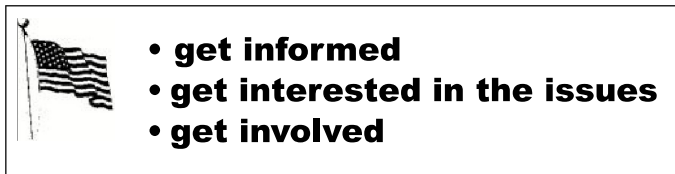


Personal Involvement

Of the people, by the people, for the people...

Abraham Lincoln used these words in a famous speech—the Gettysburg Address. He was talking about the government of the United States. The United States government, at all levels, is based on the will of the people. This means that the people have the responsibility to stay informed about issues. Each individual should do all that he or she can to make sure that the government works. Three ways to do this are to get informed, get interested in the issues, and get involved.



State Government

The Florida Constitution (adopted in 1885) provides for a governor elected to a four-year term. The legislature is composed of a House of Representatives of 120 members elected for two years and a Senate of 40 members elected for four years. Florida sends 23 representatives and two senators to the United States Congress and has 25 electoral votes. (Electoral votes are discussed in Unit 9.)

Local Government

One of the easiest places to get involved is at the local level of government. This is because we are closer to our local governments, and we represent a larger part of the **constituency** (the people to whom elected officials are responsible). Local government also generally deals with issues important to our everyday lives; therefore, our interest in them may be greater.

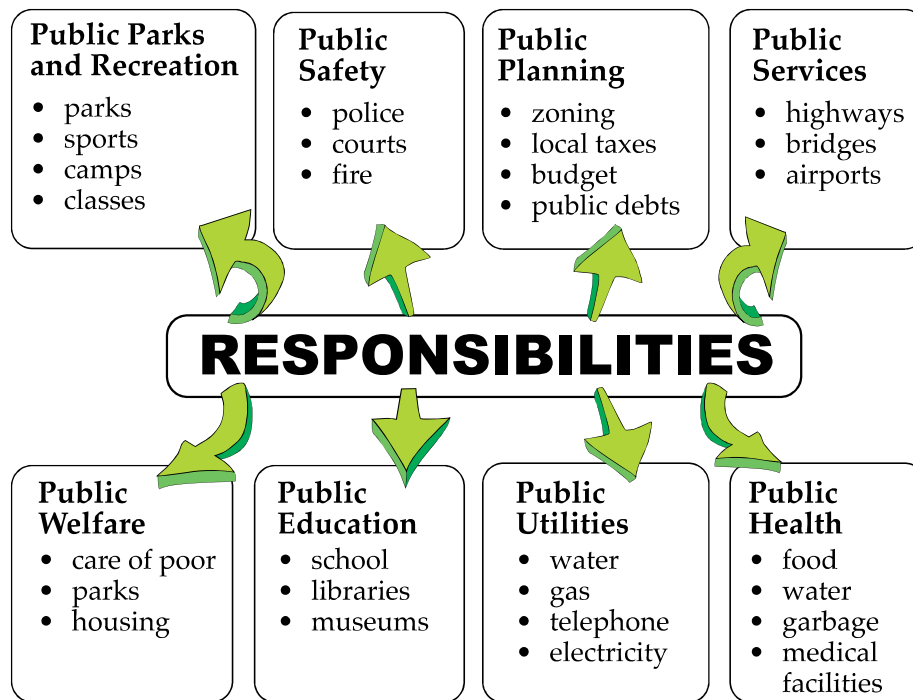
Areas of Responsibility

The main job of local government is to provide services for citizens. Local government has to handle a variety of problems dealing with health, education, and safety. It is responsible for keeping traffic flowing smoothly and for patrolling neighborhoods to prevent crime. Local government must provide efficient trash collection services, street lighting, public

transportation, traffic control, safe and adequate water supply, and sewage systems for the health and safety of the local area citizens.

Local government not only provides many services for the citizens, it also provides cultural activities that are important to the life of those citizens. Local governments support libraries, museums, and parks. Local governments also contribute to universities, hospitals, and entertainment.

The following chart shows some areas of responsibility of our local governments. Decisions made by local governments in all of these areas have a big impact on the quality of life in a local community.



Forms of Local Government

Local government may be organized in many different ways. Three types of organizational plans are as follows:

Mayor-council: In this type of local government, a full-time mayor works with a **unicameral** (one-house) council of part-time members to run the local government. The mayor and council members are elected to their positions and serve as two separate branches—the executive and legislative.

Commission: This type of local government exists when a group of elected commissioners makes local decisions. One of the commissioners usually acts as mayor, although there is no separation of branches in the commission form of government.

