Building Communities

Through Local Government

A Resource for Teaching and Learning about Municipal Governments

Alberta Grade 6 Social Studies

Alberta Municipal Affairs

This resource was developed with the assistance of grade 6 teachers, students, municipal officials and staff of both Alberta Education and Alberta Municipal Affairs.

Readers should be aware that Internet websites offered as citations and/or sources for further information may have changed or disappeared between the time this was written and when it is read.

Teachers are cautioned that all websites listed in this resource should be checked for appropriateness and suitability before being provided to, or used with, students.

Every effort has been made to acknowledge sources used in this resource. In the event of any question arising as to the use of any material, we will be pleased to make the necessary corrections in future printings.

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This teaching and learning resource has been developed for Alberta students and teachers, and is designed to support, enrich and extend the experiences provided by core Grade 6 Social Studies resources. At the heart of this resource are approaches, strategies and tools that encourage citizen involvement and participation – with students, teachers, municipal officials and community members.

INTRODUCTION

The Alberta Grade 6 Social Studies program of studies focuses on citizenship, identity and democratic processes of decision-making within our society. Students explore ways to participate in democratic processes, be involved in their communities and develop beliefs, values and attitudes that empower them to effect change. The topic of local government is a natural place for students to investigate how issues, challenges and decisions are dealt with in communities.

The *Building Communities Through Local Government* resources provide opportunities for students to explore local government in the context of their own and other communities. The resources support General Outcome 6.1 of the Alberta Social Studies program of studies. They are based on a fundamental assumption that students should be involved in decision-making and encouraged to consider ways that they can be active, participatory and engaged citizens.

Building Communities Through Local Government includes the following components:

- This *Building Communities Through Local Government* Teaching and Learning Resource
- The *Building Communities Through Local Government* website, found at **http://www.municipalaffairs.alberta.ca/edu_grade6.cfm**
- The *Building Communities Through Local Government* A Resource for Municipal Officials
- A poster, student trading cards and a CD with PDF files of the resources, assessment tools and website visuals.

These components encourage students to delve into different aspects of municipal decision-making and governance in Alberta. The resources develop students' understandings of, and commitment to, their communities as well as their sense of empowerment and ability to participate in change processes.

Grade 6 Social Studies

Democracy:
Action and Participation

Grade 6 students will examine how participation in the democratic process is a means for governments and citizens to effect change in their communities. They will explore how democratic principles and ideals are reflected in the structure and functions of their local and provincial governments.

General Outcome 6.1

Citizens Participating in Decision-Making

Students will demonstrate an understanding and appreciation of the dynamic relationship between governments and citizens as they engage in the democratic process.

Building Communities Through Local Government **encourages students to explore different perspectives and opportunities for becoming involved as citizens.**

The learning experiences in *Building Communities Through Local Government* offer numerous possibilities for students to explore and develop the following understandings and processes:

- Local government, democracy and citizenship
- Municipal government as a type of local authority
- Types of municipalities in Alberta
- Roles and responsibilities of municipal governments
- Processes, structures and functions of municipal governments
- The electoral process
- Accountability and responsibilities of elected municipal officials
- Ways that representatives and citizens interact
- How the decision-making process is applied to issues and challenges
- Ways to be involved in the decision-making process and effect change.

Building Communities Through Local Government provides students with opportunities to inquire into the structures, functions and processes of municipal government in Alberta and investigate the similarities and differences between different municipalities, including urban and rural, large and small. Students are also encouraged to participate in their local community through current affairs that are related to municipal government and decision-making.

THE IMPORTANCE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Students need to feel a connection to their community and their government. Awareness of political processes and a desire to become actively involved as citizens is important for the development of our communities, province and nation. It is also central to building commitment to the values and attitudes of a democracy. This resource provides a valuable, Alberta-focused supplement to support teaching about local government.

Local government touches people's lives on a day-to-day basis. It responds to the needs of communities and plans for their futures. Local government shapes and influences ways of life of all people, regardless of whether they live in rural areas, villages, towns or cities. It is accountable to its communities. Local government is municipal government, a type of local authority. Local authorities include school board authorities, and health authorities, improvement districts and special areas.

