



Town of Bladensburg Citizens Civics Academy — Facilitator's Guide

Version 1.0 | Draft

The Bladensburg Citizens Civics Academy will offer residents an in-depth look at how the Town government works through an informative, fast-paced, program. The Citizens Civics Academy should:

1. **Educate** residents about the roles, responsibilities, and functions of local government.
2. **Empower** participants to engage meaningfully in civic life.
3. **Build connections** between citizens, elected officials, and public administrators.
4. **Encourage leadership** by helping residents become informed advocates and community problem-solvers.

Program Overview & Structure

- **Purpose:** Equip residents with the knowledge and tools to engage effectively in local government.
- **Target Audience:** Adult residents of the Town of Bladensburg; open enrollment or application-based
- **Format:** In-person, 6-8 weekly sessions, 1.5 - 2 hours each.
- **Instruction Style:** Interactive, participant-focused, and practical.
- **Facilitator Role:** Guide discussions, coordinate guest speakers, keep sessions on schedule, and create an inclusive learning environment.
- **Capacity:** 20–30 participants per cohort
- **Culminating Project:** A group capstone activity or presentation to local officials (or a celebration)

Session 1 — Welcome, Program Overview, & Introduction to Local Government

Objective: Establish expectations, introduce participants to the academy, and provide an overview of local government structure.

Facilitator Talking Points:

- Review the session schedule
- Overview of the levels of government (distinctions between local, county, state and federal)
 - Program overview and expectations
 - Introduce participants and facilitators
 - Overview of the session schedule
 - Take it from the top!
 - Federal government
 - State government
 - County Government
 - Municipal government
 - Municipal charter (highlight key roles identified)
 - Article I: Powers
 - Article II: Town Government
 - Roles of elected officials
 - Article III: Registration and Elections
 - Article IV: Administration
 - Role of staff
 - Article V: Finance
 - Article VI: Public Ways and Improvements
 - Article VII: General Provisions
- Discussion on the importance of having a charter. What would residents change in it if anything/why?

Materials Needed:

- Participant handbook
- Copy of the charter
- Organizational chart of local government
- Interactive quiz “Who Does What” (to be developed)

Guest Speaker Suggestion: (If needed)**Activity**

- Who Does What Quiz or Matching Exercise

Agenda (2 hours)**Time Activity**

0:00 – 0:15	Welcome & Icebreaker (“Why I Signed Up” activity)
0:15 – 0:30	Program overview, goals, and participant expectations
0:30 – 0:50	Overview of the levels of government
0:50 – 1:35	Diving into the Town charter
1:30 – 1:40	Interactive quiz on “Who Does What?”
1:40 – 1:55	Small-group discussion: “Why Civic Engagement Matters”
1:55 – 2:00	Wrap-up, preview Session 2, and distribute handouts (if any)

Session 2 — The Role of the Town Council | How Local Laws are Made

Objective: Learn how local policies and ordinances are made.

Discussion Prompts:

- Review the roles of the Mayor and Council as outlined in the charter from the last class.
- Build on the last class and discuss:

- The role of resolutions, the uses, and how they are created.
- Decisions, decisions. Who is responsible for making which decisions for the Town?
- Identify key functions of municipal government
- Discuss the importance of residents input in the process of creating laws.
- Role playing activity #1: Citizens act out a Council Meeting
 - Discuss the experience
- Role playing activity #2: Creating and passing an ordinance
 - Debate the pros and cons of an ordinance.
 - The role of public comments in the process. How do you reconcile the silent majority with the vocal minority in the discussion.
 - Discussion on the experience
- Conclude the activities and preview the next session.

Materials Needed:

- Sample meeting agendas
- Sample ordinance

Guest Speaker Suggestion: *TBD if needed*

Agenda (2 hours)

Time	Activity
0:00 – 0:10	Recap Session 1 + participant reflections
0:10 – 0:40	How the council works
0:40 – 1:00	Walkthrough of a real meeting agenda
1:00 – 1:30	Mock council activity: Participants debate a sample ordinance
1:30 – 1:50	How to provide effective public comment
1:50 – 2:00	Wrap-up and preview Session 3

Session 3 — Administration Department (The Backbone of the Organization & Public Works Department (Our Unsung Heroes)

- **Objective:** Understand the roles and responsibilities of the administration and public works departments.
- **Content:**
 - Administrative Department
 - Town Administrator
 - Finance
 - Provide an understanding the annual budgeting process
 - Deliver an overview of the planning timeline
 - Let's talk dollars and cents
 - Where does the money come from for the Town's budget
 - Where do local tax dollars go
 - Review by departments
 - What revenue comes from the
 - Discuss priorities for community investments
 - Clerk's Office
 - Primary responsibilities of the clerk
 - Marketing
 - Public Works Department (*a few suggestions*)
 - Primary responsibilities
 - Water, sewer, waste management, and roads (note who is responsible for what (local utility vs county vs town))
 - Sustainability initiatives and green infrastructure
 - Funding and maintenance projects and challenges
 - Snow emergencies
- **Activity:**
 - Tour of park space or site where public works has a project going on

Agenda (2 hours)

Time	Activity
0:00 – 0:05	Session recap + check-in
0:05 – 0:30	Town Administrator
0:30 – 0:55	Finance
0:55 – 1:25	Clerk's Office (including Marketing)
1:25 – 1:55	Public Works
1:55 – 2:00	Wrap-up and preview Session 4

Discussion Prompts:

- TBD by departments

Materials Needed:

- TBD by departments

Guest Speaker Suggestion: TBD if needed

Session 4 — Public Safety & Emergency Services (Include the Fire Department)