Council-manager: In this type of local government, council members are elected to office and hire a manager to run the local government. The council decides what issues are important, and the manager carries out the administrative duties associated with council policy.

Citizenship



American citizens are of many different ethnic origins and religions. All of us are descendants of **immigrants**—people who came here from other lands. Our country has been settled by people from all over the world. Our government allowed unlimited immigration in the early 1800s. In the 1920s restrictions had to be put upon the number of **aliens** who could enter the country; we still have an annual quota.

Citizenship Defined

Citizenship is gained in two ways—by birth or by **naturalization**. Most of us were born in one of the 50 states and are therefore **native-born citizens**. Citizens of other countries living in the United States are called aliens. Aliens are required to register annually. They enjoy many of the benefits of Americans, but they cannot vote or hold public office.

Some foreigners live here but remain citizens of their country. Others wish to become American citizens. This can be done through a legal process called *naturalization*. The first step is to enter the United States legally. To enter the country legally, foreigners must meet a number of qualifications. They must be able to support themselves, be able to read and write, not favor a violent revolution, not be mentally ill, and not be a drug addict.

The process of naturalization may begin immediately. The steps to American citizenship include filing a declaration of intention in any federal court; filing a petition requesting American citizenship; obtaining

two American citizens to appear as witnesses to declare that the individual has lived in this country for five years, has good moral character, and believes in the principles of the Constitution; passing an examination of literacy and American history and government; and taking an oath of **allegiance** (loyalty) and signing a certificate of naturalization.

Applicants are asked to give up their loyalty to their former country and must promise to accept the responsibilities of citizenship. (However, if dual citizenship is both desired and recognized by the United States and the former country, applicants are not asked to give up their loyalty to their former country.) Once he or she has met all of the requirements, the applicant is sworn in by a federal judge.

Steps to American Citizenship

- file a declaration of intention in any federal court
- file a petition requesting American citizenship
- obtain two American citizens to declare the individual has lived in this country for five years
- have good moral character
- believe in the principles of the Constitution
- pass an examination of literacy and American history and government
- take an oath of allegiance (loyalty)
- sign a certificate of naturalization
- give up their loyalty to their former country (unless dual citizenship is recognized)
- promise to accept the responsibilities of citizenship

Once he or she has met all of the requirements, the applicant is sworn in by a federal judge.

Duties

In Unit 6 you learned about the individual rights that are guaranteed to all American citizens. Along with their rights and privileges, citizens also have important duties and responsibilities.

The Constitution of the United States requires citizens to perform certain duties. The success of our government depends on the citizens performing these duties listed below.

Duties of American Citizenship

- attending school
- paying taxes
- obeying the law
- appearing in court as a juror or to testify, if called

Responsibilities

Each individual should do all that he or she can to make sure that the government works. In Unit 5 you learned how citizens may influence changes in the government and its policies. This is a responsibility, as well as a privilege. Citizens of the United States play a vital role in determining the nation's future. Our participation in government is critical for our form of government to work effectively.

Get Informed

An important part of good citizenship is to keep informed about issues. In order to protect your rights, you must first know your rights. Studying how American government works is one way to do this. Another way you can keep informed is by reading and watching the news.

Get Interested

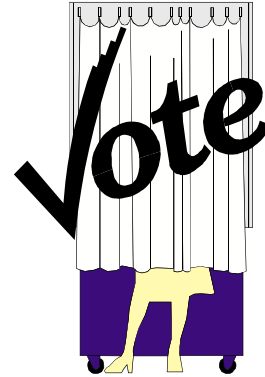
No one can be an expert on all subjects. Some areas will be of greater interest to you than others. Ask yourself which issues are important to you. Do you feel strongly about abortion, the death penalty, death with dignity, drug testing, flag-burning, pornography, drunk driving, or the draft? Focus on those political issues which are most important to you.



Get Involved

Good citizenship means getting involved in the political process. Make your feelings heard! There are many ways to get involved and many degrees of involvement. Some of them are listed below.

- Register to vote as soon as you are able, and then exercise that right.
- Write or call government officials and let them know your feelings about issues that are important to you.
- Serve willingly if called to jury duty.
- Sign a petition which supports one of your beliefs.
- Do volunteer work in your community.



Benefits

Our democratic government works because of the willingness of people to get involved in political activities. A major benefit of this participation is the sense of accomplishment which comes as a result of seeing the effect that your involvement can have on your community and country. Informed, interested, and involved citizens bring about positive changes in their community. These improvements and accomplishments are our reward for participation.