



COUNTY YOUTH GOVERNMENT DAY

FRAMEWORK OF THE PROGRAM

It has been recognized that there is little emphasis and very little material available on county government in our schools. The main objective of this program is to give more students a practical study of county government.

The framework:

1. Set up a good working committee from your county organization. County officials should be contacted and understand the importance of their part in this program. At the discretion of the county officials, a date should be selected for the students to appear at the County Courthouse.
2. Each school in the county should be contacted, in person (preferably the civics teacher), to explain the program and help them in any way. After the county officials have set the dates and the schools have agreed to participate, the classroom plans should be exclusively in the hands of the school authorities. In the past, many schools had this course for either juniors or seniors, with the thought that they would soon be eligible voters and would better be able to participate in the election process. Since a civic type program that covers county government is being taught at various grade levels, it was determined that the class that is given this course should be selected by the school administration.
3. Teachers are asked to get students involved in a class-wide election process for the county offices. A suggested time should be allotted for learning about the various offices and their responsibilities, a time for nominations, for campaigns and for real elections that would create much interest and understanding of government. The possibilities for innovative teachers to bring reality into the study of government are endless. Once students decide to become candidates, have campaigned, and have been duly elected, they would represent the school and the students at the County Government Day.
4. If the school has foreign exchange students, ask them to be present also, not as candidates for an office, but as interested individuals eager to learn about county government.
5. The program for the day may vary with each county. With registration followed by a general assembly, the students should then be allowed to visit with their counterparts to learn the many duties of the office. At noon, there is a luncheon. The sponsoring units should share the expense of this, as well as transportation, if any. If possible, allow the students to sit in on a portion of a County Court session or County Board session. Close out the day with another general assembly, which would be an ideal time to hand out their citations, as well as the citations for the county officials.
6. Your student representatives will bring back a deepened understanding of the government process because they will have experienced it. Hopefully, the school would be able to benefit from an increased interest and involvement in government, which would translate to greater involvement in the school's student governing body. All students should benefit by the early experience of government, the election process, and by sharing experiences of "real" government with their classmates.

7. There is very little textbook material on county government in our schools however, a good outside source is found in *The Framework of Your Wisconsin Government*, a publication offered by the Wisconsin Taxpayers Alliance (WTA) at a nominal cost. A digital version can be ordered at wispolicyforum.org/wisconsinframework-textbook-digital/. The latest revision was in 2017. The publication provides an excellent resource, not only on county government, but also that of towns, cities, and villages, school districts, and state levels of government. The WTA also provides speakers for free lecture service for assemblies and individual classes.
8. Do not forget **PUBLIC RELATIONS**. Get pictures of the groups during the day and have them published, along with a good story. Give your elected officials proper credit for their time and assistance. Do not forget a letter of thanks to the school officials. This program has met so much acclaim from both public officials and school instructors that we feel sure you will be rewarded greatly for having carried out a **COUNTY YOUTH GOVERNMENT DAY PROGRAM**.

COUNTY GOVERNMENT (Overview)

The county has always played an important part in Wisconsin government. It was a unit of government even before Wisconsin became a state in 1848. In that year there were only 29 counties. By 1901, the number had grown to 71. In 1961, the newest county of Menominee was created from the territory that made up the Menominee Indian Reservation. This brought the total number of counties to the current 72.

With few exceptions, the form of county government has not changed much since the early days. The services provided by the county have expanded greatly, however, and it has become a very important unit of local government.

THE COUNTY'S DUAL ROLE

The county actually serves two purposes. It provides certain services at the local level for the state, and it is a unit of local self-government.

The county assists the state in many ways. The **county sheriff** enforces state laws, including state traffic regulations. The **county district attorney** represents the state in prosecuting those who break state laws. The **county highway department** maintains the state trunk highways within its borders. The **county register of deeds** keeps certain records required by the state, such as property records, marriage licenses, and birth and death certificates. The **county clerk** handles elections and sells hunting and fishing licenses. These are just a few examples of the way the county acts as an arm of state government.

As a unit for local self-government, the county has been given powers to handle certain matters that are of local interest, but the county may do only those things specified by state law. For example, the county may build parks, keep up county forests, take care of county highways, provide mental health services, and maintain nursing homes for the aged. While the county may provide only those services that are required or permitted, it does have some control over how the government is organized and administered.

COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

The county board of supervisors passes ordinances (laws) and resolutions, and it may have the same responsibility for running county government if there is no county executive or county administrator.

Most boards are divided into **committees** to handle their duties. Some examples of board committees are finance, personnel, agriculture, highways, parks and zoning. The committee must solve problems that arise in its area of responsibility. Sometimes it does this by recommending that the board, as a whole, take necessary action. The board usually follows its recommendations. In counties without an executive or administrator, the committee also supervises the department that relates to its field. For administration may be called government by committee.

