

# Irondale High School 2015 Civic Action Project

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Effective citizens are able to solve problems and they understand the role that policy plays in doing so. During this Semester, you are going to address a problem or an issue by taking civic actions. As you try to make an impact, you'll explore relationships between the issue, your actions, and policy.

How the Project will be graded:

The project is worth a total of 10% of your semester grade and is considered a "Performance" grade. Each part is worth a portion of that 10%:

Part I: Select an issue 15/100

Part II: Determine involvement 20/100

Part III: Take Action 40/100

Part IV: Reflection and Presentation 25/100

Part I: Issue Development:

For the first part of this project, you will be selecting an issue where you want to affect change. This must be an issue that can be reasonably solved through the action of the government. **Choosing a Problem, Issue, or Policy: Brainstorming Possibilities**

Come up with all kinds of possibilities by brainstorming or asking around. While you are brainstorming, suspend your judgment. The purpose is to write down as many ideas as you can.

Once you finish your brainstorm, decide which of the problems you have written down are the most important.

**Education.** You probably have some strong ideas about school. What are some problems with education in your community? Have they affected you?

**Crime.** Crime can cause big problems. How does crime affect you? Your community?

**Economy.** Without jobs or income, a community has a hard time. What economic problems does your community suffer from? Jobs? Housing? Poverty?

**Environment.** Are you concerned about the air, land, water, and wildlife? Many communities have problems with pollution and waste disposal. What environmental problems does your community face?

**Other Social Problems.** People need food, clothing, housing, medical care, and old-age assistance. Many communities must deal with drug and alcohol abuse, teen pregnancy, automobile accidents, and natural disasters. Cities often suffer from problems such as graffiti, litter, and abandoned buildings. Conflicts between people of different races, cultures, religions, and ethnic groups can cause problems. What other problems or issues does your community face?

**Choosing a Problem, Policy, or Issue: Making up Your Mind**

Here are some questions you can ask yourself. Which problem:

**Affects your life the most?** You will probably work best on problems that are part of your life.

**Affects other people in the community?** If your problem touches other people, they may want to help.

**Needs to be fixed soon?** More people will want to work on an urgent problem.

**Will be interesting to work on?** You'll work harder if it interests you.

**Could you affect the most?**

**Would you learn the most from?**

## Part II:Determine Involvement

The second part of this project is focused on the efforts currently underway by others to affect change on your issue. Before you take action yourself, it is important to know what is already being done.

### **Describing the Problem and its Effects on People**

The Civic Action Project is about making an impact on a problem, issue, or policy that affects people. If you are thinking about working on an environmental problem, consider not only how the problem affects the environment, but also how it affects people. If you are thinking about a problem having to do with animals, that might be an exception, so make sure you explain that in your proposal.

#### **Policy Implications: What is Policy?**

**policy** A principle, plan, or course of action, as pursued by a government, organization, or individual.

**public policies** The policies that governments adopt to solve problems.

Policies are established ways of doing things. You have ways of doing things, and so do businesses and government. We all adopt policies to solve problems.

A policy can be a principle, e.g., a company pledges to make a special effort to employ homeless people. A policy can be a plan, e.g., an individual creates a budget plan to save \$50 a month. A policy can be a course of action, e.g., a city develops a program to feed homeless people at a shelter.

Many policies are translated into law by government action. For example, to control drunk-driving deaths, a state may pass tougher drunk-driving laws. These laws in turn may require administrative action, such as enforcement by police.

#### **Policy Implications: What does the problem have to do with policy?**

The Civic Action Project provides you with flexibility in connecting your CAP to policy. You may not see it right away, but for most public problems, there is a policy implication. Take a look at these examples:

##### **Policy Implication: Enforcing Existing Policy**

Let's say you are concerned about cars speeding in your neighborhood. Even though drivers are supposed to know the speed limit for a residential street, you notice that there is no posted speed limit on any of the streets in the vicinity. Your CAP is about getting the city to better enforce the policy on your street by posting a speed limit sign. If just posting it isn't enough, a next step might be to get the city to take further measures to enforce the policy by installing speed bumps.

##### **Policy Implication: Creating New Policy**

You notice that huge amounts of paper are in the trash cans at school. You want your school to create a new recycling policy and place recycling cans next to the regular trash cans.

