

Lesson 6

Local Elections



GUIDING QUESTIONS

- 1 **How are municipal council members or electoral area directors chosen?**
- 2 **How do voters decide who to vote for?**
- 3 **Which candidate(s) do I support and why?**

OVERVIEW

Elections are contests of leadership, ideas, politics and power, where interested individuals campaign for your support and ultimately your vote.

In this lesson, students will learn about local government elections in British Columbia and the different election races in their community. Students will engage in the inquiry process to investigate factors when making their voting decision and to guide their research into the candidates. Afterwards, students share their candidate research with the rest of the class for analysis. In the *Consolidation* activity, students reflect on the research process and what is most important to them when making their decision.

LEARNING INTENTIONS

We are learning to:

- explain the process for local government elections;
- explore different ways to research and compare the candidates;
- develop an investigation plan to research the candidates running for election;
- compare and contrast the candidates and their viewpoints.

Tips for Teachers

- Please use the activities and combine them in a way that is appropriate for your class.

Supplies/Needs

- Slide Deck 6
- Access or copies of 6.1
- Online templates for all activities and any videos and slide decks are available on the project website

Starter

1. Introduce the upcoming local elections and the Student Vote program.
 - Local elections in British Columbia are held every four years on the third Saturday in October.
 - The next general local election will be held on Saturday October 15, 2022.
 - Throughout the province, voters will elect individuals to sit on their municipal council or regional district board, as well as their board of education (Lesson 7).
 - Elementary and high school students will also have an opportunity to learn about the election process and practice voting through a program called Student Vote.
2. Watch the "Student Vote Vancouver" video to hear students and teachers speak about their experience with the program for the 2018 local elections.
3. As a class, co-create a list of learning goals (knowledge and skills) that students want to achieve by the time they cast their Student Vote ballot. Keep this list posted in the classroom for the duration of the program.

Activities

1. Through a 'Placemat' activity, have students answer the question: What qualities or skills should an elected representative have?

This cooperative learning strategy allows students to think about, record, share their ideas in groups and then reach a consensus.

- a) You can provide each group with one large sheet of paper divided into sections (one for each student and a centre block for the final group list).
- b) Ask students to respond to the question within their allotted space. Provide time for each student to share their recorded responses with the rest of their group without discussion or debate from the other students.

- c) Next, have each group decide, collectively, on the five most important qualities and record them in the centre of the placemat — it is essential that all group members agree on the top five items.
 - d) Ask groups to decide, collectively, on the five most important/significant qualities and record them in the centre of the placemat — it is important that all group members agree on the top five qualities and skills.
 - e) Have each group's share their top five with the rest of the class.
2. Review the process for local government elections in British Columbia. You can use Slide Deck 6 as a starting point and add specific information about the election races where you live (the name and number of positions).

TEACHER NOTE

With the exception of Lake Country, councillors and mayors are elected at-large, by all voters in the municipality.

3. Find out which candidates are running for election in your area. Show students where they can find this information by visiting your local government's website.
4. On a blackboard or whiteboard, write down the following question: How should we decide who to vote for?

Through a class discussion, generate questions to frame this decision. For example:

- Why do they want to be on council?
- Would they make a good leader or council member?
- What issues in our community matter to me? Do they matter to the candidates?
- What ideas or goals do the candidates have for our community?

5. Divide students into pairs or small groups to research the candidates running for election.

Co-create an investigation plan or checklist for developing a candidate profile and determine how the information will be presented (e.g., poster, slide deck, video, mock Instagram profile).

Sample research profile:

- Name and photo
- Reason for running (Why do they want the job?)
- Personal information (e.g., education, career, accomplishments)
- Priorities (What issues are most important to the candidate?)
- Goals (What do they want to achieve?)

Review different ways that you can collect information about the candidates (e.g., candidate websites and social media pages, web searches, news media, candidate debates or town halls, discussion with family and friends). Tell students they can even contact the candidates directly and ask them what they want to know.

TEACHER NOTE

If your municipality has election slates, consider focusing on the mayoral candidates and party platforms to reduce the amount of work.

6. Have each group share their candidate profile with the rest of the class through a presentation or Gallery Walk. Students can make notes on all the candidates using Activity 6.1.

Consolidation

Have a brief closing discussion about the candidates and the process of becoming an informed voter, or ask students to write a reflection on one or more of the following questions:

- Do you feel ready to vote? How did your research help you decide who you might vote for?
- Which factors do you think are most important when deciding who you will vote for?
- What else do you want to know about the candidates or the election process?

Extended Learning

You can also consider inviting candidates to visit your class/school or organizing a candidates' debate (Handout 6.2). Alternatively, you can use the candidate's website or news reports to find the answers or analyze how the candidate may respond to the questions. You can assign each group a candidate and have them share their research and responses with the rest of the class.

