

## What Is Government For?

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*Appropriate for ESL & EL/Civics students, Intermediate – Advanced levels*

### Resources

[Government Explained](#) - **You Tube** video (from beginning to 1:30 only)

[The Facts of Congress: Federalism](#) - **You Tube** video

[Federal Powers vs. State Powers](#) by *Ignite Learning!* - **You Tube** video

[Tell Me What You Want, What You Really, Really Want](#) - from [KQED News Election 2012 Blog](#)

### Objective

Identify the basic roles of federal, state and local government.

### Critical Issue

On Tuesday, November 6, 2012, American people will elect a president, vice-president, and in some states, members of congress. These elected officials will play key roles in our government. What does government do, exactly? Abraham Lincoln put it this way:

*“The legitimate object of government is to do for a community of people whatever they need to have done, but can not do at all, or can not so well do, for themselves – in their separate and individual capacities.”*

### Preview Activity/Introductory Questions

1. What is government?
2. Ask for examples of governments (*school board, neighborhood council, city council, federal government, your classroom*).
3. Is government necessary? Why? Or why not?
4. From what you know, how is the U.S. Government different from the government in your native country? How is it the same?
5. Imagine a visitor from Mars wants to know how the U.S. Government works. How would you explain it?

View **You Tube** video, [Government Explained](#) up to **1:30 only**

## Introductory Activity 1: Vocabulary Preview

Give students **Handout A**, make sure directions are clear, and work through as a class.

## Introductory Activity 2: Group Work

### Four Corners Exercise (allow 10 minutes)

Post the following simple signs in the four corners of the classroom:

- **I have lived in another country (besides my native country).**
- **I have lived in another state of the U.S.**
- **I have lived in another city in this state.**
- **I have only lived here.**

- 1 Have students go to the corner of the room with the sign that best applies to them. Write these two questions on the board, and students ask members of their group: **“Where else have you lived?”** and **“For how long?”**

Students in the “I’ve only lived here” corner can ask, **“How long have you lived here?”**

- 2 Direct students to partner with one person in their group, and ask each other these questions:
  - **Which of the services from the handout have you used?**
  - **Was it free, or did you have to pay?**

With a new partner within their group, students should ask these questions:

- **Can you think of a problem or need in society that the government helps with?**  
(*i.e., homelessness, gang problems, unemployment*)
- **How does the government help?**

- 3 Keeping partners together, assemble students in groups of 4 or 5. Ask them to assign a recorder, and brainstorm problems or needs (“issues”) faced by individuals and society, listing as many as they can in 5-10 minutes (*i.e., overcrowded schools, discrimination, illness etc.*). Invite representatives from each group to transfer lists to the board. Eliminate duplicates.
- 4 Once the list is complete (with about 20 items), create a [T-Chart](#), on the board next to the words. Using the headings **Issues handled by Government** and **Issues not handled by Government**, ask students to copy the T-Chart, and work together to assign each item to the proper column. Allow 10 minutes.

Follow up by coming to a consensus as a class to complete the master T-Chart on the board.

- 5 Finally, on the **“Issues handled by Government”** side, have students write an **F**, **S**, or **L** above the words, indicating which level of government they think would handle each issue. Allow 5 minutes for them to begin this exercise in their groups, and then discuss as a class.

Save the chart for reference, later in this lesson.

## Listening Practice

### Listening Exercise 1: You Tube video – [The Facts of Congress: Federalism](#)

Before playing the video, give students **Handout B**, and ask them to fold the paper so that they are looking at **Exercise 1** only. Review the instructions for this exercise. Allow 2-3 minutes for students to predict answers, writing in pencil only before playing the video.

View [The Facts of Congress: Federalism](#) video.

Students can finalize their answers while watching the video. It may be necessary to play it several times, pausing and reviewing when necessary.

### Listening Exercise 2: You Tube video - [Federal Powers vs. State Powers](#)

Before playing the video, ask students to turn over their folded handout, so they are now looking at **Exercise 2**. Allow 2-3 minutes for students to read the list and make predictions.

View [Federal Powers vs. State Powers](#) video. Students can finalize their answers while watching the video. Once again, it may be necessary to play the video several times.

## Post Viewing Activities

### Group work - building consensus

In their groups, ask students to compare answers on **Handout B** with group members. Encourage students to come to a consensus about each answer, and remind them that building consensus is at times necessary in government! After about 5-10 minutes, review the handout as a class.

*An additional viewing of one of the videos may be in order if disagreements arise.*

### Individual work

Direct students to the blog post, [Tell Me What You Want, What You Really, Really Want](#) on KQED's **Election 2012 blog**. Then, using an issue they feel strongly about from the group exercise (above), follow [this prompt](#) to fill out the simple form with personal information, and answer the question [What's Government For?](#)

Review submission guidelines with students for best outcomes – and use a separate class period to check and perfect short essays. Emphasize that they will be giving their opinions; there is no “right” or “wrong” answer.

## Reflection

Discuss any differences students can identify between the U.S. Government and the government in their native countries.

Have their opinions changed after this lesson?