Each supervisor on the county board is **elected** from a supervisory district. The county's population should be divided about equally among the districts. If necessary, following the federal population census conducted every ten years, the county board must redraw the district to be sure they are equal in population.

All supervisors are elected on a **nonpartisan** basis for two-year terms. The maximum number of supervisors on the county board is limited by state law depending on the population of the county; however, the board may have fewer members if it chooses. Based on population, the range is 25,000 or less, 21 maximum supervisors. If the population were at least 100,000 but less than 500,000 the maximum number of supervisors would be 47.

Two counties, Milwaukee and Menominee, have county boards based on a different system of representation. The board determines the size of the Milwaukee County Board. Currently, it has 18 supervisors.

In Menominee County, which has only one town, the entire town board also serves as the county board of supervisors. Thus, the Menominee County Board has seven members.

County boards are **required by law** to meet at least twice a year. The April meeting is an **organizational meeting** in which the board elects its officers and names its committees. The purpose of the fall meeting in October or November is to **adopt the annual county budget**. Other meetings are held as often as necessary. Many county boards meet at least once a month.

COUNTY EXECUTIVE, COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

As county duties and services became more complex, state law was changed to permit selection of a single officer to manage county government. **If elected**, this official is called a county executive. **If appointed** by the county board, the title is county administrator.

A 1962 constitutional amendment authorizing an elected county executive in Milwaukee County was the first step toward this type of county government administration. Under State law, Milwaukee County must have an executive. A later constitutional amendment, ratified in 1969, allows all Wisconsin counties to create the position of executive or administrator if they choose.

In many respects, the duties of the two positions are similar. Both the executive and administrator, administer the affairs of the county, submit an annual budget and make certain appointments to office. There are some differences, however. A county executive is elected on a nonpartisan ballot by the people for a four-year term and is a more independent officer. The executive has the power to veto county board actions, including a partial veto on appropriations. On the other hand, a county administrator is selected by the county board to serve at its pleasure for an indefinite term and has no veto power. In 2020, there were 11 County Executives and 21 full time County Administrators and 25 part time County Administrators.

In counties that do not have either, an executive or administrator, an **“Administrative Coordinator”** must be appointed by the county board. In 15 counties the Administrative Coordinator has been granted most of the powers of an executive or administrator. In most cases, the county clerk or county board

chair has been designated administrative coordinator. State law does not specify the powers of duties of the office.

OTHER COUNTY OFFICIALS

Each county is required by the state constitution or state law to elect certain officials whose duties are set forth by state law. These are district attorney, sheriff, clerk, treasure, register of deeds, clerk of circuit court, coroner (unless there is a medical examiner system) and surveyor (unless that officer is appointed). Milwaukee County does not elect a coroner or surveyor. Although the district attorney is elected by county voters, it is designated a state office and the state pays the salary.

In contrast to county supervisors, these county officials are elected on a **partisan** basis for **two-year** terms. They run on a party ticket in the November general election and receive party support for their campaigns.

The county clerk serves as secretary to the county board and performs some general management duties. In counties without an executive or administrator, the clerk may compile the budget requests for the board to review and keep financial records on income and expenditures.

Another elected official is the **treasurer**, who handles all county government funds. The treasurer must receive and record all revenues coming into the county treasury and pay money out.

Several criticisms have been raised about the organization of county government. Some say that the county board should be concerned with lawmaking and not be burdened with administrative details. They would like to see wider use of a county executive or administrator with broad powers. Others have complained that having so many independently elected county officers' splits responsibility.



THE AMERICAN LEGION DEPARTMENT OF WISCONSIN

To The Principal,

Background: The American Legion is dedicated to the service of God and Country. We believe the best way to preserve our system of democracy is to help each of our country's youth become participating, freedom preserving citizens. We realize that our Democracy is in constant need of protection and improvement. The liberties, the duties, the rights we all enjoy are by no means perfect, nor is it likely they will ever be. However, it is the best system in the world.

Our rights are the product of people like you and me. People have ideas; they give them time and thought, talk them over with others, and then act on them, making them rules of conduct. These become the laws we live by. Our county government plays a very important part in the lives of each of us. With this in mind, we have sponsored the County Youth Government Day for over 30 years. We look at democracy as a living thing. It lives in the body and spirit of each and every one of us.

As an organization of veterans, we realize that our young people will have to take an active part in choosing who will represent them. They will need to keep their representatives informed of what they want, what they like, and what they dislike. This program is dedicated to achieving that end.

Too few Americans are **willing to take an active part** in elections. There is also a seeming reluctance to accept responsibility for doing minor things vital to government. There seems to be an **increasing reluctance** to run for office, **and many offices go uncontested**. Whatever the reason, it is a threat to our system of government, a threat that government will be run by self-seeking individuals, with voters drawing further away from government.