- **Objective:** Understand how police, fire, EMS, and emergency management operate.
- **Content:** (a few suggestions)
 - Overview of the purpose of philosophy of the department
 - Overview of the staff and leadership team
 - Building public trust
 - Technology advancements used to serve residents
 - Emergency preparedness and response plans
- **Activity:**
 - Tour of public safety facilities
 - Tabletop emergency response exercise

Agenda (2 hours)

Time	Activity
0:00 – 0:15	Session recap
0:15 – 0:40	Overview of police department responsibilities
0:40 – 1:10	Overview of volunteer fire department responsibilities
1:10 – 1:50	Brief tour of the facilities (20 minutes per department)
1:50 – 2:00	Wrap-up and preview Session 5

Materials Needed:

- TBD by departments

Guest Speaker Suggestion:

Bladensburg Volunteer Fire Department Leader

Session 5 —Overview of Municipal Government | Applying What You've Learned

- **Objective:** The objective of today's class is to give students the opportunity to role play the roles of the Town Council, staff and residents in a variety of scenarios.
- **Content:**
 - Review the roles of the Council and staff to ensure there is understanding.
 - Assign roles to the attendees and coach them through scenarios of:
 - 1.) Council Meeting – approving minutes
 - 2.) Council Meeting – public comments
 - 3.) Passing a law
 - Discuss/debate the merits of an ordinance, public comments, the voting process, the requirements for posting the ordinance and when it actually passes and becomes law.
 - Spell out the specific conditions where you've heard overwhelmingly positive feedback from residents on an issue

but 2-3 very vocal residents give passionate testimony against the matter.

- **Activity:**

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Agenda (2 hours)

Time	Activity
0:00 – 0:15	Recap last two sessions.
0:15 – 0:25	Activity: Explain the purpose of the activity and assign roles
0:25 – 1:25	Role playing: Walk through each of the steps for a: 1.) Council Meeting 2.) Public comments 3.) Creating a new law/ordinance
1:25 – 1:45	Participants reflect on the experience and share lessons learned
1:45 - 1:55	Wrap-up and preview Session 6

Discussion Prompts:

- Walk through each of the steps in the process.
- Emphasize where public participation opportunities are.
- Stress the importance of seeking community feedback in a variety of ways and not just waiting for the meetings.

Materials Needed:

- Sample meeting agenda
- Sample ordinance
- Sample public comments (pro/opposing)
- Create a graphic that shows the flow of the overall process on a one pager

Session 6 — Civic Engagement & Leadership

Objective: Teach participants how to effectively advocate and lead in the community.

- Equip participants to become effective civic leaders.
- **Content:**
 - How to engage with elected officials and staff
 - Attending meetings/town halls and events.
 - Public comment process and advocacy strategies
 - Public Comments for Bladensburg Council Meetings
 - Public Comments for County Council Meetings
 - Submitting testimony for State Senator or State Delegate Committees
 - Volunteer boards, commissions, and committees
 - Green Team
 - Patriotic Team
 - Neighborhood Watch
 - Maryland 250 Commission
 - Others?

Activity: Draft and deliver a 2-minute “public comment” speech on a sample issue

Agenda (2 hours)

Time	Activity
0:00 – 0:15	Session recap
0:15 – 0:45	How to engage with elected officials
0:45 – 1:15	Workshop: Crafting a persuasive public comment
1:15 – 1:40	Overview of boards, commissions, and volunteer roles
1:40 – 1:50	Participant sign-up for engagement opportunities

Time	Activity
1:50 – 2:00	Wrap-up and preview Session 8

Activity:

Each participant drafts and delivers a 2-minute public comment on a local issue.

Guest Speaker Suggestion:

Community engagement officer or former citizen advocate.

Session 7 — Capstone Project & Graduation

Objective: Celebrate completion and showcase participant learning.

- Content:
 - Capstone presentations on a community improvement proposal or what you've learned from the class. (Get input from the team)
 - Certificates of completion
 - Networking with elected officials and alumni
- Activity: Graduation ceremony with local leaders

Agenda (2 hours)

Time	Activity
0:00 – 0:10	Welcome and introductions
0:10 – 1:10	Capstone presentations: Participants pitch improvement proposals
1:10 – 1:30	Panel feedback from local leaders
1:30 – 1:45	Graduation ceremony & certificates
1:45 – 2:00	Networking reception

Guest Speaker Suggestion:

Mayor, Council Chair, and Town Administrator

Appendices (To be developed)

- Sample handouts for each session
- Pre- and post-program surveys
- Recommended reading & digital resources
- Community directory for ongoing engagement

Instructional Methods

- Guest speakers (elected officials, department directors, community advocates)
- Facility tours (town hall, community assets, emergency services office)
- Interactive workshops and simulations
- Small group discussions and problem-solving activities
- Digital resources (videos, infographics, local government dashboards)

Evaluation & Impact Measurement

- **Pre- & Post-Surveys:** Assess knowledge gains and confidence in civic engagement.
- **Attendance Tracking:** Ensure participant retention.
- **Feedback Forms:** Collect session-specific evaluations.
- **Long-Term Tracking:** Follow alumni to measure involvement in boards, commissions, and advocacy efforts.

Future Considerations for Program Enhancements (depending on survey feedback):

- **Youth Track:** A parallel program for high school or college students.
- **Civics 2.0 Series:** Advanced sessions for alumni focusing on advocacy and leadership.
- **Community Project Grants:** Mini-grants for graduates to implement civic initiatives.

- **Digital Platform:** Provide online access to resources, recordings, and discussion forums.
