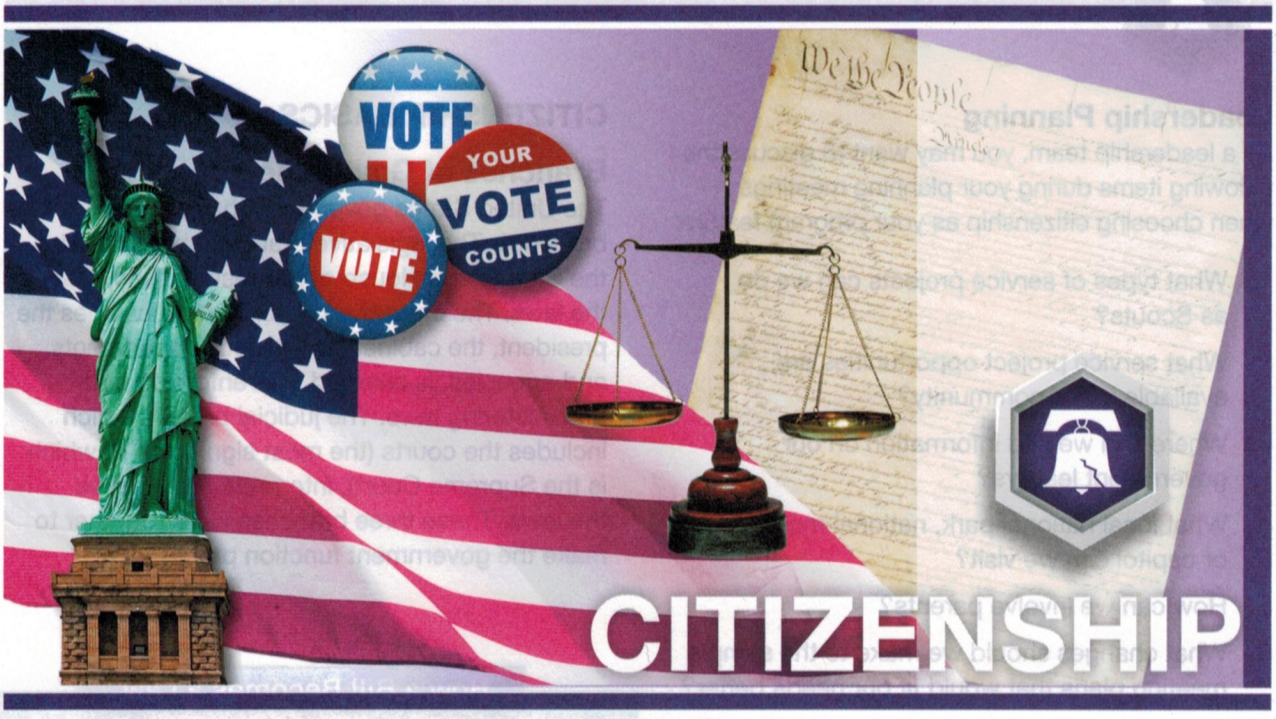


Doing Your Civic Duty

What does it mean to be a citizen? You are automatically a citizen of the country where you were born, but most would agree that being a good citizen takes more effort. People often talk about the rights they cherish as citizens, such as freedom of speech and the right to bear arms, but those rights are balanced by responsibilities, such as voting and paying taxes. Every opportunity you have to provide service to your country, whether through the military, political office, or community projects, strengthens our nation. The more you learn about citizenship, the better you can do your duty to your country, as the Scout Oath requires.

Objectives

This month's activities should:

- Help Scouts give back to their community.
- Give Scouts a better understanding about how the government works.
- Teach Scouts about their local, state, and national government leaders.
- Demonstrate how the election process works.
- Let Scouts experience how Congress passes laws.
- Let Scouts visit a national or state park, historical monument, state capitol, or the U.S. Capitol.

RELATED ADVANCEMENT AND AWARDS

- First Class requirement 5
- Citizenship in the Community merit badge
- Citizenship in the Nation merit badge
- Citizenship in the World merit badge
- Discovery Award service requirement
- Discovering America Varsity Scout activity pin

Leadership Planning

As a leadership team, you may want to discuss the following items during your planning meetings when choosing citizenship as your program feature:

1. What types of service projects can we do as Scouts?
2. What service project opportunities are available in the community?
3. Where can we find information on our government leaders?
4. What local national park, national monument, or capitol can we visit?
5. How can we involve parents?
6. What changes should we make to the sample meeting plans that would fit our needs better?

