

Local Government 101 – Workshop discussion prompts

These activities are not meant as ‘homework’, but more as a starting point for discussion in workshop groups. They are intended to assist you in developing your knowledge of your council and the local government sector.

PART 1

ACTIVITY 1

Reflect on the following questions for discussion:

1. Does local government have a different emphasis to the other two levels of government? What are the key differences?
2. What does the concept of community mean to you, and how does it relate to council, compared to the other levels of government?

ACTIVITY 2

1. What council area do you live in?
2. What ward do you live in?
3. Who are your current councillors?
4. What is the electoral structure of your council?
5. What voting system applies in your ward/council?

PART 2

ACTIVITY 1

1. List as many council services, policies and programs that you can think of.
2. Think of one example of a service, policy or program that councils can provide for each of the points in the last slide.
3. Which of these are provided by your home council? Which of these have you, or a family member, accessed?
4. How many of these services, policies and programs are responsive, how many are proactive, and how many are focused on maintaining current community standards?

ACTIVITY 2

Find and download the Council Plan from your council’s website, then find the following information within the plan:

1. Community demographics – now and in the future. One thing you didn’t know, or found particularly interesting.
2. Community engagement – what kind of community engagement was undertaken as part of the development of the Council Plan? Does it go into detail about this? What kind of community engagement would you want to undertake?
3. Planning and reporting framework – how does the Council Plan fit in with other key council planning and reporting documents?
4. Strategic objectives – what are the strategic objectives identified by council? List one policy, program or service that is identified for each objective.

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PART 3

ACTIVITY 1

1. What does being a 'good councillor' mean to you? List some traits and behaviours.
2. Think of some interactions that you have had with your local, state or federal representatives. What are some examples of good leadership, and what are some examples of leadership that you felt were lacking?
3. What kind of candidate and what kind of councillor do you hope to be?
4. What would you hope to achieve on council, or throughout the course of the campaign?

ACTIVITY 2

Go to the 'Know your council' website and search 'councillor remuneration'.

1. What category does your council fall under?
2. What is the pay bracket for that category?

See if you can find out (from Google, or your council's website) how much councillors are currently paid.

3. Where can you find this information?
4. How much are they currently being paid?
5. Are there reasons given for the councillors' decision to pay themselves a higher or lower amount within their pay bracket?
6. Do you think they are being paid an appropriate amount for the work that they do?

ACTIVITY 3

Use your council's website to access this information.

1. When are your council meetings usually held? If there is not a current schedule on the website, use the past minutes to get an idea of the usual intervals between meetings.
2. Watch a council meeting. If your council is not currently holding meetings, try to find one from another council, or think of a previous council meeting that you have watched. What is one thing that you found interesting about the way that the meeting was conducted?
3. Have a look at one set of council meeting agenda and minutes. What does the agenda contain, and what is noted in the minutes?

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to send me an email at deborah@vlga.org.au.