an opportunity to explore your town/city website with the students, talk to a member of local government, or ask students to do [a Town/City Quest from Lesson 18.5 on "Moose on the Loose."](#)

Whatever form this takes in your classroom, the goal is to get students thinking about all the services the town/city provides to their community.

Direct Instruction

Review with students that:

- In New Hampshire, there is a strong tradition of local government for both towns and cities
- Town governments are run by a select board (or town council), which oversees town departments like police, fire, transportation, libraries, and parks and recreation. Schools are overseen by a school board. Voters elect representatives, and vote to adopt town and school budgets each year.



- Each year in March, towns host town meetings to address these matters and give the community the chance to voice their concerns and vote. – This is an example of direct democracy.
- Cities are governed by a mayor and a city council (or board of aldermen). Members of the community still elect members of the school board, but play less of a direct role in the governing of the city.
 - Cities are an example of representative democracy, where citizens elect representatives to make decisions on their behalf.
- Towns and cities rely on people in the community to not only vote to express their opinions, but also to serve as elected officials to donate their time and experience and make their town/city a safe and nice place to live.

Guided Practice/ Reflection

Local government then and now. Begin by displaying or handing out copies of the “Warrant for a Manchester, NH, town meeting, 1841 February 18.” Distribute the “Local Government Then and Now” worksheet and have students work independently or together to fill out the questions in the “Then” column. This can also be done by assigning groups of students particular Articles from the document to review and then collectively answering the questions on the worksheet. (Suggested groupings: Articles 1-5; Articles 6-10; Articles 11-12; Articles 13-15; Articles 16-19; Articles 20-22)

Next, obtain a modern warrant for a town meeting. If your school is in a town, you may choose to use the warrant from the most recent year. If not, choose another New Hampshire town that is nearby or that you are able to find the warrant available online easily. Similarly, distribute or display it to students, cutting it up as necessary, and fill out the “Now” side of the worksheet independently or as a group.

Finally, have students fill out the reflection questions or discuss as a group.

- What are similar concerns that people had then and now?
- Are there any differences between how they plan to solve these problems?
- Why is community involvement necessary to solve these issues? How does that benefit the overall community?

Extension

What do we want our school board to know? Students can brainstorm ideas of topics to bring up to their own school board members and decide on the best way to contact them. Depending on your school district, information is readily available online for contacting school board members.

Invite students to collectively draft an email or letter to the relevant school board member. Ensure to include:

- The concern students wish to bring attention to

- The reasons they feel this is a significant issue to bring before the board
- Any research they feel helps strengthen their claim (Does any other school in NH face the same issue? Are there any news articles they could use to support their opinion?)
- The solution they are proposing to their concern
- A thank you to the school board member – remind students that often these are people who volunteer their time and experience to better their community



Supporting Materials

Other Resources

- Structure of a town government infographic:
<https://moose.nhhistory.org/units/civics-and-government-today/learning#map-gallery-3>
- New Hampshire's Cities:
<https://moose.nhhistory.org/Moose/media/Default/Documents%20and%20PDFs/Unit-1-docs/NH-Cities.pdf>
- Schools and SAU Information, includes maps and directories of school districts in New Hampshire:
<https://www.education.nh.gov/who-we-are/division-of-educator-and-analytic-resources/bureau-of-education-statistics/schools-and-sau-information>



Standards

New Hampshire Social Studies Frameworks:

- ✓ Civics and Governments: Structure and Function of United States and New Hampshire Government (SS:CV:8:2.2,SS:CV:8:2.4)
- ✓ Civics and Governments: Rights and Responsibilities (SS:CV:8:4.1)
- ✓ US / NH History: Social/Cultural (SS:HI:8:5.1)

NCSS Themes:

- ✓ Theme 5: Individuals, Groups, and Institutions
- ✓ Theme 6: Power, Authority, and Governance
- ✓ Theme 10: Civic Ideals and Practices

C3 Frameworks:

- ✓ Civic and Political Institutions (D2.Civ.2.6-8, D2.Civ.4.6-8, D2.Civ.5.6-8, D2.Civ.6.6-8)
- ✓ Participation and Deliberation (D2.Civ.9.6-8, D2.Civ.10.6-8)
- ✓ Processes, Rules, and Laws (D2.Civ.13.6-8, D2.Civ.14.6-8)
- ✓ Change, Continuity, and Context (D2.His.2.6-8)
- ✓ Historical Sources and Evidence (D2.His.12.6-8)

Common Core ELA:

- ✓ Key Ideas and Details (RH.6-8.1, RH.6-8.2, RH.6-8.3)
- ✓ Craft and Structure (RH.6-8.4)
- ✓ Integration of Knowledge (RH.6-8.9)
- ✓ Production and Distribution of Writing (WHST.6-8.4)
- ✓ Comprehension and Collaboration (SL.8.1)

Lesson Vocabulary

ballot	(noun) Something used to cast votes in an election. Ballots can either be on a piece of paper or a computer
board of aldermen	(noun) A governing body of a city or town
budget	(noun) An estimate for how much money will be spent and made in a set amount of time
citizen	(noun) A member by law of a nation or group
city council	(noun) A group of elected officials that makes laws for a city
civic engagement	(noun) Actions taken to participate in the rights and responsibilities of citizenship in a community
civility	(noun) Behaving or speaking in a polite manner
clerk	(noun) A person who manages and keeps records and accounts in an organization
committee	(noun) A group of people who make decisions and plans about a specific topic or issue
democracy	(noun) A government ruled by majority vote of the people
election	(noun) When people vote for a person for office or other position
government	(noun) A group of people that have the power to make and carry out laws for a community
law	(noun) A rule that regulates the actions of members of a community

local control	(noun) When decisions about government are left up to the local community, rather than the state or federal government
majority	(noun) More than half of a group
minority	(noun) Less than half of a group
moderator	(noun) A person who leads a meeting to ensure it is organized and balanced
motion	(noun) A formal proposal made in a meeting
neutral	(adjective) Describing something or someone who is not on any side of an issue
point of order	(noun) A question in a formal meeting whether the rules are being followed
public service	(noun) Something that is supplied for the benefit of the people; examples of public services are police, libraries, school, roads, courts, and military
representative	(noun) The person selected by a group of people who will communicate their views and make laws for them
school board	(noun) A group of elected representatives who make decisions about the school system in a town
select board	(noun) A group of people elected to govern a town
supervisors of the checklist	(noun) People elected to maintain the official list of voters
tax	(noun) An amount of money, added to the regular cost of an item, that goes to the government

town council	(noun) A group of people elected to govern a town
town meeting	(noun) A formal gathering of the citizens of a town to discuss and vote on town business
town meeting day	(noun) The day on which a formal gathering of the citizens of a town to discuss and vote on town business occurs; in New Hampshire, this day is traditionally the second Tuesday in March
town report	(noun) A yearly document laying out the management, money matters, and actions of a town
voter turnout	(noun) The number of people who voted in an election divided by the number of people allowed to vote; shown as a percentage
warrant	(noun) A document giving authority to do something
warrant article	(noun) A planned action or discussion item to be considered at a town meeting