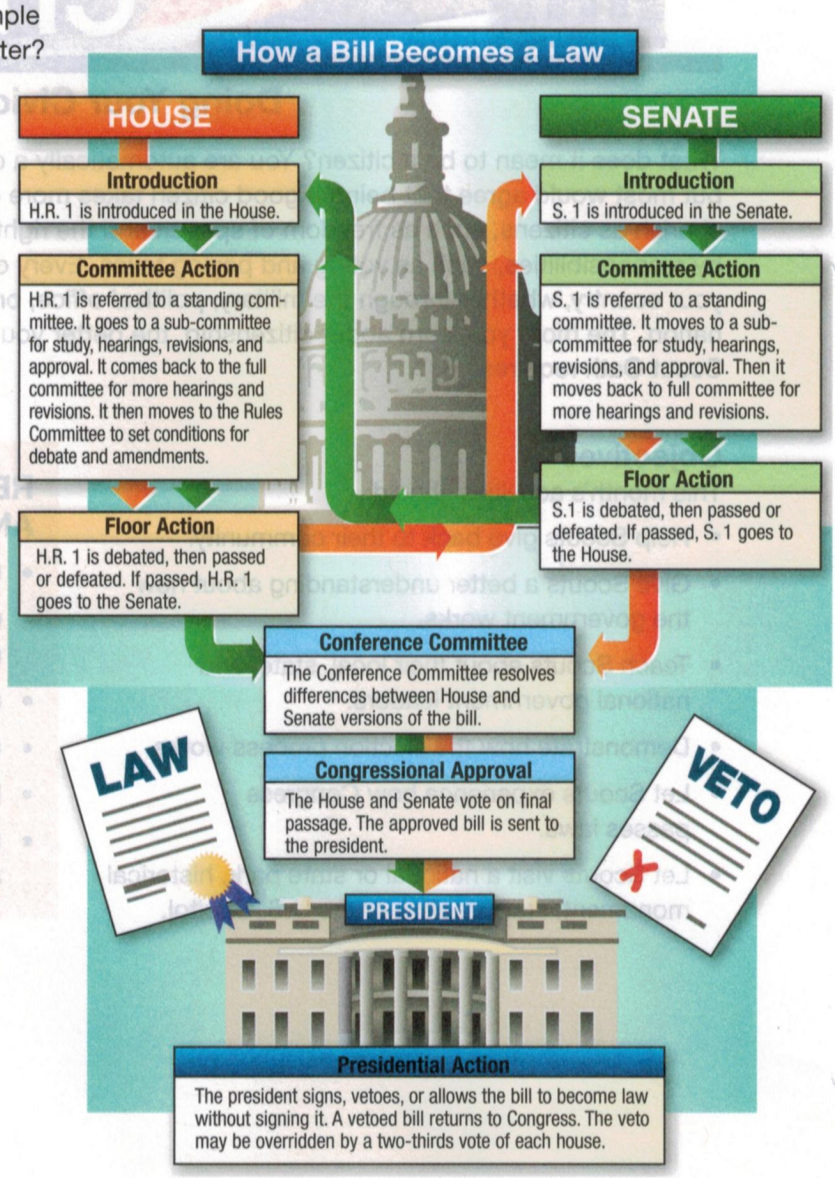
CITIZENSHIP BASICS

Branches of Government

The United States government has three branches. The legislative branch, which includes the Senate and House of Representatives, makes the laws. The executive branch, which includes the president, the cabinet, and various departments and agencies, is charged with enforcing and administering laws. The judicial branch, which includes the courts (the most significant of which is the Supreme Court), interprets and applies the laws. These three branches work together to make the government function properly.