## Contact Assignments

- Ask students to check the Internet or their local newspapers, to find out when their local neighborhood council meets, and try to attend a meeting. Another option would be for students to watch a city council meeting on a local public access channel.  
Students should take note of the three points below, and report back to the class:

Does the council discuss any of the issues from today's lesson?

How is new business introduced?

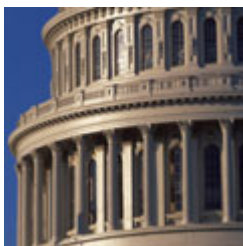
How does the meeting vote on actions to be taken?

- Explain that neighborhood councils are an even smaller level of government than city or county government, and are a great way to get involved in issues they care about. Talk about ways to be involved and make changes in your community – all year round on a local level.  
<http://ckgroup.org/resources/videos/>
- Help students find out who their local representatives are by going to <http://whomyrepresentative.com/> and entering their zip codes.  
They can click on the prompt given for their representatives' websites, and follow the prompts to "issues." On the issues page, students can see how each representative has voted, or what action he/she has taken on an issue of the student's choosing (*gun control, death penalty, the environment, etc.*).

Students can report on their findings, and explain whether these findings would affect their voting in future elections.

## Additional Resources

KQED News [Election 2012](#) - What's Government For?



This year it's not just about choosing *who* will govern us, but also *how* government should work. This election, we're asking: **What's government for?**

<http://blogs.kqed.org/election2012/>

<http://www.californiareport.org/archive/R506101630/b> **Immigrants and Local Government**

Audio archive of KQED's **The California Report** from 2005. Interview examines two questions: How involved are immigrants in local government, and do city officials see them as powerful a constituency?

[Listen to RealMedia Stream](#)

[http://www.ehow.com/list\\_6068028\\_responsibilities-local-government.html](http://www.ehow.com/list_6068028_responsibilities-local-government.html)

This page on the **eHow** website lists clear categories of what areas local governments handle.

[http://www.ehow.com/list\\_7694128\\_duties-state-government.html](http://www.ehow.com/list_7694128_duties-state-government.html)

This page on the **eHow** website lists clear categories of what areas state governments handle.

<http://www.constitutionus.com>

Easy to use, online version of the full text of the U.S. Constitution includes the Bill of Rights and Amendments.



# Handout A

Below is a list of jobs the government does, or services it provides for its people. These jobs and services are divided among the three levels of government in the U.S.: federal, state, and local government. Look at the list, and decide as a class which level of the government provides each service. Put an F (federal), S (state) or L (local) in the blanks. In some cases, services are actually shared by two levels of government. Put two letters for those.



Build highways and public transportation



\_\_\_\_\_



Provide educational opportunities

\_\_\_\_\_



Provide health care \_\_\_\_\_

Provide recreation



\_\_\_\_\_

Protect the nation's money and fiscal well-being



\_\_\_\_\_



Protect people's liberties and guard physical safety with the police

\_\_\_\_\_

... and military



\_\_\_\_\_



Provide clean air and water \_\_\_\_\_



Provide gas, electricity & sewage



\_\_\_\_\_

Provide disaster protection



\_\_\_\_\_



Protect people's savings for retirement or hard times

\_\_\_\_\_

## **Handout B**

### **Exercise 1**

*Look at the vocabulary words in the box below. Then read the sentences, and try to predict which word to use in each blank.*

*View [The Facts of Congress: Federalism](#) video 2-3 times with your class.*

*Finalize your answers while listening.*

#### **Word Bank**

**building    cake    federal    Federalism    recreation    space    U. S. Congress**

1. According to the video, the United States Government “is like a big 3-layer \_\_\_\_\_.”
2. We have local (city or county) government, state government, and *national* government, which is often called \_\_\_\_\_ government.
3. Examples of issues handled by local governments are police, water, and \_\_\_\_\_ permits.
4. Examples of issues handled by state governments are education, healthcare and \_\_\_\_\_.
5. Our federal government handles issues which concern the whole country, such as national parks, the military, and \_\_\_\_\_ exploration.
6. The \_\_\_\_\_ is a part of the federal government.
7. Our system of dividing responsibilities among governments is called \_\_\_\_\_.

### **Exercise 2**

*Read the list of jobs the government does below. Can you guess which ones are done by the federal government, the state government, or the local government? Some of the jobs below are shared by the federal AND state governments. We call these **concurrent** responsibilities.*

*As you watch [Federal Powers vs. State Powers](#) mark each governmental responsibility as belonging to Federal (F), State (S), Concurrent (C) (Federal & State shared responsibility), or Local (L) government.*

1. \_\_\_\_\_ coin money
2. \_\_\_\_\_ collect taxes
3. \_\_\_\_\_ conduct elections
4. \_\_\_\_\_ declare war & make peace
5. \_\_\_\_\_ make & enforce laws
6. \_\_\_\_\_ maintain courts
7. \_\_\_\_\_ pass immigration laws
8. \_\_\_\_\_ provide education
9. \_\_\_\_\_ provide for the common defense & maintain armed services
10. \_\_\_\_\_ provide money to local governments
11. \_\_\_\_\_ regulate foreign & interstate commerce