



PROJECT CITIZEN: AUTHENTIC CIVIC ACTION FOR STUDENTS

DISTANCE-LEARNING ADAPTATIONS

Why Project Citizen can work well for Distance-Learning

- Because it is inquiry-based, students are given a sense of control and choice, which is empowering during a time of uncertainty.
- Policy issues are in the forefront of news and discussions around how the different levels of government are dealing with the Covid-19 pandemic.
- What students are experiencing this year is directly connected to multiple levels of government and how they are responding and planning for public health, the economy, education, and many other issues.
- The project can be self-directed or team-based, it can be one full activity, or divided into short, individual pieces that can stretch over a length of time.

Distance-Learning Tips

Individual Students:

- Give students time to explore and ask a series of questions to begin the project
- Provide plenty of time for each step of the project – longer than might usually be given in a classroom.
- Provide all the information and materials for each step up front so that students can work at their own pace within the due dates you give.
- Provide a way for individual students to share their work with classmates.

Groups:

- Assign groups no larger than 4 or 5 students to make it easier for them to negotiate meeting times.
- Give them a chance to meet on their own and check in together in a meeting with you.
- Be very clear about roles each member of the group will play and how they will turn in their collaborative work.
- Provide a way for the groups to share their progress and present at the end.

Purposes of Project Citizen

- To understand how different levels of government work
- To increase your knowledge, skills, and interest in participating with government and civic life
- To practice teamwork, problem solving, and civic participation

How Project Citizen Works

- Work together in a group to conduct research about important problems in your community
- Choose one of the problems that you think needs a solution
- Identify alternative solutions to the problem and weigh advantages and disadvantages
- Propose a solution that includes government action
- Propose an action plan for your solution
- Record your project steps and results in a full project portfolio
- Take part in a simulated public hearing to present your results

Learn by Doing

- Learn about the roles of people in civil society and how they participate in the political process

- Learn which branches, agencies, and levels of government have the authority and responsibility to deal with the problem you've chosen to address
- Learn how to monitor and influence the political process in your community



WHAT IS PUBLIC POLICY?

Public Policy is a concept or set of ideas that guides a course of action or a procedure used in dealing with public issues or problems.

Policies are:

- Embodied in laws, rules, or regulations
- Agreed upon procedures used by government to fulfill its responsibilities
- Serve to distribute certain benefits, manage resources, or manage conflicts

Examples of Public Policies:

- A law that forbids selling alcohol to persons under the age of 18
- A law that forbids smoking in public institutions
- A law that forbids carrying guns in schools
- Regulations about work time in places of business
- A school district policy about absenteeism

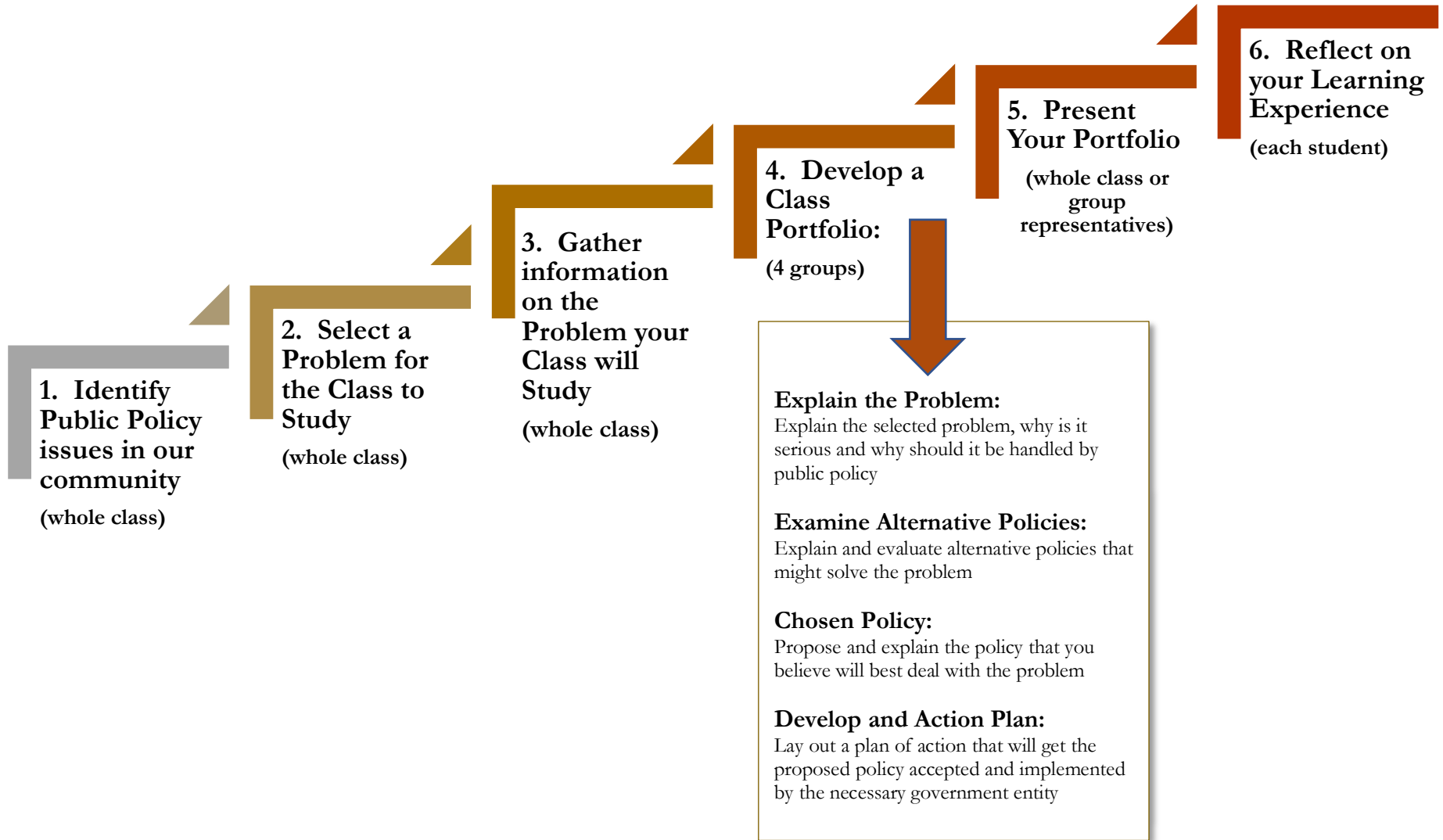
Public Policy can:

- Include any kind of community problem or issue
- Center on all questions or problems that are sometimes called “general welfare” issues (a Constitutional term)
- Include education, medicine, economics, social care, housing, safety, or any other areas of public concern

Participants in Public Policy making include:

- Executive or Legislative branches of federal, state, or local government
- Government agencies
- Citizens who influence decision makers

Project Citizen Step by Step



The Project Citizen Portfolio & Evidence Collection

1. A Portfolio demonstrates all the work your class has done. It is a way to display and explain the policy solution you have worked so hard to develop.
2. The Portfolio needs to have coherence – the panels are sequential and substantively relate to each other. Any one student should be able to present all four panels/sections to demonstrate their understanding of public policy. All students need to understand the content of each section to do work as a small group.
3. All students need a clear understanding of the problem before working on their sections.
4. An important role for the teacher is to facilitate the learning by helping students to:
 - Set criteria for what makes a good problem for Project Citizen
 - Narrow the problem
 - Develop consensus
 - Discuss alternatives
 - Provide intentional time for students to communicate across groups
 - Help them see how research from one group will impact or assist other panels
5. Students should have experience with many sources of evidence as possible. Evidence should be authentic, from your community, and associated with the problem. Surveys, interviews, and local media can be included. The Internet is only one source of information. Teach students to carefully evaluate, summarize, and select sources for their Portfolio.

Portfolio Part 1: Display Board or Digital Visuals

- Title of the project and school
- Appropriate titles for each section/panel
- Community supporters who helped
- Government involvement clear
- Well organized
- Information is thorough
- Appropriate graphics and pictures
- Attention getting!

Portfolio Part 2: Documentation

Can be done in a binder for display or a digital folder of documentation

General:

- Cover Page
- Clear Sections
- Table of Contents
- Names of students and teacher

The Problem:

- Problem Summary
- Graphic presentation
- Problem identification form
- Other:
 - Interview form
 - Printed sources
 - Radio/TV/Websites
 - Publications
- Bibliography/Source List

Alternative Solutions:

- Summary of alternative policy solutions (with advantages & disadvantages)
- Graphic presentation
- Bibliography/Source List for each

Chosen Policy Solution:

- Narrative of the Chosen Policy
- Advantages
- Disadvantages
- Level of government responsible and what it needs to do
- Graphic presentation
- Bibliography/Source List

Action Plan:

- How to gain support from:
 - Individuals
 - Groups
- How to gain support of government
- Graphic presentation
- Bibliography/Source List

Evaluation:

- Constitutional opinion form
- Student evaluation form
- Teacher evaluation form

Project Citizen Tips for Teachers

1. Choose a relevant problem. Let the students choose the problem they want to address. If the students choose they will be much more invested in the issue and the whole process will be much more exciting for everyone.
2. Make contact early. Start contacting representatives, officers, experts, etc., as early as possible in the process. Correspondence with public officials can take some time. Be sure to brainstorm your contact list with your kids sooner rather than later so students will have time to include the responses in their portfolio.
3. Practice, practice practice. Have students practice their presentation for the whole class, for the administration, for a faculty meeting, for the class pet turtle, in front of the mirror at home... Each time their audience (except, maybe, the turtle) will give them new questions to consider and they will become more comfortable and knowledgeable about their presentation.
4. Be flexible. There are many different ways to fit Project Citizen into your year. The following are some variations that might work for you:

7-8 Week “Perfect World” Plan:

During school 2 or more times a week for an hour a day

- Steps 1-2: 1-2 days
- Steps 3-5: 2 weeks

4-8 Week “After School Special” Plan:

After school club that meets for 30-45 minutes once or twice a week

- Steps 1-2: 1 meeting each
- Steps 3-5: 2-4 meetings each
- For this plan you will need to assign work (research) to the kids they can do at home
- Allow kids to work on research and writing during some class times
- Enlisting help for the students (a volunteer parent, possibly) will make their meeting times more effective

2-4 Week “Maximum Overdrive” Plan:

Every day 45-60 minute lessons

- Steps 1-2: 1 day each
- Steps 3-5: 2 weeks total
- Warning: You may not be able to contact experts and get responses back with this short time span

5. Set a date for your school showcase, or register early for Classroom Law Project’s Showcase at the Capitol, then plan backwards. Allow at least 4-6 weeks to prepare.
6. Contact community leaders, policy makers, and any other interested experts, professionals or others who might be interested in helping your students during the project.
7. Let the students know what parts of the project you will grade and what you expect from each student
8. Plan lessons around each stage of the process – you can teach a LOT of content and skills as they work on the project itself.