Municipalities are local government structures created by the provinces to provide essential services to communities. The powers and responsibilities of municipal governments in Alberta are established by the *Municipal Government Act*. Municipal governments in Alberta provide services, develop plans, raise revenue and implement policies and decisions. The efforts of municipal government serve community members and work to improve the quality of life in a community. Municipal councils and regional boards consist of local citizens elected by the community – and municipal government staff are often community members. Local government is about citizenship and community.

ORGANIZATION AND INQUIRY

Using This Resource

Building Communities Through Local Government provides a learning sequence that develops and supports selected outcomes from the Grade 6 Social Studies program. This learning sequence can comprise approximately six to ten weeks of time out of the school year, depending upon activities selected.

Building Communities Through Local Government is organized into four sections. A suggested time allocation for each section is based on 50-minute classes.

Get Personal introduces the concept of municipal government and revisits understandings of community.	10 to 17 class periods
A Good Place to Live focuses on the processes, structures and functions of municipal governments.	11 to 16 class periods
Make Connections explores opportunities and choices for getting involved with community issues and participating in local government processes.	11 to 19 class periods
Participate emphasizes action and change.	7 to 10 class periods

FEATURES

Within each section of this resource, features provide support for different learning preferences and levels, skill development and integrated planning.

Differentiate provides suggestions and strategies for addressing differing learning needs, interests and prior knowledge.

Integrate identifies opportunities to integrate and provides suggestions and strategies for addressing outcomes across different subject areas in the Alberta program of studies.

Website identifies activities that support and extend the use of the *Building Communities Through Local Government* website.

Assess provides suggestions, strategies and tools for assessment of students. A performance task, as well as rubrics and checklist templates and tools, is included in each section of the resource.

Participate identifies strategies and activities that encourage the development of social participation outcomes. These strategies and activities also reinforce the Participate feature on the *Building Communities Through Local Government* website.

Interact provides suggestions for working with municipal officials in appropriate, meaningful and inquiry-based contexts.

Teacher Backgrounders provide detailed information to support students' learning of concepts and information related to municipal government in Alberta.

Think About provides insights, comments, additional suggestions and extra information to enhance or support the approaches, activities and information provided in this resource.

How to Navigate Through This Resource

Grey page tabs indicate teacher information, tools and strategies. Green page tabs indicate student resources.

As students build understandings about local government, citizenship and democracy, they explore five critical issues:

- What is a community?
- What should and can a community provide?
- Why share?
- What does it mean to be a citizen?
- How democratic is our community?

Get Personal encourages students to explore what citizenship means to them in the context of daily life in communities. Students develop criteria for an ideal community, discuss connections between community and local government, and identify public services and facilities. They examine municipalities and municipal government in Alberta, investigate what services and facilities can be provided by municipal government, and consider the range of factors that influence individual and community responsibilities and decision-making. Students investigate what democracy means and start to develop an understanding of the roles and responsibilities of municipal government.

As students focus their inquiry on the roles and responsibilities of municipal government, they explore five critical issues:

- Why do people choose to live in a municipality?
- How do people in a municipality contribute to building a good place to live?
- Why do we need municipal government?
- How does municipal government serve communities?
- How do the decisions of municipal government reflect the values and attitudes of its communities?

A Good Place to Live invites students to explore different types of municipalities and decisions, challenges and issues they may face. Students investigate municipalities in Alberta and identify similarities and differences between them. They conduct a community scan, identifying issues and challenges that influence decision-making in their municipalities. They develop knowledge and understandings about the structures and functions, roles and responsibilities of municipal government, and consider how municipalities make decisions for sustainability. Students develop an appreciation for the ways that decision-making is influenced by different needs as well as by municipal governments and community members.

Make Connections provides students with the opportunity to apply their knowledge of municipal government to ways that citizens can influence and shape decision-making. Students explore the electoral process, representation and citizen action and identify ways that municipal representatives demonstrate accountability to their communities. Students also investigate ways that individuals, groups and organizations share perspectives and beliefs on issues and concerns that affect and interest them. They examine strategies that extend understandings of participation and decision-making. Students build appreciation for ways that people can contribute to the quality of life within communities by working together, supporting and participating in their municipal government.

As students investigate decision-making in municipalities, they explore five critical issues:

- Why are municipal representatives elected?
- How are elected officials accountable to community members?
- How do local issues in the municipality affect decision-making and participation?
- How do people influence decision-making?
- Why is this local issue important?

