

City of San José
Civics Masterclass
Curriculum Outline

Course Description

The City of San José’s Civics Masterclass is a broad, yet detailed course focused on providing and enabling the general public with the knowledge and skills to civically participate in local government.

Civic participation is the cornerstone of democracy and a key principle in ensuring that local government reflects the will of its people. The following is an introduction statement to the California Brown Act, California Government Code §54950:

“In enacting this chapter, the Legislature finds and declares that the public commissions, boards and councils and the other public agencies in this State exist to aid in the conduct of the people’s business. It is the intent of the law that their actions be taken openly and that their deliberations be conducted openly.

The people of this State do not yield their sovereignty to the agencies which serve them. The people, in delegating authority, do not give their public servants the right to decide what is good for the people to know and what is not good for them to know. The people insist on remaining informed so that they may retain control over the instruments they have created.”

FindLaw.com - California Code, Government Code - GOV § 54950
<https://codes.findlaw.com/ca/government-code/gov-sect-54950/>

This course is designed to assist people in remaining informed and understanding the many facets of local government. While this course will cover theoretical concepts in public administration, the San José’s Civics Masterclass is a guide for understanding how to monitor and participate in public meetings and policy making in the City of San José.

Participants will learn the following:

1. **Government 101:** Participants will be able to distinguish the differences in the structures and responsibilities of federal, state, and local government in the United States, i.e. the basics of public administration; and, participants will learn the difference between the city charter, ordinance code, resolutions, policies and procedures, and other city records.
2. **Parliamentary Procedure:** Participants will be able to facilitate democratic decision making in deliberative groups through the use of parliamentary procedure; and, participants will be able to navigate and participate in public meetings hosted by the City of San José City Council, Council Committees, and Boards and Commissions.

3. **California Brown Act and Sunshine Policies:** Participants will learn about the laws that govern the public process of policy and lawmaking; and how to research city legislative files and other city records.
4. **Policy Research and Policy:** Participants will be able to conduct open-source research and find independent evidence from government agencies, academic institutions, industry associations, and other sources.
5. **Storytelling:** Participants will learn the basic principles of storytelling, how to translate their Program/Policy ideas into a story that resonates with their intended audiences.

How You Can Use this Course:

1. **Group Study:**

The Civics Masterclass can be administered as a program at school, your organization, community or neighborhood group, etc. Through five (1) one-hour long workshops administered weekly over the course of 5 weeks or over the course of a week for 5 consecutive days. There are detailed videos, quizzes, and additional study materials as well as a suggested curriculum outline that is free to use.
2. **Individual Study:**

The entire course is open and free to the public, making it easy to study on your own.

COURSE ACCESS

You may access this course for FREE and online at the City of San José's website:
<https://bit.ly/SJCivics>

Course Description

Module 1: Government 101

Understand the differences in the structures and responsibilities of federal, state, and local government in the United States, including the specific governance structure of the City of San José.

Learning Objectives

1. United States Constitution
2. United States Government
3. California State Government
4. California Local Government
5. City of San Jose Government

Additional Videos

1. U.S. Government and Politics Crash Course
In 50 videos, Craig Benzine teaches you U.S. government and politics! The course is based on the 2014 AP U.S. Government and Politics curriculum.
<https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PL8dPuuaLjXtOfse2ncvffeelTrqvhrz8H&si=E7BxV82EgiC4gvta>
2. Democracy in the United States
Democracy in the United States is an 8- part presentation on how we can better exercise our democracy as citizens of the United States. Thomas Linzey, Senior Council for the Center for Democratic & Environmental Rights (CDER) presents a pathway forward and tells us what the problem is and how we can fix it.
<https://www.n2k.world/democracyintheunitedstates>

Resources:

1. United States Constitution
<https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/constitution-transcript>
2. United States Government Manual
For over eight decades, The United States Government Manual has been the "official handbook" of the Federal Government.
<https://www.usgovernmentmanual.gov/>
3. United States Government Organizational Chart
<https://www.usgovernmentmanual.gov/ReadLibraryItem.ashx?SFN=Myz95sTyO4rJR M/nhIRwSw==&SF=VHhnJrOeEAnGaa/rtk/JOg==>
4. California Constitution
<https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/codesTOCSelected.xhtml?tocCode=CONS&tocTitle=+California+Constitution++CONS>
5. City of San Jose City Charter
<https://www.sanjoseca.gov/your-government/appointees/city-clerk/city-charter>

6. City of San Jose Council Policy Manual
<https://www.sanjoseca.gov/your-government/appointees/city-clerk/council-policy-manual>

Module 2: Parliamentary Procedures

Understanding how the City uses Rules of Order to manage their public meetings, how the public can participate in public meetings, and how to use these rules to manage your own meetings.

Learning Objectives:

1. Background on Rules of Order
2. Overview of Robert's Rules of Order
3. Overview of Rosenberg's Rules of Order
4. Practicing Rosenberg's Rules

Additional Videos:

1. Democracy in the United States
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Resources:

1. United States Government Manual
For over eight decades, The United States Government Manual has been the "official handbook" of the Federal Government.
<https://www.usgovernmentmanual.gov/>

Module 3: The California Brown Act & Sunshine Polices

How to research and understand the differences between the City Charter, Ordinance Code, and other city policies, as well as how to search through legislative files to find public information related to your own policy research.

Learning Objectives:

1. California Public Records Act
2. Relationship with the Brown Act & Sunshine Policies
3. City Open Government and Records Ordinances
4. City Clerk's Records Responsibilities
5. Searching City Legislatives Files

Resources:

1. City of San José's Open Data Policy
<https://www.sanjoseca.gov/home/showpublisheddocument/2396/636631025332400000>
2. City of San José's Open Data Portal
<https://data.sanjoseca.gov/>

Module 4: Policy Research & Writing

How to conduct open-source internet research to find data, records, reports, peer benchmarking, best practices, and other information to help build a policy case.

Learning Objectives:

1. Understanding Open-Source Research
2. Government Research
3. Academic Research
4. Best Practice Research / Peer Benchmarking

Policy Memo Examples:

1. Strategic Deconstruction Policy:
<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1fDE1KT03L555pxsdeLSeTQrslivCNdoD/edit?usp=sharing&ouid=113734849637944316127&rtpof=true&sd=true>
2. Sustainable Architecture Memo:
https://docs.google.com/document/d/1o-tIolthZyVCDX3qr1E71vG29xEddx_A/edit
3. Wood Recycling Policy:
<https://docs.google.com/document/d/18tFoY1XedbsGd3p4E-hrBLWDGBV4AIZq/edit>

Resources:

3. The Ethics of Public Language
https://www.ca-ilg.org/sites/main/files/file_attachments/ethics_of_public_language.pdf?1412367191
4. Writing Tips for the Public Agency Writer
https://www.ca-ilg.org/sites/main/files/file_attachments/writing_tips_for_local_agency_writers_11-8_0.pdf?1412367191

Module 5: Storytelling: Participants will learn the basic principles of storytelling, how to translate their program/policy idea into a story that provide concise information that also resonates with their intended audiences.

Learning Objectives

1. What makes a good story, examining case studies
2. Tools and Resources available for storytelling
3. Create a storytelling plan
4. Presenting their story

Additional Videos:

1. Tutorial: How to give a public comment
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uJIndG8WGYg>
2. 7 Tips for Crafting Good Public Comments Podcast
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1T_62cYiUA4

Resources:

1. Regulations.gov - Commenter's Checklist (PDF):
<https://s3.amazonaws.com/prod-regulations-faq/pdf/Tips-For-Submitting-Effective-Comments.pdf>