

CIVIC PARTICIPATION

Curriculum Steps

Overview of the Workshop

5 minutes

1. To set the tone for the workshop the presenter should discuss the reason for the workshop: to encourage people with developmental disabilities to become active participants in the civic life of their community by providing training on local government and the strategies for them to address issues of importance.
2. Presenter explains that this is a two-session workshop and gives the date and time of the second session.

Welcomes and Introductions

10 minutes

1. Each presenter says who they are, why they are interested in presenting this workshop, and a couple of civic activities that they participate in. (*Write on a flip chart for later use.*)
2. Each participant says who they are and what city/county they live in.
3. Participants' names and city are written on a flip chart. This can be done by someone other than the presenter

Be sure that you spend minimal time on this section because participants will have other times to talk.

Civic Participation: What is it and Why is it Important?

10 minutes

1. The presenter asks, what is civic participation? It may be helpful to break the question down by asking what is civic and then asking what participation is. Then, provide examples of civic participation such as:
 - voting, knowing the process of voting
 - writing or calling on local officials
 - participation in committees or city/county activities
 - speaking out on an issue of importance
 - writing letters to the newspaper
 - working on a campaign
2. At this time the self advocate presenter shares his/her example(s) of civic participation. This includes the issues, the actions, the outcomes, and the possible next steps.

The self advocate should have this written up before the workshop. Presenters can have examples written ahead of time as well which could capture: a successful situation with closure, a situation with a little success and lots of next steps, or a situation that needs to be moved from the local level to the state level.

Sharing Local Government Experiences

25 minutes

1. Explain to participants that during this section of the workshop they will be actively participating and therefore will break into two smaller groups.

2. Divide the room in half and assign each group a number, 1 & 2. Each group needs a presenter, a recorder, a mentor/facilitator, and a volunteer self-advocate to present back to the large group.
3. Once in the small group explain that this exercise is an opportunity to participants to talk about what they know about their local government and civic participation.
4. Each participant's information is written on a flip chart for easy reading and remembering.
5. The presenter leads participants through a set of questions:
 - Do you live in a city or county? (Presenter may need to give a brief description of each)
 - Do you vote?
 - Have you been to your city hall?
 - Do you know who your mayor/city manager is?
 - Have you ever been to a city council meeting?
 - Did you ever call a city official? If yes, for what reason?
 - Did you ever volunteer to work on a political campaign?
 - Have you had an experience dealing directly with your local government?

If participants do not have familiarity with these questions then try these: What would you like to learn in the workshop or why did you decide to attend the workshop?

6. The groups come back together and 1 or 2 volunteers from each group give a brief talk on what information their group decided was the most important to share.

This is a great opportunity for the mentor to help participants decide what to say and how. Pictures and key words would help.

Explanation of the Civic Participation Tool

5 minutes

The Civic Participation Tool is designed for participants to have specific information about the city/county they live in to use as they participate in local civic activities. The Tool is partially filled in before the workshop to save time for those people who have pre-registered. Participants will use this tool during the issue and assignment sections of the workshop. A copy of the tool is in your folders.

Examples of Public Policy Issues and Areas of Civic Participation

20 minutes

It is important for people to understand that "civic participation" occurs around concrete activities and areas of interest. This section introduces this idea and some issues that people are commonly interested in. Make sure that people understand what an issue is as that will be the basis for explaining civic participation.

1. The presenter introduces this section by explaining that many people first become active in their city or county around a public policy issue or activity that is important to them. Ask the participants, what is a public policy issue?

2. Get input from one or two participants, and then explain that a public policy issue is an item that is handled by a government branch or department. For the purposes of this workshop we will concentrate on local government (city or county) issues.
3. The presenter explains that the group is going to talk about some common public policy issues. What the issue is and what problems associated with the issue are. Present each issue listed below by stating the issue, showing and passing around the picture of the issue and getting input from one or two of the participants. Make sure to elicit the key idea(s) listed below.
 - **HOUSING:** The issue that most people are concerned about is finding affordable housing in a decent neighborhood. We all want affordable housing and we want to live in nice homes in nice surroundings, whether that is in an urban, suburban or rural area. We also want to have a say in deciding where to live and we do not want to be put in a neighborhood that we don't want to live in.
 - **TRANSPORTATION:** The issue is trying to get fair transportation that is affordable and is available to everyone. This includes buses, trains or any other form of transportation. We want to have public transportation to get to work, appointments and social activities.
 - **ACCESSIBILITY:** Accessibility for people with physical disabilities is about making public places more accessible through ramps, bigger elevators and wider aisles. This includes buildings, sidewalks and public transportation. We all want to have equal access to public buildings and services.
 - **HEALTH CARE:** The issue in healthcare that most people are concerned about is getting the best medical coverage at affordable rates. This includes medical insurance, medicine, doctor and hospital visits. We all want to have the best medical coverage that is affordable and reasonable.
 - **SAFETY:** The issue around safety is trying to live in the best and safest conditions all the time: At home, in the workplace and out in the streets. We all want to live where we are free of violence, crime and other incidents.
 - **EDUCATION:** All of us want to have the best education possible and the opportunity to learn additional skills. We should have access to good continuing education so that we can get ahead in life.
 - **PARKS AND RECREATION:** The issue here is about having recreation activities in our community for everyone to share. This includes different types of camps, concerts, trips and other forms of the arts. We all want to have a chance to see things we don't normally see and to enjoy activities that we may not have the opportunity to do all the time.
 - **RECYCLING:** This issue is about getting the word out on how recycling helps the environment. Recycling is when we separate our trash into piles of glass, plastic, aluminum cans and paper. We all want to live in a world where future generations can see the same clean, natural world.

