



Preparing to vote

ACTIVITY



60 minutes
approximately

At the heart of municipal life

This activity allows voters in training to learn more about the role of elected officials at the municipal level. Participants will also be asked to express their opinions and find arguments to defend their point of view.

OBJECTIVES

Understand the role of elected officials in the municipality

Developing and justifying your point of view

SUBJECTS

French
English
Culture and citizenship in Québec

MATERIAL REQUIRED

- ✓ Copies of the Voters in Training activity sheet

SUGGESTED STEPS

To get started

Ask participants if anyone close to them has ever been involved in municipal politics. What roles did or do these people play?

1. After reviewing the different roles with the entire group, divide participants into three teams.
2. Read out the following scenario:
The municipality recently acquired some land. The municipal council has been asked to redevelop the land in a way that will benefit citizens, especially by providing opportunities for sports and recreational activities. Two proposals have been put forward:
 1. one councillor wants to build a skateboard park for children and teens;
 2. a second councillor wants to build a peaceful haven where seniors, yoga enthusiasts and young families can enjoy a leisurely stroll.
3. Determine which team will:
 - argue in favour of proposal 1;
 - argue in favour of proposal 2;
 - represent the citizens of the municipality.
4. Ask the first two teams to come up with arguments in favour of their proposal. Ask the citizen team to reflect on the two proposals and come up with questions.
5. The debate should proceed as follows:
 - a. the first two teams will each have five minutes each to argue in favour of their proposal;
 - b. the citizen team will have five minutes to ask questions;
 - c. the first two teams will each have one minute to make a closing argument.
6. Have the citizen team vote on the proposals by a show of hands and see which one gets the most votes!

A BIT OF THEORY

Municipal politics play an important role in our democracy. Elected officials at this level are responsible for issues that are close to the community. In Québec, there are approximately 8,000 elected municipal officials who are responsible for the administration and development of 1,100 different municipalities.

The municipal council

During a general municipal election, each municipality must elect a mayor and councillors. Together, they form the municipal council. In municipalities with larger populations, the municipal council has more members. Once a month, municipal councils hold meetings that are generally open to the public. Council members are primarily responsible for ensuring that municipal services meet the needs of community members. In addition to road maintenance, fire services and garbage collection, municipal councils deal with various other matters that directly affect quality of life, such as:

- organizing community and recreational activities;
- building parks and playgrounds;
- providing access to affordable and safe social housing for families;
- improving the public transit network;
- promoting active transportation, including through the design of bicycle paths;
- holding public consultations on projects that promote the community's social and economic development.

Elected officials manage a municipality's affairs and the decisions they make determine its orientations and priorities.

The mayor

A municipality's mayor represents its entire population. He or she speaks on behalf of the municipality. The mayor chairs council meetings and works closely with other members of council (the municipal councillors). He or she is also responsible for referring matters to the municipality's director general. The mayor has a special responsibility to ensure that municipal revenue (property taxes) is collected and spent in accordance with the law. He or she remains involved in the decision-making process at council meetings, but is not required to vote.

Councillors

Municipal councillors are mainly responsible for listening to demands, grievances and suggestions from people who live in the area (often called an electoral district) they represent. They are expected to come up with solutions to the issues raised. In addition to attending council meetings and representing the interests of their constituents, councillors may provide input on specific issues. They vote on every proposal discussed at council meetings, helping decide on by-laws and resolutions. In some municipalities, the mayor can create an executive council, a sort of municipal Cabinet.

Citizens

People interested in becoming involved and learning more about issues that affect quality of life in their municipality can attend council meetings and public consultations. They can also volunteer with the municipality.

ACTIVITY SHEET

Now that you have a better understanding of the roles played by elected officials at the municipal level, you're ready to participate in a debate. Here is the scenario:

The municipality recently acquired some land. The municipal council has been asked to redevelop the land in a way that will benefit citizens, especially by providing opportunities for sports and recreational activities. Two proposals have been put forward:

- 1. one councillor wants to build a skateboard park for children and teens;*
- 2. a second councillor wants to build a peaceful haven where seniors, yoga enthusiasts and young families can enjoy a leisurely stroll.*

Depending on which team you're on, come up with valid arguments in favour of your proposal or ask questions that will help you form an opinion.

Proposal: _____

Questions and arguments:

Proposal: _____

Questions and arguments:



Did you know that citizens can participate in the democratic life of their municipality, including by asking questions at council meetings or by serving on an advisory committee? Visit your municipality's website or follow local media to find out about the issues!