Some say that they **do not know enough** about the issues or election procedures to vote intelligently. They imply that this is because **someone else has failed** to do their job. That is why our county officials, through The American Legion, **and local school districts**, provide our youth **with this opportunity**.

However, each citizen **has a responsibility** to learn the process. Once the students selected in your school have the opportunity to attend the County Youth Government Day Program, they will bring that **experience back** to your schools to share and use what they have learned.

Chair, County Youth Government Day Program

SAMPLE OF FOLLOW-UP LETTER TO SCHOOLS

County Youth Government Day

Date _____

Name
Address
School

Dear Sir,

On _____, the _____ County American Legion Posts jointly sponsored a County Youth Government Day, with _____ high schools in the county invited to participate with representatives from each school.

Since your school participated, we would like to ask you for an evaluation of the event. We welcome all suggestions and criticisms, and we would appreciate your returning the enclosed questionnaire.

Signed: (County Commander or Chair)

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SAMPLE QUESTIONNAIRE TO BE INCLUDED WITH THE ABOVE

Date _____

Please return to:

(List the County Commander or Chair's Name and Address)

- Do you think the County Youth Government Day was a productive, educational experience for all who participated?
- Did the participants bring back meaningful reports to the other members of their class?
- Would you favor repeating this activity in following years?
- Have you any suggestions or criticism?

School Official: _____

School: _____

COUNTY YOUTH GOVERNMENT DAY

Sponsored by:

_____ County Council

THE AMERICAN LEGION

Date: _____

PARTICIPATING SCHOOL INSTRUCTOR: _____

NAME OF SCHOOL: _____

FOREIGN EXCHANGE STUDENT(S), If any: _____

PLEASE INCLUDE COUNTY OF STUDENT: _____

SUCCESSFUL CANDIDATES OF YOUR GENERAL ELECTION

COUNTY CLERK: _____

COUNTY TREASURER: _____

REGISTER OF DEEDS: _____

CLERK OF CIRCUIT COURT: _____

SHERIFF: _____

CORONER: _____

DISTRICT ATTORNEY: _____

Note: This is only a sample listing. More names may be added. Please type all names on the above form and return by _____ to the address below. Thank you.

(Date)

Sincerely,

Chair,
County Youth Government Day Program



THE AMERICAN LEGION DEPARTMENT OF WISCONSIN

County Youth Government Day Report

Survey Sheet: Post Chair & Post Commanders

**RETURN THIS SURVEY TO YOUR COUNTY COMMANDER, AND A COPY TO
DEPARTMENT HEADQUARTERS, BY THE SECOND WEEK OF MAY**

District: _____ **County:** _____ **Date of Program:** _____

Location of Program: _____
Courthouse, City Hall, Etc. (Include Address)

Chair: _____ **Phone:** _____

Address: _____ **City:** _____ **Zip:** _____

County Commander: _____ **Phone:** _____

Address: _____ **City:** _____ **Zip:** _____

Record of Posts, Units, and Squadrons involved in this year's County Youth Government Day Program
(Check all involved)

<u>Post No.</u>	<u>Unit</u>	<u>Squadron</u>	<u>Post Location</u>	<u>High School</u>	<u>No. of Students</u>

Totals:	_____ Posts	_____ Number of High Schools
	_____ Units	_____ Number of Students
	_____ Squadrons	_____ Number of Foreign Exchange Students

Estimated Cost of Program \$ _____ **(This figure is important, please include.)**

Brief Explanation of Costs: _____

Record number of continuous years of your Program, if known: _____

Use reverse side for any comments. If available, attach a copy of your agenda.



THE AMERICAN LEGION DEPARTMENT OF WISCONSIN

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Email: info@wilegion.org Web: wilegion.org
Phone: (608) 745-1090 Fax: (608) 745-0179

Memo

TO: County Commanders
FROM: Department County Youth Government Program Chair

All County Commanders should notify Department Headquarters regarding whom they have appointed as County Youth Government Chairs for the current year. Please fill out the form below and return to Department Headquarters, Attn: Americanism, P.O. Box 388, Portage, WI 53901.

Certificates of Appreciation and Participation will be available from Department Headquarters. The cost will be \$.50 each.

COUNTY YOUTH GOVERNMENT PROGRAM

District: _____ County: _____ Date of Program: _____

Location of Program: _____
Courthouse, City Hall, etc. (Include address)

Chair: _____ Phone: _____

Address: _____ City: _____ Zip: _____

County Commander: _____ Phone: _____

Address: _____ City: _____ Zip: _____

PLEASE SEND: _____ Certificate of Appreciation

_____ Certificate of Participation

(\$.50 each)