4. Explain to the participants that they will be voting to decide which issue to use as an example for the rest of this exercise.

If participants have limited experience in voting explain that this is one way in which groups reach a decision or make a choice.

5. Distribute the ballot to each participant. Ask the participants to mark the issue that is most important to them and then to place their ballot in the ballot box.
6. Once everyone has voted, count the ballots and announce the issue. Tell the participants that we will be talking more about this issue after the next session.

If there is a tie in the ballot, announce this and choose one of these two issues to work through in the strategies for action section.

Basic Structure of Government

10 minutes

Presenters will need to tailor this presentation to the group makeup. If the participants come only from a city or only from a county, present the appropriate structure. If the group includes participants from both cities and counties, divide the group and present both structures. If possible find out in advance where participants will be from so that information can be printed out and provided to participants.

1. The presenter tells the participants, now that we have an issue we need to know what structure we will use to work on this. Explain to the group that the structure is the city government or county government.
2. The presenter describes the basic structure of local government using a chart to illustrate this. Draw on the information participants gave in the sharing government section. Make sure to cover who the elected officials are, their roles and responsibilities and the use of committees.

Strategies for Action

25 minutes

1. The presenter recaps the issue that the group selected in the Examples of Issues section and asks for a volunteer to explain what is important about this particular issue.
2. Brainstorm with the participants the steps that could be taken to address this issue using the following format:
 - WHO (official, committee or community group) can address the issue?
 - WHAT do we want changed or addressed?
 - WHERE does this action or change need to take place (neighborhood, a town, etc.)
 - WHEN is the best time to address the issue?
 - WHY is the issue important to address?
 - HOW will we address it?

Through the discussion on how to address the issue the presenter should help the group to consider the following actions that are commonly used to address issues:

- Attending a committee (or other) meeting
- Calling, visiting, or writing an official
- Contacting other groups/organizations that might have an interest
- Participating in a forum or activity related to the issue
- Writing a letter to the editor or other media action

The key to this section is keeping the discussion focused concretely on the issue/community that is being discussed, while presenting all of the options for action. There are handouts with specific how-tos on all these strategies in the Resource Section.

3. In discussing public meetings, tell the participants that there are rules that must be followed in bringing your issue to these groups and give an example (i.e. the issue needs to be on the agenda ahead of time). Explain that their mentor will help them to understand these rules in the next section.

Civic Participation Assignment: A Call to Action

20 minutes

It is now time for ACTION! Participants have talked about what local government is and what it can do. We have talked about issues and how we can work on them. For the remainder of this workshop and most of the next workshop we will work on an issue that is important to you.

You will decide what issue you want to work on and you will have a mentor to work with you between now and the next workshop.

So let's decide what your issue is that you want to work on. Pick an issue you care about because you will have the passion you need to ask others to join you and work with you. Some issues take time and energy to solve. Be patient and persistent. Having allies will give you the 'staying power' it takes to get something done.

1. Participants need the Civic Participation Tool.
2. Place pictures and names of each issue around the room for all to see.
3. Assign a mentor/facilitator to each issue.
4. Ask each participant to pick an issue and then go to where that picture is.
5. The mentor/facilitator takes a few minutes to identify the issue and make sure everyone is in the right group.
6. The mentor/facilitator briefly reviews the Strategies for Action section and the group talks about some of the things they could do to work on their issue.
7. The mentor/facilitator hands out the Civic Action Assignment and assists the participants to decide what action they will take. Actions support the participant to have an active and positive experience. For example: Attending a meeting is a better experience than writing an e-mail.

Remember the principles of the workshop: Social interaction and valued roles.

8. Mentors/facilitators are encouraged to use the local resources they know best so that the experience can be as successful as possible.

Possible actions are: Attend a local government meeting, contact a local official for an appointment, speak to other people interested in your issue, write a letter to the local newspaper, attend a workshop on your issue, etc.

9. Participants may need help in completing their action. The mentor/facilitator should help the participant in only the things the participant cannot do. For example: If a participant wants to write a letter but cannot read or write, the mentor/facilitator writes, but the words and ideas are the participant's. The mentor/facilitator makes changes only for clarification. It is perfectly ok to ask a participant what they can do. For example: Do you read or write? How do you usually tell people what you are thinking? However, some participants may need more help. The mentor/facilitator must use her/his judgment to determine how best to help the participants have a successful experience. The best way is to relax, have fun, and keep positive.
10. It is expected that the mentor/facilitator and participants may need to meet in between the workshops to assure that everyone is prepared for their civic activity. It is also expected that the mentor/facilitator attend any activity that the participant attends unless the participant wants to go on their own.
11. Participants, with the support of their mentor/facilitator, will prepare a brief presentation (5 minutes) of their actions for the next workshop. Using the Civic Action Assignment Sheet the presentation should include:
 - √ What is your issue?
 - √ What is your action?
 - √ What response did you receive?
 - √ What did it feel like?
 - √ What are your next steps?
12. Additionally, a poster board presentation using pictures and handouts from the action activities works best. For example: a picture of the participant at the activity with a local official, an agenda from the meeting, a copy of a letter written and sent, a handout from the committee meeting, business cards of the people they met, etc. A list of the activities is also good. For example: Telephone calls to and from mentor, visits with mentors, looking up phone numbers together, going to the meeting place beforehand to get comfortable, etc.
13. Presenters are available between workshops to assist.

Wrap-Up

5 minutes

The presenter takes a few minutes as a large group to mention:

- √ The next meeting date and time
- √ That participants and mentors have necessary materials
- √ A local official will be attending
- √ Thank everyone for coming