

VIRTUAL CIVIC ENGAGEMENT PROGRAM

Sample Overview

During this time of social distancing and online learning, it's more important than ever to help students develop their sense of purpose and make personal connections to the world around them. Close Up's Virtual Civic Engagement Program helps students explore why people disagree about important issues, how to understand different perspectives, and how young people can take action on the issues they care about.

Throughout the program, students will engage in discussions with their peers, take part in exciting community bonding exercises, hear from speakers, and participate in workshops designed to help them become more engaged citizens. Sessions are supported by Close Up's trained instructors who facilitate small group discussions, moderate seminars, and lead workshops. A minimum of 20 students is required to run the program. Program content can be adapted based on school curriculum and learning objectives.

Sample Program Sessions

Session 1: Creating Community and Establishing Purpose (3 Hours)

- **Orientation:** Get ready for the week ahead, and meet your program instructors!
- **Building a Virtual Community:** Students will consider how they will work together during the program by creating their own rules and norms for engagement and participating in team building exercises.
- **Understanding Why We Don't Always Agree:** Students will investigate and discuss a set of political values that includes liberty, equality, private interests, and the common good to see how different people apply those values in different situations.

Session 2: Characteristics of a Good Law (3 Hours)

- **Opening Community Activity**
- **What makes a "Good" Law?:** Students will discuss what characteristics and criteria they can use to evaluate laws. Criteria might include being understandable, reasonable, enforceable, and just.
- **Evaluating Proposed Laws:** Students will apply their criteria to a set of proposed bills and laws being considered in Congress or in state and local governments.

Session 3: Deliberating about a Pressing Issue (3 Hours)

- **Opening Community Activity**
- **Current Issue Seminar:** Students will engage with a policy expert or advocate to learn about one issue currently being debated by national political leaders.
- **Current Issue Deliberation:** Students will deliberate about competing ideas and proposals to address the issue raised by the speaker.

Session 4: Considering Civic Action (2.5 Hours)

- **Opening Community Activity**
- **Taking Action:** Students will consider different ways that citizens can make change in their communities, will evaluate examples of youth civic action, and will inventory their own civic skills in order to consider how they can be more active and effective citizens.
- **Congressional Meeting (Optional):** Students will meet with elected officials and/or members of their staff to share their views, ask questions, and better understand how Congress works.
- **Reflection:** Students will reflect on the program and commit to future civic action and involvement.

Student Outcomes

By participating in this program, students will:

- Develop a better understanding of why people disagree
- Increase their appreciation and tolerance for multiple perspectives
- Practice public speaking and other forms of communication
- Gain an increased understanding of public policy, legislation, and current issues
- Build an engaged and respectful learning community among peers