PARENTS CAN HELP WITH THE CITIZENSHIP PROGRAM FEATURE BY:

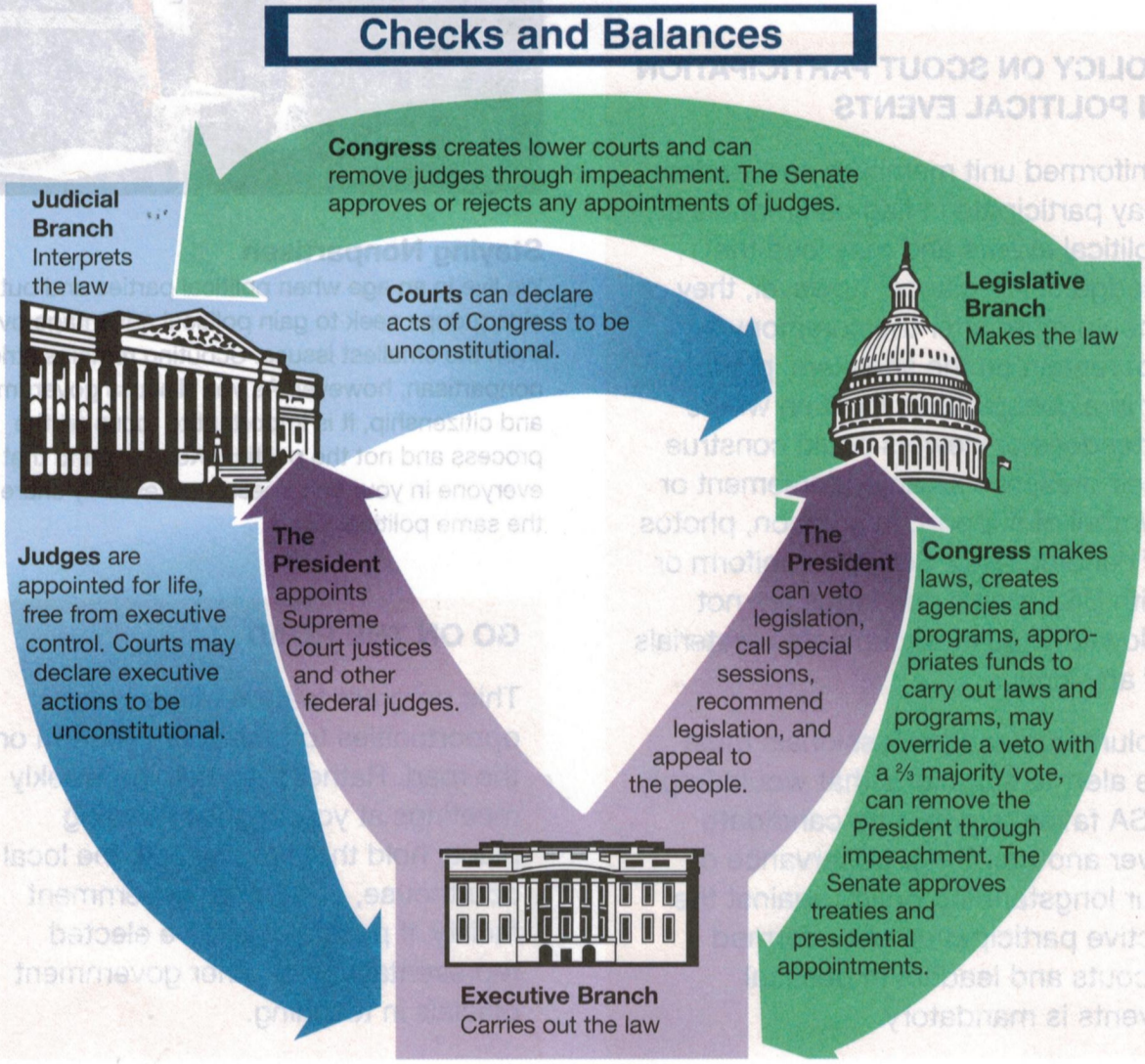
1. Arranging visits to government offices or meetings with government officials
2. Providing transportation for activities
3. Talking about how and why they vote
4. Teaching about various levels of government
5. Giving a firsthand account of major court cases that have affected their lives
6. Helping organize and lead the games



State and local governments—and even nonprofit organizations—often use a similar three-branch structure for their own governance.

