

What's Important to my Government?

Ever wonder what's considered to be most important to your government? Check out the budgets! That's where government leaders, policymakers and citizens work together establish funding priorities.

Budget process

When do governments make their budgets? For local governments, budgeting is done in the winter and spring. Usually they establish goals and strategies in the winter, and then from there the lead administrator (the county, city or town manager or school superintendent) works with staff to develop a recommended budget. The recommended budget is just that - a recommendation from the manager, with input from government departments, policymakers and data from goals, past results, community needs and other information. A big factor is how much money is available to spend on budget items.

From there, the elected officials take a look at the budget, discuss it, give the public a chance to weigh in, and discuss it some more. The city, county and town budgets are adopted, or enacted into law, by June 30 of each year.

Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools' budget is handled a little bit the same and a little bit differently, in part because CMS is funded through other governments (as opposed to being able to tax citizens - like the county, city, state and federal governments do - to get money to pay for their services). School district leaders create a recommended budget. The school board and public have opportunities to weigh in, and then the school board approves its budget request. Once the county and state decide how much money is available in their own budgets, the schools receive an appropriation, which may be the same as, more than, or less than their budget request.

Different kinds of services

A government funds different kinds of services. Some are mandated, and some are discretionary.

Mandated

- Defined by law (NC or federal law, or interest payments)
- Means this service must be provided and at a specific level

Discretionary



GenerationNation
K-12 Civic Learning Opportunities

- Service does not have to be provided, but is done so as a service to the community
- Some are both mandated and discretionary
- Service must be provided; level can fluctuate

Examples

- Mandatory: build and maintain schools, roads and jails
- Discretionary: build and operate libraries, neighborhood improvements, and parks

Objective and Activities

There are many opportunities for writing, reading, small group discussion and oral presentation. The activity aligns with several core standards. Skills include:

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| ▪ Persuasion | ▪ Media literacy | communication |
| ▪ Critical thinking | ▪ Collaboration | ▪ Teamwork |
| ▪ Analysis | ▪ Civic leadership | ▪ Math |
| ▪ Reading information | ▪ Local and State Government | ▪ Group discussion |
| ▪ Active listening | ▪ Federal Government | ▪ Connecting historic events, personal knowledge, current events or global life |
| ▪ Writing | ▪ Effective | |
| ▪ Civic literacy | | |

Local and state government budgeting is a civic learning opportunity. Students learn about the roles and services of government, evaluate community priorities and needs, and examine the roles of citizens and leaders in the process. A variety of activities are available. Modify based on your grade level or subject area. For example, you can focus students on the community, North Carolina, the United States or another country.



Web resources

Lessons and activities, with Common Core and NC correlations

<http://www.generationnation.org/index.php/learn/entry/whats-important-to-my-government>

Make your voice heard! My Wish or Idea for my Community

http://www.generationnation.org/documents/MyWish_andIdeas.pdf

Learn about local governments in Charlotte-Mecklenburg

<http://www.generationnation.org/index.php/learn/entry/local-government-who-does-what>

How do budgets compare at the city, county and towns?

http://www.generationnation.org/documents/budgetcomp_localgovt.pdf

Role play commissioners and departments to create your own Mecklenburg County budget

<http://www.generationnation.org/documents/MeckCountybudgetexercise1.pdf>

Contact officials to make your voice heard on budget decisions and government priorities

http://www.generationnation.org/documents/LocalGovt_whodoeswhat.pdf

Teens - get involved in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Youth Council

<http://generationnation.org/index.php/youthvoice>

Make your own federal budget with People's Pie

<http://www.icivics.org/games/peoples-pie>

Create a county budget Counties Work

<http://www.icivics.org/games/counties-work1>

Build NC's budget and explore state services and funding with Civic Education Consortium

<http://www.civics.org>



More activities

WHAT'S FOR KIDS?

Which government services impact children and youth? How time do public officials spend on these issues? How much money is budgeted? Is the emphasis on adult issues? Why or why not?

WRITE THE HEADLINE

Follow the government budget process. What do you think the news headline will be?

Now, read actual titles or headlines. One easy way to do this is through local news media.

Were you close? Is your headline or title better? Why?

Sometimes there will be many headlines and titles, with each one saying something completely different. Why do you think that is?

COMMUNICATE EFFECTIVELY

Watch a video of a city council, county commission, or school board meeting about the budget. How do public officials communicate information? Are they persuasive? How? What do you think is the most effective? Least?

Do governments have a need to communicate effectively? How do they do this?