##### **Policy Implication: Modifying Existing Policy**

Your city has a curfew ordinance that applies to people under the age of 16. You and many people you know have summer jobs that require you to be out after curfew. You want to try to persuade the city to change the existing policy to make exceptions for teenagers who are working at night.

##### **Policy Implication: Eliminating Existing Policy**

In one of the CAP lessons there is the example of students working with school administrators to eliminate the policy of locked restrooms during the school day.

## Part III: Take Action

The third, and most important part of this project is what you will do to affect change on your issue. You have a voice, and it's time to use it! Your action must attempt to influence a policymaker's decision and ask for a response.

### **Civic Actions: Thinking About the Things You Could Do**

CAP is about taking "civic actions" to address a real problem, issue, or policy. Simply put, civic actions are the activities you do to make an impact on the problem, issue, or policy. Civic actions include:

- 1) Finding out more about the problem. Examples of civic actions: Reading articles, studying resources on the Internet, talking to people who might know something about it. Learning about people/agencies/organizations that share your concern. Learning what, if anything, is already being done. Finding out who or what agencies make decisions related to the problem, issue, policy. Your first step should be doing research to learn as much as you can about the problem, issue, or policy you want to address.
  - 2) Developing your strategy for addressing the problem. Examples of civic actions: Determining what your goal is—what do you think should happen. Deciding what you need to ask for and who you need to ask.
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- 3) Contacting people/agencies that could address the situation. Examples of civic actions: Calling, writing, e-mailing, visiting the people who might be able to solve the problem.
  - 4) Making other people aware of your concerns. Examples of civic actions: Talking to people to get them to support your position, creating a poster/flyer campaign to raise awareness, using the Internet (blog, web page, posting your own writing/video/photos) to raise awareness and build a constituency.
  - 5) Becoming involved in the efforts of others to address the problem.
  - 6) Trying to get the problem on the agendas of different groups. Examples of civic actions: Bring the problem to the attention of a neighborhood council, city council, school board. Or to an appropriate agency like the Better Business Bureau, Chamber of Commerce, Department of Housing. Or to an advocacy group that might be interested in your issue (such as groups that are concerned about the environment, health, safety, education, children's issues, etc). Remember: Doing the research to find out what agencies and groups might help you is a civic action.
  - 7) Taking political action. Examples of civic actions: Lobbying, petitioning, testifying at hearings and other public meetings, working to get something on a ballot, voting, etc.

**Be sure to read through numbers 1-7. You will need to show your work in numbers 1 and 2 and then select Two of the options in 3-7 that you will follow through with.**

## Part IV: Reflection and Presentation

The fourth and final portion of this project asks you to reflect on what you did and to present your project to the class. The presentations will occur at the end of the semester. This will allow me to review your submission prior to your presentation.

# How to do a phone interview

**Make an appointment over the phone or or via email.** Explain the purpose of the interview and how long the interview will take. Set an exact date and time. Be sure you have the correct phone number.

**Confirm the interview appointment.** A day before your interview, call or email the person to confirm the time. It is a good idea to send the questions ahead of time so the person has a chance to prepare.

**Rehearse the interview with a partner.** Go through the introduction, questions, thank you, and goodbye. Make sure there is a smooth transition between the different parts of your interview.

**Prepare your questions in writing.** Conduct research to create your questions. Develop thoughtful questions that will cover everything you need to know.

**Be on time.** Have your interview materials ready and in front of you at least 10 minutes before your phone interview. Find a quiet place without interruption to place the call.

**Take Notes.** Have your questions in front of you with space to take brief notes. Remain attentive to the speaker. If you are recording the interview you must first ask permission from your speaker. It is illegal to record an interview or conversation without informing your speaker that he or she is being recorded and getting his or her permission. Afterward, make complete notes.

**Cover each point before moving on to the next.** If you do not understand a response to a question, ask for an explanation.

**Ask for literature and names of other experts.** Be sure that one of your questions asks for more information, suggested reading material or other experts who you should contact.

**Say “Thank you.”** Within three days of the interview, send a short note thanking the person for his or her time.



## **Possible ideas for questions on phone interview**

1. What is the public policy (what is government doing or proposing to do about the problem)?
2. What problem does the policy address?
3. What group(s) supports the policy? Why? What group(s) opposes it? Why?
4. What institution, if any, is making or has made the decision on the policy?
5. What level of government is this institution (e.g., federal, state, local)?
6. In your opinion, do you believe the policy is a good one? Why or why not?