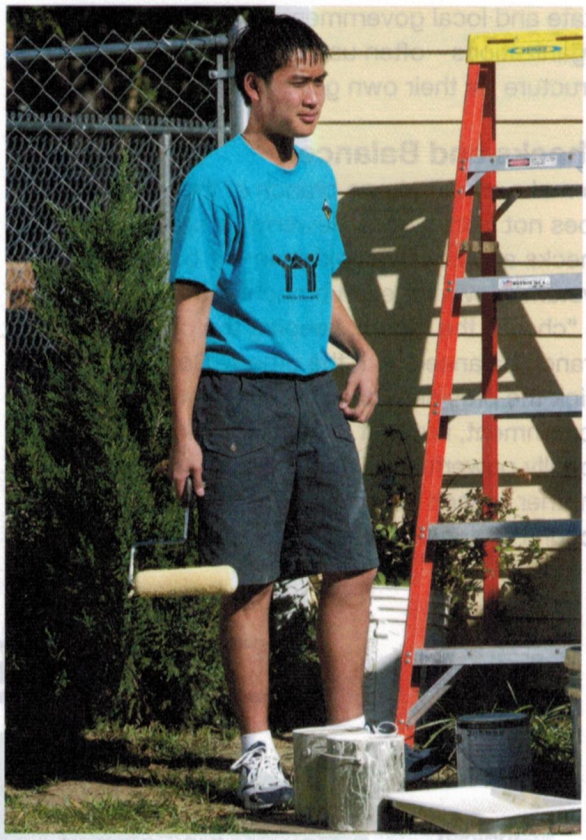
Checks and Balances

To make sure that one branch of the government does not become too powerful, a system of checks and balances exists in our country. This system allows for each branch of the government to "check" the others, keeping the power of each branch balanced with the others. Some people think the president has the most power in the government, but that is not true. Each branch is equally powerful and can call for a "check" on another branch at any time if it considers the actions of another branch unconstitutional.



Community Service

Community service is a selfless act that benefits the people or area around you, and it is a key part of the Scouting program. Various advancement requirements involve doing community service, giving back to an organization, or completing a project for your neighborhood. Think about all of the community service hours you have completed thus far in your Scouting career—you probably have a lot! Community service shows that you care about others and are willing to help. Giving back and taking care of your community is part of being a good citizen. Don't take for granted the democracy and freedoms we have in this country—community service is an effective way to show appreciation for the gifts of citizenship, freedom, and democracy we all enjoy as Americans.



POLICY ON SCOUT PARTICIPATION IN POLITICAL EVENTS

Uniformed unit members and leaders may participate in flag ceremonies at political events and may lead the Pledge of Allegiance; however, they should retire after the ceremony and not remain on the speakers' platform or in a conspicuous location where attendees or viewers could construe their presence as an endorsement or symbol of support. In addition, photos of candidates or Scouts in uniform or with BSA marks and logos are not allowed in political campaign materials of any kind.

Volunteers and professionals must be alert to situations that would imply BSA favoritism for one candidate over another. Strict observance of our longstanding policy against the active participation of uniformed Scouts and leaders in political events is mandatory.

Staying Nonpartisan

We live in an age when political parties and outside groups seek to gain political advantage over even the smallest issues. Scouting remains strictly nonpartisan, however. As you discuss government and citizenship, it is important to focus on the process and not the politics. Keep in mind that everyone in your unit doesn't necessarily share the same political views.

GO ON THE ROAD

This program feature offers great opportunities to take your program on the road. Rather than holding weekly meetings at your regular meeting place, hold them at city hall, the local courthouse, or another government facility. If possible, involve elected representatives or other government officials in teaching.

CITIZENSHIP GAMES

Mock Election

Equipment: Poster board and craft supplies (optional), paper for ballots, a ballot box, pens for voting

Method: Each team selects one member to run for president of the made-up land or country of your choosing (e.g., Candy Land, Country of Sandwich). Each candidate can make a quick campaign poster to display while they present a one-minute speech about the issues on which they are running. Everyone is given a ballot and selects the candidate who they think would best represent the land or country. Each team takes a turn to place their votes in the ballot box. After all of the votes have been cast, count up the ballots, and announce the newly elected president.

Scoring: The candidate with the most votes wins the presidency.