Participate invites students to investigate a local issue and participate in a decision that affects them and their municipality. Students research, develop and carry out a plan for action. They create a strategic plan to describe a vision, recommendations, rules and principles that should guide decisions for their municipality's future. They build appreciation for the contributions of municipal government officials, and the ways that people of all ages can participate in their municipalities.

As students build strategies for participating in their communities and municipal government, they explore three critical issues:

- What does it mean to participate?
- How can kids participate as citizens?
- To what extent should people and organizations work together to build a vision for the future?

Using the Website

The *Building Communities Through Local Government* website provides students with the opportunity to explore different aspects of municipal government. An illustrated landscape provides the entry point into the website. Once students enter the landscape, they find different types of municipalities, from large and small urban centres to rural areas as well as a Métis Settlement, a different type of government. Students can obtain information by clicking on the icon beside each municipality and the Métis Settlement.

The website also allows students to investigate different facilities and services within three of the municipalities in greater depth. Within each of these three municipalities, students can:

- Investigate the roles of mayors or reeves, councillors, chief administrative officers and others involved in municipal government
- Find out about some of the services and facilities provided by municipal government
- Follow a decision-making process with a fictional student who responds to an issue
- Obtain information about social participation strategies.

Suggestions for integrating the *Building Communities Through Local Government* into classroom activities are provided in each section of the teaching resource.

THINK ABOUT

The **Vote for a Representative** interactive activity is a simulation. Municipal elections occur once every three years on a single day!

The website includes two feature links:

Participate encourages students to explore different options for participating in decision-making and investigating issues. Participate provides examples and discussions on social participation and action – holding community dialogues, attending community meetings, lobbying and creating press releases. This feature also models and encourages citizen participation through two interactive activities:

- **Vote for a Representative** invites students to participate in a mock election of a municipal representative. Students explore the views and stances of three fictional municipal candidates and vote to elect the candidate they believe would best represent them. Student votes register and accumulate daily. When a representative has been elected, each of the three municipalities displays a change that reflects their views. The votes reset daily. Students can view the current or previous day's results.

- **Voice Your Opinion** gives students the opportunity to register their opinion on an issue that will result in change to the municipality. Students respond to a "yes-no" question and their votes accumulate and reset daily. Students can view the current or previous day's results.

Scrapbook provides opportunities for students to track and organize their research on municipal government structures, functions, responsibilities and processes. Students can select icons to add to the website scrapbook and print a record of their research.

Teaching and Learning with Municipal Officials

Building Communities Through Local Government provides strategies for students to work with municipal officials in their municipality. These strategies are supported by A Resource for Municipal Officials, available to municipal officials. The Resource for Municipal Officials provides an overview of what grade 6 students learn about local government and suggested strategies for supporting students in their learning.

The Inquiry Model

The inquiry model used in this resource provides opportunities for students to develop and apply research and social participation skills. Students explore questions and issues by starting with their own knowledge and perspectives, use research skills to collect information, apply critical thinking skills to develop conclusions and consider social action.

When students **Explore**, they are asked to think about what they know and why this inquiry is important, interesting and relevant to themselves and to others.

When students **Consider Perspectives**, they identify research questions and consider who is affected by this issue. They are also asked to find out about different opinions and perspectives that may influence decisions.

As students **Plan and Find Information**, they identify and organize the sources of information that will help them research and understand the issue.

As students **Record and Organize**, they record what they find out, and look for patterns, connections, similarities and differences in the information.

When students **Draw and Share Conclusions**, they discuss and present their conclusions and the evidence that supports them. They explore the perspectives involved, form opinions and make decisions.

When students **Take Action**, they decide what they will do with what they have learned. They are encouraged to make a plan to act on their decisions.

As students **Reflect and Evaluate**, they consider how effective their decisions and actions were. They think about what they could change, do next, or find out more about.

The chart that follows provides an overview of the inquiry process used in this resource, including the purpose of each step in the inquiry process, questions that can guide the inquiry and the critical issues that support and develop each step.

INTERACT

In this teaching and learning resource, **Interact** identifies activities that can be supported by the involvement of people who work with municipal government. Consider the capacity of your municipality and municipal officials when selecting from these activities.

