



450 MAIN STREET
METUCHEN, NJ 08840
TEL: (732) 548-9798
FAX: (732) 548-9298
WWW.THECITIZENSCAMPAIGN.ORG

INTRODUCTION TO SOLUTIONS CIVICS FOR ADULTS

In today's fast-paced and technologically-driven world, it is imperative that all citizens appreciate the value of civic engagement and the skills that will *empower* them to find solutions with positive impact in their communities. In order for this to happen, citizens must learn about the rights and responsibilities of citizenship, especially at the hometown level.

These Solutions Civics classes have been designed to teach citizens a positive, no-blame problem-solving approach to the issues they think are important. It is based on a curriculum developed by the University of Pennsylvania's Graduate School of Education in collaboration with the non-partisan, non-profit, Citizens Campaign. It includes 10 class sessions and an additional 3 sessions that center on no-blame problem-solving in a hands-on field project that can either be implemented concurrently with the classes or following them. In addition, instructors have the ability to choose from several project options and lessons can be supplemented with resources available online or in more depth via in-person training and information sessions arranged with The Citizens Campaign directly.

SOLUTIONS CIVICS CLASSES

Unit 1: Introduction to Local Government – This unit introduces the structure of local government; the major players, their roles and responsibilities, and their relationship to the communities they serve.

Materials: The Citizens' Manual, Election District Map, List of Party Committee Representatives, Model Local Party Constitution

Optional: Beyond the Classroom venue: visits to public hearings of the governmental power centers, invite local party officials as a class speaker, review government documents such as minutes or videotapes of meetings, identify appointed positions in government

Lesson 1: Introduction to Solutions Civics – Introduce participants to the concept of empowerment and the importance of informed participation and civic responsibility, and hold activities to help them understand the important role informed citizens play in improving their communities

Lesson 2: The Power Centers of Local Government – Provide an overview on the structure of local government, and introduce the power centers of Mayor and Council, Planning Board, School Board

Lesson 3: The Hidden Power Center: Local Political Parties – Describe the nature of political parties in the United States, and explain the functions of local political parties and rights of party members. Explain why this is a “hidden” power center and the important role it plays in politics, not only on the local level but also at county, state, and national levels.

Lesson 4: Local Public Policy – Introduce the concept of public policy through discussions on how it is set and changed, the decision-making process in local government, and how to identify and interpret local policy. Discuss how non-governmental/community organizations influence legislation and policies at the local level

Activity: Participants can observe a local planning board, school board, party committee, or town council meeting (either in person or videotape) and construct a mock town meeting

Materials: Council, school board, or planning board resolution or ordinance

Unit 2: Methods for Civic Participation – **This unit introduces citizens to the concept of civic participation and teaches them the vehicles for effective civic participation in their community. It includes a discussion of citizen rights with respect to local government and explores methods of civic participation**

Materials: The Citizens’ Manual; newspaper and magazine articles; The Citizen Service Act; The Party Democracy Act; “Shining Light in Dark Spaces”

Lesson 5: Introduction to Citizen Power - Explain the legal rights of citizens to access government power levers including OPRA, OPMA, and Citizen Service Act and introduce the idea of “political power levers.” Introduce and discuss the Paths to Power: Citizen Legislator, Solutions Journalist, Appointed Official, Political Party Leader and Civic Trustee

Lesson 6: Citizen Legislator – Discuss the process of policy proposal: identifying a problem and a constructive solution, researching, building community support, making a respectful proposal, sustaining grassroots effort

Lesson 7: Citizen Journalist – Discuss how to become an effective citizen journalist: pick a topic, know your rights, responsible journalism, effective writing, getting published/getting social

Lesson 8: Political Party Leader – Discuss how to become a political party leader. Research local & county committees, find your election district, check for vacancies, know qualifications, legal rights and power; become a committee person; get active within the party

Lesson 9: Appointed Official – Discuss the process of getting appointed: decide where to serve, apply to serve, best practices to get appointed, how to make the most of an appointment

Lesson 10: Civic Trustee – Discuss the role of Civic Trustee as working with other citizens to help find solutions to issues facing their communities that are based on evidence of success in other places and are cost-effective; participants will learn the concept of “no-blame approach” in governmental problem-solving

Unit 3: No-Blame Problem Solving & Implementing a Group Project - This unit centers on the development and implementation of the Group Project and prepares participants to identify and address community needs. The project provides participants with a greater understanding about workings of local government, and empowers participants to become active, informed citizens by exercising their rights to access and influence local decision-making bodies

Lesson 11: Issue Identification – Participants identify issues they are interested in, work in teams to identify common-purpose issues, and research how their city has addressed the issue and how other cities have addressed the issue. As a group, they will choose a priority issue

Lesson 12: The Responsible Proposal – Assign group tasks, including research, community outreach, citizen journalism, and drafting a proposal. Apply evidence-based problem-solving skills to the identified issue by researching cost-effective, best-practice solutions. As a team, draft a constructive, reasoned solution in a persuasive writing piece

Lesson 13: The Respectful Presentation – Present the group’s policy proposal before a public entity, e.g., one of the power centers, a community service group, community members, etc., and advocate for its adoption using no-blame political strategy, drawing on a variety of community resources and various methods of engagement to ensure the project’s successful implementation