Notes: Review the Electoral College and point out the differences between the popular vote, which was exhibited in the game, and the Electoral College.

Guess the President

Equipment: Facts about famous U.S. presidents

Method: The teams assemble in different corners and are informed that they will be visited by a famous president shortly. They must try to figure out his identity by asking him questions. The famous visitor can answer only with yes or no. The game leader assigns a presidential identity to each team leader (e.g., George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Teddy Roosevelt, Abraham Lincoln). The team leaders go to their corners, and the teams begin questioning.

Scoring: The first team to identify its visitor correctly receives 1 point. After a set number of rounds, the team with the most points wins.

Bill to Law

Equipment: Poster showing the steps a bill takes to become a law (optional), paper and pens (to record ideas for new law)

Method: Divide into two teams (to represent the two houses of a bicameral legislature). Have each team create a new law for an imaginary country, making sure they follow the bill-to-law process for their respective chamber. After the team passes its new law, teams should trade laws, and try to pass each bill again. Once a bill has been approved by both teams, it is sent to the designated leader (president) for approval or veto.

Scoring: No scoring for this activity.

Notes: Explain the bill-to-law process (with a poster or other visual aid) before you start the activity. Have assistant leaders help each team go through the steps of the bill-to-law process.

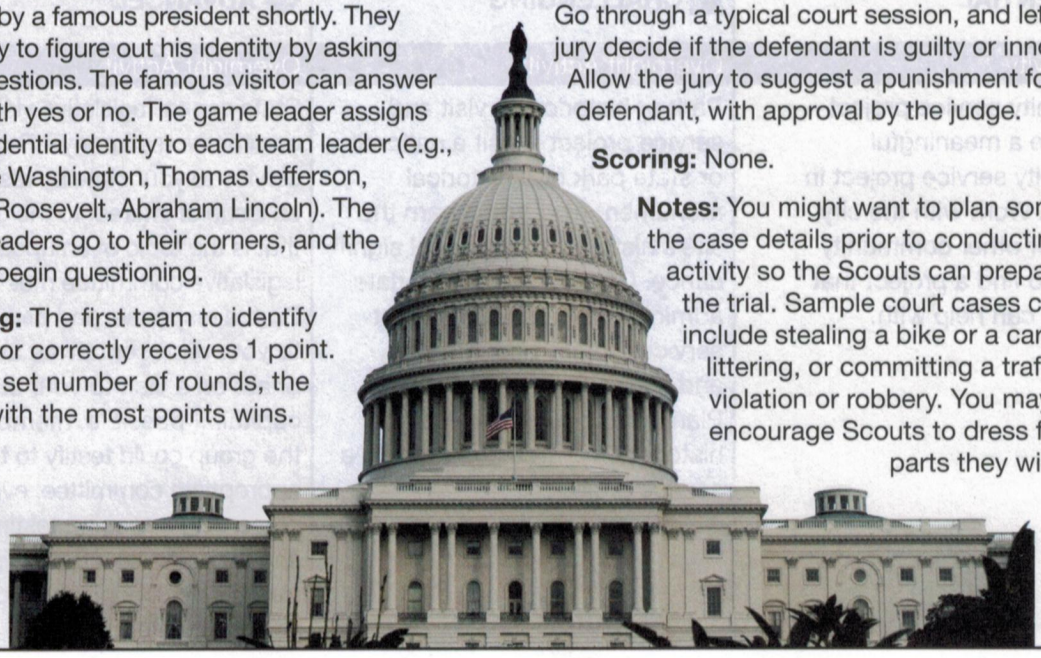
Mock Court Case

Equipment: Tables for the judge, prosecution, defense, witnesses, and jury; gavel (or an effective substitute) for the judge

Method: Decide on a judge, two lawyers, a defendant, a few witnesses, and a jury for the court case. All other Scouts will be observers in the courtroom, or you can take them to another room to conduct a second court case simulation. Go through a typical court session, and let the jury decide if the defendant is guilty or innocent. Allow the jury to suggest a punishment for the defendant, with approval by the judge.

Scoring: None.

