

Civics in Action for Girl Scout Daisies, Brownies, and Juniors

We strengthen our democracy when civically engaged kids become civically engaged adults. That's where Girl Scouts comes in! From the very beginning, civic engagement has been part of our DNA. We build girls of courage, confidence, and character who become engaged citizens and change the world.

As you're working on the Citizen badges with your girls, you may want to share more information about our democracy and how it works.

ACTIVITIES

Visit Mayor's Office

Want to show girls government in action? Take a field trip to the mayor's office and have girls interview them (or a staff member).

Before your visit, tell your girls a few basic facts about your mayor. When were they elected? How long have they served? Girls should know enough to ask questions directly and leave understanding the following:

- The office of mayor is a local version of the executive branch.
- The mayor is elected by the people of the city or town, usually using a ballot.
- Not all mayors have term limits (what, if any, are your mayor's term limits?).
- A mayor's basic duties depend on the size of the city and structure of local government; what are your mayor's top three duties?

Visit City Hall

What goes on in your city hall? Some city halls are large buildings that include courts. Some are much smaller and only include a few offices for police or administrators. In most cases, city council meetings are held at city hall. If you can plan a troop visit right before a city council meeting, your girls may have the opportunity to ask some questions and watch meeting preparation. Before the visit, tell your girls a few basic facts about your city hall. Girls should know enough to ask questions directly to a staff member of city hall and leave understanding the following:

- When was the city hall built?
- What types of departments or offices are in the city hall?
- How many city council members are there?
- What, if any, are the council members' term limits?
- What are the three basic duties of the city council? How often does it meet?

Start a Petition for the Community

Is there a local issue that your girls are passionate about? Whether it's space for a community garden, permission to paint a mural, maintenance for the local playground, or fixed lights on main street, a petition is a great way for girls to experience how the governmental process turns a request into an action.

Local governments receive petitions all the time—that means action might not happen right away, if at all. Your girls should work to have their petition heard and adopted, but if it doesn't happen, that's totally fine. The first goal of this activity is to see how the process works. If it passes, great! Have girls ask why it passed. If it doesn't, great! Have girls ask why it didn't! Then see if making changes and trying again will work.

Here are a few things for your girls to consider when starting their first petition:

- Know who to petition: is it the city council or the mayor's office?
- How many signatures does a petition need to be considered by the local government?
- How can the petition can be submitted? Ink on paper? Digital signatures?
- Starting with a small, popular issue (like fixing lights) will make it simpler for your girls to gather signatures.

GLOSSARY

Elections: A group decision-making process in which a population chooses one or more individuals to represent them in public office. Mayors, council members, senators, and (of course) presidents are all elected.

Vote: A vote is a show of support for a person or even an action. Votes are often cast with ballots, but votes in congress are usually made with a simple “yay” or “nay.”

Legislative branch: The part of government made up of senators or congresspeople—they are in charge of writing the laws.

Judicial branch: The branch made up of judges who are either elected or appointed (“appointed” means they're given the job by an elected official). They interpret the laws written by the legislative branch.

Executive branch: The executive branch is an elected person who enforces the law, such as a governor or president. They do this with help from government departments. The departments are in charge of things like national parks, roads, and food.

Checks and balances: These keep each branch of government from getting too powerful. Each branch has a little bit of power over each of the others. For example, if the executive branch enforces something incorrectly, the judicial branch is in charge of “checking” the executive branch by explaining more clearly what the law means.

Petition: A written request asking the government to take action on something people care about, usually signed by lots of people.