

“Shout Out” to Youth about Local Civics and Careers in City Government

“The philosophy of the schoolroom in one generation will be the philosophy of government in the next.”

— Abraham Lincoln

Young people typically learn little about local government in middle or high school. They are probably unfamiliar with the roles and responsibilities of local officials and staff, and they may never have considered future employment opportunities or careers in local government.

This lack of familiarity reduces the capacity of young people to be knowledgeable, effective citizens now and in the future. It also diminishes the number of individuals who will be interested, ready and available to serve as the next generation of city officials and staff. The need to ensure a future pool of committed, prepared individuals to serve in city, county and other local government roles is particularly urgent given the large number of Baby Boomers nearing retirement.

This civics and employment gap can be addressed by actively encouraging young people to learn about local government and consider local government-related careers. While this may not seem the best time to be talking about local public sector jobs, it may be more important than ever to help ensure a better understanding of the work and opportunities inherent in local public sector service.

What Appeals to Young People

Young people today have the same ideals as youth of prior generations: They want to build communities, save the planet and make a difference in the world. These values can be met through many interesting and challenging roles and careers in local government. Such jobs offer an opportunity to have a direct impact on communities and residents’ health, safety and well-being.

For ideas on resources to connect youth with the emerging green economy, see “Today’s Youth: Tomorrow’s Green Workforce.” (www.ca-ilg.org/YouthGreenWorkforce)

Reaching Out to Youth

Local officials and staff can reach out to young people in their own communities to build a better understanding of local government and possibly foster a young person’s future in local public service.

Here are a few ideas for local officials to consider:

- Contact local schools to arrange for city, county or other local officials to give presentations about local government roles, responsibilities and jobs;
- Participate in school career days;
- Organize a tour of city, county, special district or school district offices for youth organizations;
- Develop a local government internship program for local students;
- Establish a youth commission or council if your city or county doesn't have one;
- Look for opportunities to involve youth on other appropriate local government commissions or committees; and
- Engage youth in the planning process for issues that specifically concern them, such as designating bike lanes or areas for skateboarding.

Examples of communities engaging youth can be found on the Institute for Local Government (ILG) website at www.ca-ilg.org/post/youth-engagement.

A Role for Youth Commissions

If your county or city has a youth commission or council, ensure that information about the purposes and activities of local government are built into orientations for youth commission members. Involve youth council members in discussions about local issues. Youth commissioners can also learn about public sector careers and act as ambassadors to other young people who may be interested in pursuing careers in the public sector.

ILG provides a range of resources to support youth commissions and youth engagement efforts in California at www.ca-ilg.org/youth-commissions-engagement. This includes a roster of youth commissions in California and a series of youth commission briefing papers. The most recent briefing paper, *Youth Engagement and Local Planning: Ideas for Youth Commissions*, is posted at www.ca-ilg.org/post/public-engagement-develops-briefing-papers-youth-commissions.

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This resource is a service of the Institute for Local Government (ILG) whose mission is to promote good government at the local level with practical, impartial, and easy-to-use resources for California communities. ILG is the nonprofit 501(c)(3) research and education affiliate of the League of California Cities and the California State Association of Counties. For more information and to access the Institute’s resources on public engagement, visit www.ca-ilg.org/public-engagement. To access this resource directly, go to www.ca-ilg.org/YouthLocalGovt.

The Institute welcomes feedback on this resource:

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