Notes: You might want to plan some of the case details prior to conducting this activity so the Scouts can prepare for the trial. Sample court cases could include stealing a bike or a car, littering, or committing a traffic violation or robbery. You may encourage Scouts to dress for the parts they will play.



E.D.G.E. Ideas

***E**xplain* how it is done—Tell them.
***D**emonstrate* the steps—Show them.
***G**uide* learners as they practice—Watch them do it.
***E**nable* them to succeed on their own—Have them practice/teach it.

EXPLAIN

- Explain why we need the government.
- Describe the election process.
- Teach how bills become laws.
- Compare and contrast forms of government from the city to the federal level.

DEMONSTRATE

- Demonstrate how voting takes place.
- Tour a government facility.
- Use visual guides to demonstrate the bill-to-law process.
- Show a video explaining how the Electoral College works.

GUIDE

- Guide Scouts through a mock election.
- Help Scouts look up the names of their elected representatives.
- Have Scouts brainstorm ideas for community service projects.
- Plan a debate on an issue facing your community or the country.

ENABLE

- Enable the Scouts to hold a unit election.
- Empower the Scouts to plan and conduct a meaningful service project for the community.
- Allow Scouts to enact new "laws" for your unit.
- Have Scouts teach a Webelos den what they've learned.

MAIN EVENT SUMMARIES

ESSENTIAL	CHALLENGING	ADVANCED
Day Activity	Overnight Activity	Overnight Activity
Community service project—Complete a meaningful community service project in your city. Work with the city, county, or other community leaders to find a project that your unit can help with.	Park or historic site visit and service project—Visit a national or state park or a historical monument near you. Learn the site's history and historical significance. Contact the appropriate administrator to inquire about service project opportunities, and then carry out that service. Plan a campout to explore the history of the area and provide a service project.	State capital legislative visit and committee testimony—Provide service to your state by researching an issue of interest to the group that is the topic of an upcoming legislative committee meeting. Draft a response, and present it to your representatives as appropriate on a visit to your state capital. If possible, members of the group could testify to the appropriate committee, even presenting opposing testimony should opinions differ. If significant travel is required, plan on camping as appropriate.

CITIZENSHIP

Meeting Plan: Government and the Rights of Citizens

Week 1 Date_____

ACTIVITY	DESCRIPTION	RUN BY	TIME*
Preopening 15 minutes before meeting	If you have Internet access at your meeting place, encourage Scouts who arrive early to view videos of U.S. presidents. Use sites such as: • http://www.havefunwithhistory.com/HistorySubjects/AmericanPresidents.html		6:45 p.m.
Opening Ceremony 10 minutes	Flag presentation Oath and Law Uniform inspection		7 p.m.
Group Instruction 10 minutes	• Present the three branches of government and how they work. • Discuss the rights of every U.S. citizen.		7:10 p.m.
Skills Instruction 30 minutes	• Discuss how the U.S. government works (including the three branches of government) and how that compares with your local government. • Use the Internet or other resources to learn about your federal representatives.		7:20 p.m.
	• Discuss the structures of your city, county, and state governments and how they work together. • Using the Internet or other resources, learn about your state and local representatives.		
	• Discuss the structures of government from the city level to the national level. • Using the Internet or other resources, learn about your local, state, and federal representatives.		
Breakout Groups 15 minutes	• Review the election process. • Decide who from your group will run for president in a mock election. • Make a poster, and develop a slogan for your candidate's speech.		7:50 p.m.
Game 20 minutes	Hold a mock election (described earlier).		8:05 p.m.
Closing 5 minutes	Announcements Leader's minute Closing		8:25 p.m.
	Total 90 minutes of meeting		
After the Meeting 15 minutes	Leadership team reviews plans for the next meeting and for the main event.		

*All times are suggested.

