

Section 2

Civic Participation

WHAT IS PUBLIC POLICY?

NGSSS Standards

SS.7.C.2.12 Develop a plan to resolve a state or local problem by researching public policy alternatives, identifying appropriate government agencies to address the issue, and determining a course of action.

SS.7.C.2.13 Examine multiple perspectives on public and current issues.

SS.7.C.2.14 Conduct a service project to further the public good.

Lesson Overview

In this lesson students will learn about public policy and its role in solving community problems. This activity will also allow students to differentiate between public policy and other non-policy means of addressing community problems.

Objectives

Students will be able to...

- Define public policy
- Differentiate between public policy and non-policy means of addressing community problems
- Develop solutions to community problems through public policy, service learning and/or community service

Time

50 minutes

Materials

- Handout A: What is Public Policy?
- Handout B: Public Policy v. Community Service
- Completed Linking the Problem handout

Lesson Preparation

- Complete *Linking the Problem* prior to this lesson (available in Section 2)
- Review the Center for Civic Education instructional page on public policy. A definition (also provided below) and scholar video are provided.
 - <http://www.civiced.org/pc-program/instructional-component/public-policy>

Lesson Procedures

Warm Up Distribute Handout A *What is Public Policy?* Have students work individually to provide a definition of *public* and *policy*. Students will then need to combine their definitions to create a definition for the term *public policy*. Discuss the definitions students proposed for the term public policy. Write group definitions on large chart paper/white board/smart board. As a class, establish a consensus on the class definition of “public policy” (definition provided below).

Public policy is what government (any public official who influences or determines public policy, including school officials, city council members, county supervisors, etc.) does or does not do about a problem that comes before them for consideration and possible action. Specifically, public policy has a number of key attributes:

- *Policy is made in response to some sort of issue or problem that requires attention. Policy is what the government chooses to do (actual) or not do (implied) about a particular issue or problem.*
- *Policy might take the form of law, or regulation, or the set of all the laws and regulations that govern a particular issue or problem.*
- *Policy is made on behalf of the "public."*
- *Policy is oriented toward a goal or desired state, such as the solution of a problem.*
- *Policy is ultimately made by governments, even if the ideas come from outside government or through the interaction of government and the public.*
- *Policymaking is part of an ongoing process that does not always have a clear beginning or end, since decisions about who will benefit from policies and who will bear any burden resulting from the policy are continually reassessed, revisited and revised.*

From <http://www.civiced.org/pc-program/instructional-component/public-policy>

Once a class definition is established, students should complete Handout B: Public Policy vs. Community Service either individually or in small groups. Students will also need their completed *Linking the Problem* to complete this handout. Students will list problems previously established in the *Linking the Problem* activity and create public policy and non-public policy solutions for each problem they list.

Lesson Extensions

Using the Public Policy column of the Public Policy vs. Community Service worksheet, have students work on their *Project Citizen public policy project where they will plan to resolve a state or local problem by researching public policy alternatives, identifying appropriate government agencies to address the issue, and determining a course of action.

Using the Community Service column of the Public Policy vs. Community Service worksheet, have students organize, publicize, and conduct one or more of the community service options suggested.

*For details on Project Citizen, please see the handout provided in Section 2 and/or contact Erin Watson at ewatson@flrea.org.

What is Public Policy?

How would you define:	Definition
Public	
Policy	
Public Policy	

Below are 5 scenarios from a community.

Your task: Decide with your group if each scenario involves public policy. Check the box marked “public policy” if the scenario does involve public policy. Check the box “community service” if the scenario does not involve public policy. Explain your answers.

	Public Policy	Community Service	Explanation
The problem is that there is a lot of trash behind your school. To solve this problem, you and your friends volunteer to pick up the trash.			
There have been a lot of problems at school with students texting test answers to one another. The principal has decided to ban student cell phones on campus.			
The local Elks Club is collecting items for the homeless and will be having an open house where people can come to get items such as food, clothing, and toiletries they can use. The Club will also be accepting donations so they can make purchases in the future for more items to give out in the community.			
The road at the local soccer complex has become worn down and unsafe – there are potholes, drop-offs, and there is no lighting. The city has decided to charge a fee to come into the complex in order to pay for the repairs to the road.			
There has been a high rate of bicycle accidents in your community. The local police department has decided to host free bicycle safety seminars at a local community center. The officers who conduct the trainings are being paid for their time.			

Policy vs. Community Service

In the **center** boxes below, write in the problems you identified on your *Linking the Problem* handout (one problem per box). Then, write a way you could solve your problem with **public policy** on the **left**. Write one way you could solve your problem through **community service** (without public policy) on the **right**.

Public Policy

Problem

(From "Linking the Problem" Worksheet)

Community
Service

Government provides vouchers for food and shelter.

Example: High rate of homelessness.

Concerned citizens give food to the homeless.

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What is Public Policy?

How would you define:	Definition
Public	Answers will vary. Discuss responses with students.
Policy	Answers will vary. Discuss responses with students.
Public Policy	Answers will vary. Discuss responses with students. <i>Public policy is what government (any public official who influences or determines public policy, including school officials, city council members, county supervisors, etc.) does or does not do about a problem that comes before them for consideration and possible action.</i>

Below are 5 scenarios from a community.

Your task: Decide with your group if each scenario involves public policy. Check the box marked “public policy” if the scenario does involve public policy. Check the box “community service” if the scenario does not involve public policy. Explain your answers.

	Public Policy	Community Service	Explanation
The problem is that there is a lot of trash behind your school. To solve this problem, you and your friends volunteer to pick up the trash.		X	Students are using volunteer time to assist in cleaning the community. There is no public policy in place.
There have been a lot of problems at school with students texting test answers to one another. The principal has decided to ban student cell phones on campus.	X		The principal is enacting public policy that impacts the students at the school.
The local Elks Club is collecting items for the homeless and will be having an open house where people can come to get items such as food, clothing, and toiletries they can use. The Club will also be accepting donations so they can make purchases in the future for more items to give out in the community.		X	This is a community service project as a private club is requesting voluntary donations. There is no public policy in place.
The road at the local soccer complex has become worn down and unsafe – there are potholes, drop-offs, and there is no lighting. The city has decided to charge a fee to come into the complex in order to pay for the repairs to the road.	X		The city government putting a fee in place is a public policy as it impacts all in the community to correct a problem.
There has been a high rate of bicycle accidents in your community. The local police department has decided to host free bicycle safety seminars at a local community center. The officers who conduct the trainings are being paid for their time.	X		Where the event is free, the funding of this program and payment of the officers is a public policy as police agencies are funded by local/state/federal government.