THE PROCESS	Purpose of Each Step of the Inquiry Process	
Explore	• Motivate and generate interest • Establish prior knowledge and experiences • Identify concepts and understandings • Make predictions	
Consider Perspectives	• Identify research questions • Identify individuals and groups involved with the question or issue • Consider different perspectives and opinions	
Plan and Find Information	• Focus on research process • Identify, locate and organize sources and information • Allocate tasks	
Record and Organize	• Record information • Organize information collected • Analyze the information • Make connections and comparisons	
Draw and Share Conclusions	• Present the information • Draw conclusions • Analyze the information • Assess information • Consider solutions, perspectives, alternatives and predictions • Make decisions	
Take Action	• Identify actions • Implement actions	
Reflect and Evaluate	• Reflect on actions • Consider effectiveness • Assess learning • Identify further research • Start the inquiry process again	

	Questions that can Guide Inquiry	Inquiry Emphasis of Each Critical Issue
	Why is this important? What interests me about this issue or question? What do I already know? What do I think about this issue? How does this issue or question affect me? What do I need to understand about this issue?	Section 1: What is a community? What should and can a community provide? What does it mean to be a citizen?
	What questions do I have? Who is affected and why? What different opinions exist?	Section 1: Why share? What does it mean to be a citizen? How democratic is our community? Section 2: Why do people choose to live in municipalities?
	How will I find out what I need to know and understand? What type of information do I need? What sources do I need to consult? What is the best way to research? Who can we find out more from?	Section 2: How do people in a municipality contribute to building a good place to live? Why do we need municipal government? Section 3: Why are municipal representatives elected? How are elected officials accountable to community members? Why is this issue important?
	How will we record our research? What similarities and differences do we see? What comparisons can we make? What connections do we see?	Section 2: How do people in a municipality contribute to building a good place to live? Why do we need municipal government? Section 3: How do local issues in the community affect decision-making and participation? How do people influence decision-making?
	How will we share our information? What would happen if…? What conclusions can we make? What evidence supports our conclusions?	Section 2: How does municipal government serve communities? How do the decisions of municipal government reflect the values and attitudes of its communities? Section 3: Why is this issue important? Section 4: What does it mean to participate?
	What will we do with what we have learned? What would happen if…? How can we contribute? How can we make a difference? What should we do next?	Section 4: How can kids participate as citizens?
	How effective were our actions? What should we change? What should we do next? What more do we need to find out about?	Section 4: To what extent should people and organizations work together to build a vision for the future?

What to Prepare

Building Communities Through Local Government is designed around a series of inquiry-based student activities that focus on local government and decision-making in municipalities. Many of the activities in each section of the resource use current and local affairs. Activities also introduce and develop concepts related to municipal governance.

The following strategies can be used to prepare for the learning experiences throughout this resource:

- Collect local media sources such as newspapers, community newsletters and magazines. Start news clipping files of articles about local community issues, dilemmas, challenges and government decisions.
- Look for community sources such as brochures, photographs and booklets about the community. Check your municipality's website for any resources they may have about the community or the municipal government. Start "pizza box" centres of different types of information about the community, municipality and local government.
- Identify websites that provide information about the community and the municipality. Some municipalities may include more than one community – identify information sources about each community. **Appendix B (pp. 214-215)** provides some websites you may wish to start with.
- Consider having students start an illustrated glossary of vocabulary terms and concepts.
- Consider having students start a learning log or journal to reflect on what they have learned about local government, municipalities, citizenship and participation. Invite them to establish a section in a binder or notebook to collect their work.
- Provide students with their own file folders to start a portfolio focused on what they are learning about citizenship and participation.
- Plan for ways to integrate and link inquiries related to First Nations and Métis authorities and Francophone associations with students' explorations on municipal government. Although these organizations and school districts are not a focus of this resource, inquiries and activities from core resources can be connected and compared as students learn about municipal government structures, roles and responsibilities in Alberta.
- Consider ways that you can also encourage students to make connections and comparisons to provincial and federal levels of government.
- Invite students to work in groups and create a poster with the critical questions for each section of the resource. These posters can be displayed in the classroom. Discuss the critical issues questions as a starting point for your inquiry into municipal government.

