

Topic: Civics

Badge: Democracy for Seniors/Ambassadors

Purpose: When you have earned this badge, you will have expanded your knowledge about how your local, state, and national government works.

Helpful websites: **(Have adult permission to go online)**

[Awesome Girls: Be a Citizen Changemaker](#)

[Awesome Girls: Behind the Scenes-How Women in Congress get things done.](#)

[How a Bill becomes a Law](#)

[Judge a Case](#)



Steps: (Every step has three choices. Do ONE choice to complete each step.)

Step 1: Find out about local government

We all know at least a little bit about the government in Washington, D.C.—but how much can you say about how things are run locally? Explore the government of your city or town in this step.

Choices-Do one:

- Visit your town hall, city hall, or mayor's office. Take a trip to talk to someone in one of these places about your local government. (If you can, make an appointment to talk to your local representative or someone in their office.) Have them explain all the jobs that are done in your local government and talk to you about local elections. Have they seen voter turnout rates in elections change in recent years and if so, how? Ask any other questions you can think of.

OR

- Talk to an expert. Find an expert who can talk to you about your local government. This could be someone elected to local office, a teacher, a lawyer, or a judge. Have them explain all the jobs that are done in your local government and talk to you about local elections. Have they seen voter turnout rates in elections change in recent years and if so, how? Ask any questions you can think of.

OR

- Go to a city or town hall meeting. See democracy in action! Make a plan to go to a meeting when a vote will be held. Before you go, talk about what will be voted on and decide how you would vote if you could. If possible, attend a meeting when the public is given time to speak, and share your thoughts. See how the vote turns out, then talk about your experience with family or friends. (Sometimes you can watch these over the internet.)

Step 2: Find out about State Government.

Your state government looks a lot like the government of the United States. State governments and the United States government are all made up of three parts, or branches: legislative, executive, and judicial. Before doing the rest of the steps in this badge, read about the three branches of government located here for [Seniors](#) and here for [Ambassadors](#).

Choices-Do one:

- Visit your state capitol building.

Take a trip with your friends or family and talk to someone there about how your state government works. How do the three branches of government work together? Ask any other questions you can think of.

OR

- Compare your state. Research your state government and find out everything you can about how it's run. Then compare it to another state nearby. How are they alike? Can you find any differences? Talk about your findings with family or friends.

OR

- Explore an election. Find out everything you can about the most recent election in your state. Who were the candidates? Were there any questions on the ballot? How close were the outcomes? How many people voted? On your own or in small groups, come up with ways you might increase voter turnout in your state. Share your thoughts with family or friends.

Step 3: Find out about the federal legislative branch.

The branch of the U.S. government that creates laws is the legislative branch, or Congress. The two groups that make up Congress are the House of Representatives and the Senate. Find out more about the federal legislative branch in this step. (Federal is another name for national.)

Choices-Do one:

- Write a letter. Pay close attention to the news for a few days. Is there an issue rising to the surface that's important to you? Do you think there's something more that lawmakers can do to help? Write a letter to a representative about why the issue matters and what action you'd like to see from them.

OR

- Build a budget. One responsibility of Congress is creating the federal budget. Spend some time researching the big buckets of spending in the United States. What percentage of the budget is typically spent on the military? What about health care? Then create your own pie chart showing how you'd recommend allocating funds if you were a member of Congress.

OR

- Make a game. Read "How a Bill Becomes a Law" see the link under helpful websites above, then get creative! Make your own board game as a way to teach the process to others. (Maybe even younger Girl Scouts!)

Step 4: Find out about the federal executive branch.

The executive branch of the United States government includes the president, vice president, and cabinet members. (The president chooses members of their cabinet, or advisors; they are approved by the Senate.) Find out more about the executive branch in this step.

Choices-Do one:

- Rethink an election. Choose a historical presidential election and find out everything you can about it. Now imagine you are the campaign manager for the losing candidate. What could you have done differently to bring your candidate to victory? Share your campaign strategy with friends or family.

OR

- Encourage voting. Look into voter turnout rates in your state—and the rest of the country—for the last presidential election. Did most adult citizens cast a vote? If the number was far from 100%, why do you think that might be? Research potential options for increasing voter turnout and take part in at least one option

OR

- Explore the electoral college. Find out everything you can about its history and how it has affected recent presidential elections. With a partner, debate doing away with the electoral college or keeping it in place. After you've had a chance to argue both sides, talk about which side you agree with more.

Step 5: Find out about the federal judicial branch.

The judicial branch of the government is made up of courts and judges. The system ladders up to the highest court in the country, the Supreme Court. Take a closer look at the judicial branch in this step.

Choices—Do one:

- Judge a case. Choose one Supreme Court case from history and find out everything you can about it. What was the process to get to the Supreme Court? What was the decision? How close was the vote? Do you agree with the result? Share your thoughts with family or friends.

OR

- Judge a justice. Choose one Supreme Court justice—past or present—and find out everything you can about their voting history. Which case do you think was most important and why? Do you agree with their vote? Share your findings with family or friends.

OR

- Look into term limits. Supreme Court justices are appointed, not elected, and serve lifelong terms. (That means they generally keep the job until they resign or pass away, though Congress does have the power to impeach justices in extreme cases.) Some people believe that this system needs to be changed. Team up with a friend and find out everything you can about the arguments for and against putting term limits in place for Supreme Court justices. Debate one side, then switch places and take the other position. Which side do you agree with? Why?

***Once completed, this badge can be purchased at the GSWESTOK Girl Scout shop.**