

# Actions That Help Us Understand the Workings of Our Government

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Created in founding documents designed to monitor/keep society strong.

## Citizen Actions

1. [Attend a city council meeting.](#)
2. [Attend a criminal trial.](#)
3. [Attend a school board meeting.](#)
4. [Go on a police "Ride-Along".](#)
5. [Read the Constitution, Bill of Rights and Declaration of Independence.](#)
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7. [Volunteer in an election campaign.](#)



**Reader Submitted  
Actions**

## Attend a City Council Meeting



Unless one lives in an area governed by a homeowners association, the city council or county Board of Supervisors is probably the "lowest" level of government that affects each of us.



Attending one's City Council or County Board of Supervisors meeting is one of the easiest and most relevant ways to see our democratic government in action. Easy in that the meetings are relatively close to where we live and relevant because most of the issues discussed affect us. Such visits afford us a chance to assess the competence of individuals we have elected, to understand the governing process, to understand important local issues and to provide our input directly to our elected officials.

While many towns broadcast their meetings on local cable TV channels, being inside the council chamber gives one a different and more realistic feeling and it takes some of the mystic out of government. Town meetings are usually held a few times a month.

## Attend a Criminal Trial



The public is allowed to sit in on almost all jury trials. There simply is nothing like attending a criminal or civil trial to give one a sense and perspective of our legal system - both the good and the not so good. The court building is usually located in County Seat. Unless the trial is for a juvenile, one is allowed to walk in and observe. The court calendar is usually often posted outside the court and indicates if jury trial is scheduled.

Attending helps one understand the:

- importance of juries,
- seriousness of breaking the law,
- Importance of hearing all evidence and of not trying individuals in the media based upon polls, limited and highly "spun" information.
- importance of deciding the outcome based upon the evidence and not on personal or social-related beliefs, and
- roles of the judge, the prosecutor and the defense attorney.



It has given me more respect for the system and allowed me to more clearly understand its weaknesses. It also has demystified some of the glamour associated with some major trials.



Readers' Stories

## Attend a School Board Meeting



A district's school board is instrumental in determining the quality of its schools. While school boards differ from state to state, they typically are responsible for things like:

- hiring teachers,
- determining the curricula and books to be used, and
- setting school policy for such things as dress code, school hours, and disciplinary matters.

Most school boards are elected. Attending the school board meeting in one's school district is a great way to assess the quality of its elected members and to understand the types of issues being considered and to provide in-person input or feedback on local school issues. Attending these type meetings also often leads to further involvement.

School Boards typically meet once or twice a month and usually have a time set aside for public input.



Forget going to an amusement park. Forget watching reality TV. If you want some reality, go on a Police Ride Along! Many police and Sheriff's departments have programs where citizens can ride along with patrol officers. Call your local police department or sheriff's office to find out if they have such a program and if so, how it works.

Many of us live in a "sheltered" world. We live in a socio-economic world where we are generally unaware of the level of crime and violence and poverty and despair.



Riding with a police officer gives one an appreciation of:

- what it's like to be a law enforcement officer,
- the importance of police in maintaining a stable society
- the importance of police training in order to handle a multitude of situations in ways which not only protect themselves and other citizens from harm but which respect the civil rights of individuals,
- the potential danger police officers are placed in on a day-to-day basis and how courageous they can be,
- how real and dangerous weapons are, and
- how devastating it is to have a corrupt police officer or department.



## Read the Constitution, Bill of Rights and Declaration of Independence



Having a clear understanding of the basic founding documents gives us the proper perspective upon which to take actions and to believe in the actions we take.

Our heritage formally began on July 4, 1776 when the 13 united States of America declared their independence from the State of Great Britain. The [Declaration of Independence](#) describes why we broke away and suggests the kind of society the founding fathers wanted to establish in America.

The [Constitution](#) and the related [Bill of Rights](#) and other [Amendments](#) describe the laws and principles upon which our country was founded.

The [National Archives and Records Administration](#) is a good resource for finding out about and obtaining copies of important national documents.

# Visit Washington DC, Your State Capitol or County Seat and Attend a Legislative Session



Washington D.C. is an educational and fun place to visit! As our nation's capitol, it's not only the center of our government and most of its agencies, but it is the home to many organizations that get funded by the federal budget and the location of nation's most recognizable and museums and monuments.

One is allowed to sit in on most Senate and House of Representative sessions as well as many Supreme Court proceedings. It is a great way to see of government in action and to get a sense of the quality of our elected leaders - both the good and the bad.



**Sites & Resources**



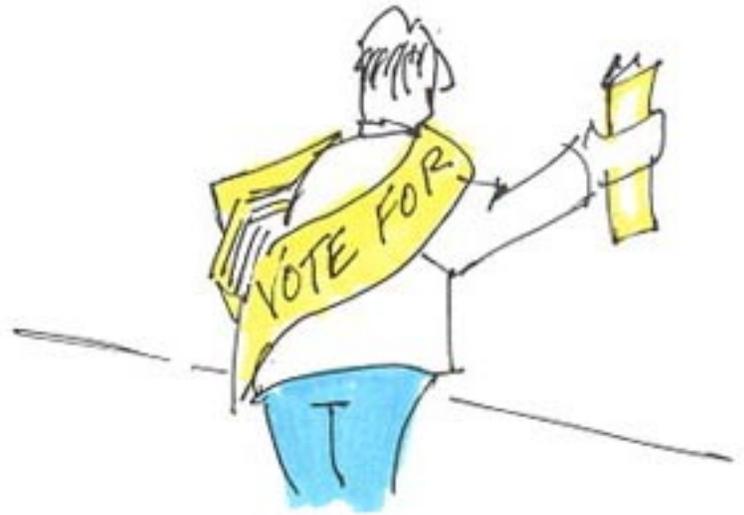
**Readers' Stories**

## Volunteer in an Election Campaign



If you want to feel involved, become a volunteer in a candidate's election campaign. It's easy and they need you. Set sense of election process and effort required to get elected, help clarify some of your own positions, understand issues like finance reform,

Many candidates have web site with contact information for volunteering. You can spend as much or as little time as you have.



Readers' Stories

## Reader Submitted Actions

I am lucky to live in a small community and spend a lot of time with the youth on flag ceremonies etc.

One program I have been involved in for 25 years is called "Freedom Academy." MG Watts (my old boss) started this program in Utah. We have recruited a large group of civic leaders, business owners and Entrepreneurs who sponsor the financial end of this event. We invite the new student body presidency of each high school in the state (usually 3 students per school= over 100 schools) to attend a five day camp at the National Guard training site. This is not a recruiting event by any means, but is conducted by volunteers out of uniform.

The curriculum includes a:

- visit to the Supreme Court and Senate at the state capitol building- freedoms and justice;
- half a day at the prison with inmates on death row - loss of freedom and it's price;
- meeting with the local press reps from each station - freedom of the press panel; and
- meeting with a religious representatives of each denomination - freedom of religion.

The list goes on and on. The event culminates with a patriotic essay contest and banquet where the parents return to pick up their enlightened students. The whole program is designed to provide the tools, incentive and materials to have each student body return to their high school in the coming year with a commitment to host a citizenship/patriotic assembly week at their high school and continue to help the students understand our responsibilities as good citizens/Americans, future leaders and voters. I have had many (including our current Governor) tell me it was one of the most memorable experiences they ever had in high school.

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