ASSESSMENT OPPORTUNITIES

LESSON SECTION	GUIDING QUESTIONS FOR TEACHERS
Starter	Can students generate learning goals for the Student Vote program?
Activities	<p>Can students generate a list of qualities or skills they would like to see in their elected representative? Can students collectively agree on the top skills/qualities?</p> <p>Can students identify different considerations when deciding for whom to vote?</p> <p>Can students identify what is important to them or their community and help them narrow their research?</p> <p>Can students design a research plan that supports their inquiry? Can they identify trustworthy sources of information?</p> <p>Are students presenting information that is accurate and informative?</p> <p>Can students assess their learning and what they might do differently in the future?</p>
Consolidation	<p>Do students recognize that research can make it easier to reach a decision?</p> <p>Do students understand different considerations when making voting decisions?</p> <p>Do they feel more prepared to vote in the future?</p>

ADAPTATIONS AND SUPPORTS

Individual Education Plans	<p>Modifications</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review the concept of elected representatives using other CIVIX video resources ("Elected Representatives" and/or "Levels of Government"). Provide access to key terms in advance. Use ability grouping to support students. <p>Enrichment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students can enhance their understanding by comparing local elections to provincial or federal elections. Encourage them to take note of similarities and differences. Alternatively, they could compare local elections to those in other countries.
Language Learners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allow students to compare electoral systems and especially municipal leadership positions to their home region and in their primary language. Provide access to key terms in advance.
Culturally Responsive Pedagogy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Analyze the diversity of the candidates running in your municipality and discuss the need for diversity in politics. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local government in Metro Vancouver is 90% white — but it doesn't have to stay that way: https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/metro-vancouver-diversity-solutions-2020-1.5620528 Women in Politics: https://www.cbc.ca/news2/interactives/women-politics/ Refugees in Politics: https://www.vicnews.com/news/canada-declares-victoria-councillor-a-noteworthy-historical-figure/
Accessibility & Accommodations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The 'Placemat' activity for the <i>Starter</i> activity can be conducted using the Google Doc available online or using a 'Think-Pair-Share' strategy. If working in pairs or small groups is not possible, considering using Google Docs for collaborative discussion/brainstorming. Provide mobility accommodations for any activities that require movement. Coordinate virtual Q&A sessions with the candidates in place of in-person candidate debates.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION FOR TEACHERS

General local elections in British Columbia are held every four years on the third Saturday in October. The next general local elections will be held on Saturday, October 15, 2022. British Columbians will elect their municipal council members, or if they live in an unincorporated area, they will elect their electoral area director, as well as other positions such as Park Board representatives and Island Trust trustees. (The Islands Trust is a federated body responsible for protecting the unique nature and amenities of 13 major islands and more than 450 smaller islands and the surrounding waters in the southern Strait of Georgia and Howe Sound.)

An individual who seeks public office or competes for the job of elected representative is called a **candidate**. It is their job to share their goals, ideas and commitment to the job in order to win the support of voters during a campaign.

In some of the larger municipalities in the province, such as Vancouver,

Surrey and Richmond, candidates may belong to a political party or election slate. A **political party** is a group of like-minded individuals with a shared vision and similar political beliefs whose intention is to achieve power through an election and create meaningful political change. An **election slate** is a group of candidates that run in multi-seat elections on a common platform.

British Columbia municipalities use a system called **First-Past-The-Post** (FPTP). A successful candidate must receive the most votes in order to be elected. In a mayoral race, only a single candidate wins because there is only one position. Whereas, in a multi-member race, where five councillors are elected **at large**, it is the five candidates with the most votes that win a seat on council.

Across all municipalities, there may be ten or more candidates running for a position on council, depending on the race.

Conversely, a candidate is elected by **acclamation** if they have no opponents, or if the number of candidates match the number of council members to be elected. In that case, no vote is held for that race.

To become a candidate in a local government election in British Columbia, you must be 18 years of age or older on general voting day; be a Canadian citizen, have been a resident of British Columbia for at least six months prior to filing nomination documents; and, not be disqualified under the *Local Government Act* or any other enactment from being nominated for, being elected to or holding office, or be otherwise disqualified by law.

There are many ways to gather information about the election candidates. Community groups hold town hall meetings or all-candidate debates where citizens are invited to listen to candidates speak on the issues and ask them questions. Information can also be found on radio and television, media websites or in newspapers and local magazines. Individuals may also visit campaign offices, attend campaign events or have a chance to talk to candidates when they visit homes during door to door canvassing. Information may also be accessible online through candidate websites and social media pages.