



## Town Budget Meeting Simulation: Meeting Needs of Young and Old Lesson Plan

### Introduction

Fiscal constraints on municipal, state and national budgets require government officials to make difficult decisions about which programs to support. Special interest groups sometimes are organized in behalf of different age groups, especially children and older adults. An intergenerational approach to budgetary matters acknowledges the needs of and reciprocity among all age groups. Creative alternatives to age-segregated programs provide more services to more people, but will require changes in attitudes. This activity is appropriate for civics or economic classes. It is an effective intergenerational activity.

### Objectives

Students will:

- identify needs of younger and older citizens;
- develop reasons for supporting a political viewpoint; and
- practice negotiating and problem-solving skills.

### Key Terms

intergenerational relations/programs, special interest or advocacy groups, fiscal responsibility

### Procedures

1. Ask students to imagine that they live in a community where 20 percent of the residents are under the age of 15 and 20 percent are over the age of 65.
2. Divide the class into two groups, one group being advocates for young people and the other group representing older adults. Have each group discuss among themselves what their special interests are. For example, what are their primary concerns as advocates for young people? Old people? What kinds of problems regarding young and old people do they think should be addressed by the town council? What kinds of special programs and services would they like the town to support?
3. Ask each group to present its respective concerns. Make a list for each group on the chalkboard.
4. Imagine next that the town council has been awarded a grant of \$50,000 to be used on any community program(s) which would serve its residents. Program ideas might include new playground equipment, renovation of the senior center auditorium, developing programs at the teen center, hiring a drug counselor, hiring a geriatric nurse to assess needs of homebound residents, improving handicap accessibility at town buildings, including schools. Ask each group to develop a budget proposal for programs and

services which would help young or old residents. Each group should develop logical and persuasive reasons why their proposed plan is necessary and what benefits are expected.

5. Ask group members to select spokespersons to represent their positions at the next town council meeting (class period). Spokespersons present their cases before the town manager or mayor (teacher). Allow some interchange of ideas and possible compromises.
6. Next, mix the two groups so that each group consists of advocates for both younger and older residents. Allow the groups time to devise a compromise budget which proposes programs that meet the needs of both older and younger people.
7. New group spokespersons then present compromise budget proposals to the class. Evaluate the proposals. Did the groups simply divide the money equally or did they seek programs which might benefit both age groups.

#### Extension Activities

Invite the town manager or a town council member to class to answer questions regarding services for younger and older persons. Find out how the distribution of town resources is determined.

Encourage students to attend local school board or town or city council meetings in which budget issues are being addressed. Students might attend with older residents who regularly attend the meetings.

Have groups of students brainstorm creative ways in which existing age-segregated programs might be modified to permit intergenerational participation.