CITIZENSHIP

Meeting Plan: Roles and Responsibilities of Citizens

Week 2 Date_____

ACTIVITY	DESCRIPTION	RUN BY	TIME*
Preopening 15 minutes before meeting	Have a merit badge counselor on hand to help Scouts with the Citizenship in the Community, Citizenship in the Nation, and Citizenship in the World merit badges.		6:45 p.m.
Opening Ceremony 10 minutes	Flag presentation Oath and Law Uniform inspection		7 p.m.
Group Instruction 5 minutes	Present and lead a group discussion on responsibilities of citizens, including: • Supporting and defending the Constitution • Staying informed on issues • Respecting and obeying laws		7:10 p.m.
Skills Instruction 45 minutes	Discuss the responsibility of actively participating in the community and how individuals can carry out this responsibility.		7:15 p.m.
	Discuss the importance of voting and participating in the democratic process.		
	Discuss the responsibility of paying income and other taxes honestly and on time, and learn how taxes are filed.		
Breakout Groups 15 minutes	• Begin planning participation in the main event. • Work on advancement requirements as needed.		8 p.m.
Game 10 minutes	Play Guess the President (described earlier).		8:15 p.m.
Closing 5 minutes	Announcements Leader's minute Closing		8:25 p.m.
Total 90 minutes of meeting			
After the Meeting 15 minutes	Leadership team reviews plans for the next meeting and for the main event.		

*All times are suggested.

CITIZENSHIP

Meeting Plan: The Forming and Enforcement of Laws

Week 3 Date_____

ACTIVITY	DESCRIPTION	RUN BY	TIME*
Preopening 15 minutes before meeting	Find a printable U.S. Constitution quiz online, and print copies. Challenge Scouts to complete it before the meeting starts. Award prizes to those who do the best.		6:45 p.m.
Opening Ceremony 10 minutes	Flag presentation Oath and Law Uniform inspection		7 p.m.
Group Instruction 10 minutes	• Review how Congress creates laws. • Discuss the roles of the executive and judicial branches in terms of the laws Congress creates.		7:10 p.m.
Skills Instruction 20 minutes	Discuss some laws that are specific to your city.		7:20 p.m.
	• Discuss law enforcement and how laws are enforced. • Learn how people accused of crimes are taken into the justice system.		
	• Explain the bill-to-law process by using diagrams, videos, etc. • Talk about some recent laws that have been passed by Congress. • Review the Bill of Rights (the first 10 amendments to the Constitution).		
Breakout Groups 15 minutes	• Discuss some amendments that you think should be added to or taken away from the U.S. Constitution, and explain why. • Pick the one you think is most important, and explain why.		7:40 p.m.
Game 30 minutes	Play Bill to Law (described earlier).		7:55 p.m.
Closing 5 minutes	Announcements Leader's minute Closing		8:25 p.m.
	Total 90 minutes of meeting		
After the Meeting 15 minutes	Leadership team reviews plans for the next meeting and for the main event.		

*All times are suggested.

CITIZENSHIP

Meeting Plan: Citizens and the Courts

Week 4 Date_____

ACTIVITY	DESCRIPTION	RUN BY	TIME*
Preopening 15 minutes before meeting	Have copies of the U.S. Constitution on hand. Encourage Scouts who arrive early to read the Preamble and find the six functions of government listed there. Discuss how these functions affect families and communities.		6:45 p.m.
Opening Ceremony 10 minutes	Flag presentation Oath and Law Uniform inspection		7 p.m.
Group Instruction 10 minutes	• Learn the differences between the federal and state courts, and how they interact. • Discuss the roles of the prosecution, defense counsel, judge, and jury. Explore other professions in the courtroom.		7:10 p.m.
Skills Instruction 30 minutes	• Explain and discuss the differences between criminal and civil trials. • Discuss the benefits afforded by the U.S. courts, such as fair and speedy trials and the presumption of innocence.		7:20 p.m.
	• Explain and discuss how the Supreme Court checks the power of the other branches. • Research and review major court cases decided on by the Supreme Court.		
	• Review some of the most controversial court cases of the Supreme Court, such as Dred Scott, Brown v. the Board of Education, Miranda v. Arizona, and others. • Debate whether the court made the right ruling.		
Breakout Groups 10 minutes	• Talk about the ways Supreme Court cases affect your life today. • Finalize plans for participation in the main event.		7:50 p.m.
Game 25 minutes	Hold a mock court case (described earlier).		8:00 p.m.
Closing 5 minutes	Announcements Leader's minute Closing		8:25 p.m.
	Total 90 minutes of meeting		
After the Meeting 15 minutes	Leadership team reviews plans for the next meeting and for the main event.		

*All times are suggested.

