

# Lesson 2

## Levels of Government



### GUIDING QUESTIONS

- 1 What is a representative democracy?
- 1 How is government structured in Canada?
- 1 How do the different levels of government affect me?

### OVERVIEW

Canada has different levels of government; each with its own elected representatives and areas of responsibility. The federal government is the only one that affects everyone in Canada.

In this lesson, students compare the different levels of government, including leadership roles, elected officials and division of responsibilities. Afterwards, students create a digital presentation where they identify government services or areas of responsibility and explain how they affect their lives using pictures or media and captions.

### LEARNING OUTCOMES

By the end of the lesson, students can:

- describe our government system in Canada;
- understand that governments are made up of elected representatives;
- distinguish between the levels of government; and,
- identify government responsibilities and explain how they relate to or directly affect their lives.

## Starter

1. Watch the "CIVIX Explains: Elected Representatives" video to review the idea of a representative democracy and the role of elected officials.
2. Review the levels of government in Canada (federal / provincial or territorial / municipal / First Nations, Métis and Inuit) and explain the basic idea that each level has its own elected representatives and is responsible for different issues.
3. Discuss as a class:
  - Why is it important to know which level of government is responsible for what?
  - Why is it important to know who our elected representatives are?

## Activities

1. Divide students into pairs and distribute Activity 2.1. Have them work together to fill in what they already know about the levels of government in Canada.
2. Review the structure of government in Canada using the "Levels of Government" video, Slide Deck 2 and/or Handout 2.2.
  - What kind of government do we have in Canada?
  - What is the title given to the elected representative at each level?
  - What is the title given to the leader at each level? How are they chosen?
  - How are issues or responsibilities divided among the levels of government?
3. Afterwards, have students continue to work in pairs to complete Activity 2.1. Alternatively, students could

create a slide deck with the same information and add images or graphics.

4. Ask students to create a digital presentation (slides) where they identify three government services or areas of responsibility for each level of government that relate to their lives (Activity 2.3). Ask students to take photos or search online to find relevant pictures to represent the area of responsibility. Students could also find a current article or social media post that shows how the issue is affecting their life.

## ALTERNATIVE METHOD

Create a class bulletin board where students can contribute by attaching photos, news articles, sticky notes and other related content for each level of government.

## Consolidation

After the lesson activities, ask students to answer the following prompt on Activity 2.4:

- What is the most significant learning/application for you today?
- What takeaways will be important to know five years from now? Why?

## Extended Learning

Ask students to pick an issue that matters to them and analyze how the government could take action to improve the conditions. Students should advocate for government action through a method of their own choosing. This could include writing a letter or email to the minister(s) in charge of their related issue or the elected representative at the appropriate level(s), producing a rant, pitch slide deck or multi-media artwork.

## ADAPTATIONS AND SUPPORTS

<b>Language Learners</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide students with terms and definitions in advance (e.g., elected representative, government, federal, provincial, territorial, municipal, First Nations, Métis and Inuit, prime minister, premier, MP, MLA).</li> <li>• Share the lesson videos before class discussions and activities ("CIVIX Explains: Elected Representatives" and "Levels of Government").</li> <li>• Ensure that subtitles are on during videos.</li> <li>• Provide examples or photos for each area of responsibility.</li> </ul>
<b>Culturally Responsive Pedagogy</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support students in sharing relevant examples from their life by being aware of possible stress and trauma that this could evoke.</li> <li>• Review the demographic data of one or more elected bodies and discuss the need for more diversity in politics.</li> <li>• Review the governance structure of an Indigenous community you know about.</li> </ul>
<b>Accommodations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If working in pairs or small groups in the classroom is not possible, consider using Google Docs for collaborative activities and discussion.</li> </ul>

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION FOR TEACHERS

Canada is a federal state, parliamentary democracy and constitutional monarchy.

A **federal state** brings together a number of different political communities with a central government (federal) for general purposes and separate local governments (provincial/territorial) for local purposes.

The division of powers is based on the idea that the level of government closest to the issue governs it. The distribution of responsibilities is found in Sections 91-95 of the *Constitution Act, 1867*.

The **federal government** takes responsibility for the whole country and matters of national concern, such as the armed forces, international relations and trade, currency, fisheries and oceans, criminal law and public safety.

**Provincial and territorial governments** are responsible for their own province or territory and issues such as education, health care delivery, social welfare, transportation and highways.

**Municipal and local governments** receive their powers from their respective provincial or territorial government. These governments handle local matters, such as garbage and recycling, public transit, local parks and recreation.

Some **First Nations, Inuit** and **Métis** communities have their own systems of governance. These councils or governments share certain responsibilities with the provincial/territorial or federal government.

For some issues, the different levels of government have to work together and share the responsibility.

For example, federal, provincial and municipal governments are concurrently responsible for the environment. The federal government enforces the *Canadian Environmental Protection Act* and regulates waterways used for fishing and shipping. Provincial governments regulate land use, mining, manufacturing and harmful emissions. Municipal governments are responsible for zoning, garbage disposal, and sewage and water treatment.

Each level of government has elected officials to represent the people (constituents) living in their designated areas (e.g., electoral districts/divisions, wards, municipalities at-large). **Elected representatives** are responsible for proposing, studying, debating and voting on bills (potential laws), and raising issues put forward by their constituents.

Representatives at the federal level are called **Members of Parliament** (MPs). Representatives at the provincial or territorial level are called Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs), Members of Provincial Parliament (MPPs), Members of the National Assembly (MNAs) or Members of the House of Assembly (MHAs), depending on the province or territory. The elected representative at the municipal level is usually called a councillor or alderman.

Most federal and provincial elected representatives belong to a **political party**. A political party is a group of like-minded individuals with a shared vision and political ideology whose intention is to achieve power and create meaningful political change. At the territorial level in Northwest Territories and Nunavut and in most municipalities, there are no political parties.

The leader of the federal government is called the **prime minister**, whereas premier is the title given to the leader of each provincial and territorial government. At both levels of government, the leader of the political party with the greatest number of elected representatives in the legislative body usually assumes the role of the leader of that government. Therefore, we do not vote for the position of premier or prime minister directly.

The leader of the municipal government is most often called a mayor, reeve or chairperson. The leader is elected directly by the people.

As a **constitutional monarchy**, Canada's head of state is a hereditary sovereign (queen or king) who reigns in accordance with the Constitution. The sovereign is represented in Canada by the **governor general**, who is appointed by the sovereign on the advice of the prime minister.

In each of the ten provinces, the sovereign is represented by a **lieutenant governor**, who is appointed by the governor general on the advice of the prime minister. Usually, the governor general and lieutenant governors serve five-year terms. There is no sovereign representative at the municipal/local or territorial level.

In Canada's three territories, territorial commissioners serve a similar role to a lieutenant governor. Commissioners do not represent the sovereign, however. They are appointed by and represent the federal government.