THINK ABOUT

Websites I can use with this resource:

TEACHING AND LEARNING APPROACHES

Building Communities Through Local Government is designed around current research and pedagogical approaches that underlie and align with the Alberta Social Studies program. These approaches emphasize an engaged, constructivist approach to teaching about citizenship. They emphasize student-centered inquiry, a community-centered approach to learning, and a focus on critical issues and collaborative decision-making.

The Grade 6 Student and Citizenship Engagement

By grade 6, students are starting to form values they will hold for a lifetime. The Grade 6 Social Studies program encourages students to become knowledgeable and involved in their local communities. Students are ready for more cognitive reasoning, decision-making and critical thinking. They continue to develop concerns over right and wrong. Grade 6 students should be encouraged to explore concepts and values associated with citizenship, engagement, responsibility and rights.

Building Communities Through Local Government:

- Provides grade 6 students with opportunities to link their learning to real-world experiences
- Benefits students and their communities by emphasizing involvement and interaction between students, municipal officials and community members
- Motivates students and encourages interest in local issues
- Initiates students into their roles as participatory and responsible citizens.

Learning Approaches

Research has shown that resources that take a more student-centered, active and participatory stance to learning are more effective in influencing changes in choices, attitudes and behaviours. *Building Communities Through Local Government* emphasizes active learning, and provides strategies and supports for implementing curriculum that is consistent with the philosophy of the Alberta Social Studies program.

Active learning strategies include approaches and activities such as class discussions, hands-on learning, collaborative learning, projects, multimedia simulations and inquiry. This resource recognizes the need to develop critical and creative thinking skills, problem-solving and decision-making strategies, and collaborative and respectful learning environments. The involvement of municipal officials reinforces learning in authentic and real-life contexts.

THINK ABOUT

As students continue to move toward more abstract thinking, they can grasp the ideas that underlie values such as fairness, respect and diversity of opinions.

THINK ABOUT

Active learning strategies are considered most effective when presented within an inquiry-based framework.

Constructivist learning recognizes that students learn most effectively when they are encouraged to construct and analyze their own understandings. It organizes information around conceptual clusters of challenges and questions and provides:

- Activities that are authentic, relevant and of emerging interest to students
- Activities that are problem-based
- Assessment that reinforces the learning process
- Opportunities that require students to be actively involved in sharing ideas, asking questions, discussing concepts and revising their ideas and misconceptions.

Cooperative learning is a strategy for participatory learning that emphasizes accountability and responsibility in group tasks and experiences. Cooperative learning strategies emphasize student involvement and the development of collaborative attitudes towards learning.

Inquiry-based learning is centered on research and investigation, as well as on experimentation and exploration of critical issues and questions. Inquiry-based learning is a fundamental aspect of the Alberta Social Studies program of studies, and includes elements and processes such as:

- Understanding the inquiry
- Exploring perspectives
- Planning the inquiry
- Retrieving information
- Processing and organizing information
- Creating and organizing ideas
- Sharing information and perspectives
- Taking action
- Evaluating and reflecting.

THINK ABOUT

The concept of community is reflected in multiple contexts within classrooms, schools and communities.

A **community-centered approach** to learning encourages the exploration of local and community-based topics and issues. Asking students to explore different meanings associated with the concept of community reinforces the multiple perspectives that influence decision-making. *Building Communities Through Local Government*:

- Presents perspectives and understandings that build a broader understanding of community
- Introduces and develops the process of community building, a critical aspect of local government

- Encourages the development of skills related to citizenship participation and collaborative decision-making.

As students explore the relationship between citizenship and community through local government, they focus on building a shared sense of commitment and belonging and respect for the opinions and perspectives of others.

A **critical issues approach** provides dilemmas and inquiries that are relevant and meaningful to students. Critical issues, posed effectively, ask students to develop and apply critical thinking skills, build understandings of multiple perspectives, consider alternatives and recognize that challenges can often involve many different opinions or solutions.

Building Communities Through Local Government is developed around a critical issues approach, one that promotes inquiry-based learning and critical thinking. Issues are framed around questions that are relevant and meaningful to students, and engage students in deliberative research and the development of social participation skills.

THINK ABOUT

Critical issues frame learning around key questions that pose problems and challenges that intrigue and interest students and set a context for motivated learning.