CITIZENSHIP

Main Event: Community Service Project

Date_____

Logistics

Location: _____

_____

Departure time: _____

Return time: _____

Duration of activity: 4–6 hours

Budget: Completed _____ Approved _____

Camping: Duty roster_____ Menu _____

Transportation: Group _____ Self_____

Tour and activity plan: Completed_____ Submitted _____

Essential (Tier I)

Complete a meaningful community service project in your city. Work with city, county, or other community leaders to find a project with which you can provide help.

Equipment List	• Appropriate tools and supplies to complete the project • Lunch (determine whether group or individual) • Water • Scout Basic Essentials (Review the list and take what you need.)
Activity	• Contact community leaders to determine available service projects. • Determine a time and place to transport to the location. • Complete the task as assigned. • Break for lunch. • Clean up appropriately. • Follow up with community leader to make sure the project was completed acceptably.
Safety	• Assign tools to appropriate age groups. • Use gloves, safety glasses, and ear protection as appropriate. • Follow BSA guidelines for service projects, tool use, and work at elevations or excavations. • Have a cell phone available for emergencies.

Notes

CITIZENSHIP

Main Event: Park or Historic Site Visit and Service Project

Date_____

Logistics

Location: _____

_____

Departure time: _____

Return time: _____

Duration of activity: 6–8 hours

Budget: Completed _____ Approved _____

Camping: Duty roster_____ Menu _____

Transportation: Group _____ Self_____

Tour and activity plan: Completed_____ Submitted _____

Challenging (Tier II)

Visit a national or state park or a historical monument near you. Learn the site's history and historical significance. Contact the appropriate administrator to inquire about service ideas, then carry out that service. Consider incorporating a campout to explore the history of the area.

Equipment List	• Appropriate tools and supplies to complete the project • Food • Water • Scout Basic Essentials (Review the list and take what you need.)
Activity	• Have unit decide what national or state park or historical monument will be visited and whether to incorporate camping. • Call the location, and determine availability for tours and/or camping. • Schedule a long day trip or a weekend trip, depending on location and how far it is from the majority of the Scouts. • Tour the park or site. • Complete a service project.
Safety	• Follow safe camping practices. • Use the buddy system. • Assign tools to appropriate age groups. • Use gloves, safety glasses, and ear protection as appropriate. • Follow BSA guidelines for service projects, tool use, and work at elevations or excavations. • Have a cell phone available for emergencies.

Notes

CITIZENSHIP

Main Event: State Capital Legislative Visit and Committee Testimony

Date_____

Logistics

Location: _____

_____

Departure time: _____

Return time: _____

Duration of activity: Overnight

Budget: Completed _____ Approved _____

Camping: Duty roster_____ Menu _____

Transportation: Group _____ Self_____

Tour and activity plan: Completed_____ Submitted _____

Advanced (Tier III)

Provide service to your state by researching an issue of interest to the group that is the topic of an upcoming legislative committee meeting. Draft a response, and present it to your representative as appropriate on a visit to your state capital. If possible, members of the group could testify to the appropriate committee, even presenting opposing testimony should opinions differ. If significant travel is required, plan on camping as appropriate.

Equipment List

- A predetermined opinion on a legislative issue
- Official uniforms for visit
- Camping equipment
- Food
- Water
- Scout Basic Essentials (Review the list and take what you need.)

Activity

- Determine a legislative issue of interest.
- Draft an opinion that can be presented to lawmakers.
- Visit your state capital.
- Arrange a tour of the Capitol and a meeting with your representative.
- Testify to a committee if appropriate.
- If significant travel is required, plan on camping as appropriate.

Safety

- Avoid inappropriate behaviors while in the Capitol.
- Follow safe camping practices.
- Use the buddy system.
- Have a cell phone available for emergencies.

Notes

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National Park Service
Website: http://www.nps.gov/index.htm

U.S. Government Portal
Website: http://www.usa.gov

U.S. House of Representatives
Website: http://www.house.gov

U.S. Senate
Website: http://www.senate.gov

U.S. Supreme Court
Website: http://www.supremecourt.gov

White House
Website: http://www.whitehouse.gov

Related Program Features

Camping, Duty to God, Ethics, Living History, and Mentoring

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