



► YMCA YOUTH AND GOVERNMENT

EDUCATOR TOOLKIT

2026-2027

*Everything you need to bring students into a real legislature,
from the first interest meeting to the floor of the State Capitol.*

NEW YORK

CONNECTICUT

RHODE ISLAND

[NYSYAG.ORG](https://nysyag.org)

WELCOME TO THE YOUTH AND GOVERNMENT EDUCATOR TOOLKIT

Dear Educator,

Thank you for considering YMCA Youth and Government for your students. This toolkit gathers what you need to start a delegation, guide students through writing their own bills, and bring them to debate in the real chambers of their State Capitol.

What's inside? Key dates for New York, Connecticut, and Rhode Island, a program overview, outreach templates, FAQs, and three ready-to-use classroom plans. Throughout, **NY** **CT** **RI** callouts show where the three state programs differ.

Why take part? In Youth and Government, your students will:

- Research a real issue and write a bill that amends an actual state law.
- Build public speaking, argument writing, and critical thinking skills.
- Debate respectfully with students who see things differently.
- Lead as committee chairs, presiding officers, cabinet members, justices, attorneys, and reporters.
- Join a national movement of about 45,000 students in 36 states and Washington, DC, with paths to national conferences and scholarships.

You don't need to be a government expert. YMCA staff provide the curriculum, training, and support, and we're happy to lead meetings at your school. Youth and Government is nonpartisan, and it's guided by the YMCA core values of Honesty, Respect, Responsibility, and Caring.

We can't wait to see what your students create.

With gratitude,

Drew Caldwell

Director of Youth Development, Alliance of New York State YMCAs

dcaldwell@ymcanys.org

YOUR ROLE AS AN EDUCATOR

- 1 Reserve your spot with the free Intent Form.
- 2 Recruit students and hold three short meetings.
- 3 Support bill writing and registration.
- 4 Chaperone and celebrate your delegation.

HOW TO READ THIS TOOLKIT

Most of the program is the same in every state. When something differs, look for a **Where states differ** box and the state tag that matches yours.

NY MS New York Middle School **NY HS** New York High School
CT Connecticut **RI** Rhode Island **ALL** Every state

QUESTIONS AT 10PM?

Ask **Gavel**, the Youth and Government chat assistant, on nysyag.org. For anything else, email Drew or book a call (page 18).

WHAT'S INSIDE

Start with the program basics, mark your state's dates, then pick the classroom plan that fits your time.

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QUICK START

New to the program? Read pages 4 to 8, submit the free Intent Form at nysyag.org, and book a call with Drew. Everything else can wait until your students say yes.

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

YMCA Youth and Government is a national, nonpartisan program where middle and high school students write real bills and run a model state government. In New York, Connecticut, and Rhode Island, students debate their bills in the actual chambers of the State Capitol.

► HOW TO JOIN

- 1 Find an adult advisor.** A teacher, counselor, or YMCA staff member leads the delegation. Even a few students can form one.
- 2 Fill out the free Intent Form.** It reserves space for your school with no cost and no commitment.
- 3 Hold three meetings.** An interest meeting, a bill writing workshop, and debate and parliamentary procedure training. Scripts are provided, and YMCA staff can lead any of them.

► AT THE CONFERENCE

- Committees hear, debate, and rank bills.
- Top bills move to the full House, Senate, or Assembly at the Capitol.
- Passed bills go to the Youth Governor to sign or veto.
- Students elect next year's leaders and celebrate together.

A RECORD YEAR

A record **823 students** took part in the 2026 New York High School Conference, and New York, Connecticut, and Rhode Island are all growing.

► COST AND AID

NY MIDDLE SCHOOL

Students **\$360** (4 per room) or **\$475** (2 per room). Adults \$360 shared or \$600 private.

NY HS CT

Students **\$435** (3 to 4 per room), **\$575** (2 per room), or **\$750** (private). Adults \$435 (2 per room) or \$750 (private).

RHODE ISLAND

A **\$250 school fee** only, with no per-student fee. The fee can be waived.

Fees are per person and cover the conference, two hotel nights, and all five meals. Schools are never charged more when rooms can't be filled perfectly.

Financial aid is need-based, and no student is turned away for financial reasons. One aid form works for every state. Connecticut aid awards range from \$50 to \$250. New groups may also qualify for start-up and scholarship support through a Carnegie partnership with YMCA of the USA; ask Drew how to apply.

WHERE STATES DIFFER

NY

New York runs two separate conferences: Middle School (grades 6 to 8, and schools may bring 5th graders) and High School (grades 9 to 12).

CT

Connecticut middle and high schoolers (grades 5 to 12) attend the same conference on their own tracks.

RI

Rhode Island is grades 9 to 12, with a middle school program coming soon.

STUDENT JOURNEY

Five steps from a first meeting to the national stage. First-year groups only need the first four, and the State Conference is the only required one.

01

JOIN A DELEGATION

Students join through their school or YMCA. First-year groups only need to attend the State Conference. Everything else is optional.

02

WRITE A BILL

Students pick a real issue, research the current state law, and write a bill to change it. Delegates can also take part without writing a bill.

03

TRAIN AND LEAD

Students who want more can apply for leadership roles. Leaders prepare at Steering weekends or online trainings before the conference.

04

STATE CONFERENCE

Delegates debate and vote on bills in the real chambers of the State Capitol, then elect next year's leaders.

05

NATIONAL STAGE

Selected high school students go on to the Conference on National Affairs (CONA), the National Judicial Competition (NJC), and the Y-Corps summer service trip.

► WHAT THE CONFERENCE LOOKS LIKE

WHERE STATES DIFFER

NY MS

One conference in November at The Desmond in Albany, with a full day at the Capitol.

NY HS

Thursday leadership day, then Friday to Sunday in Albany.

CT

Thursday to Saturday at the Hartford/Windsor Airport Marriott, with Friday at the State Capitol in Hartford.

RI

Day events with no overnight: a weekday Committee Day at a host high school, then a Saturday at the State House in Providence.

► A YEAR AT A GLANCE

FALL

Submit the Intent Form, hold the interest meeting, and apply for leadership roles (deadlines land in October). New York Middle School runs its whole season now, with the conference in November.

WINTER

Bill writing workshop, research, and drafting. Registration, bills, rooming, and aid forms are due in late January and February for Connecticut, Rhode Island, and New York High School.

SPRING AND SUMMER

State conferences in March and April, then elections for next year's officers. Selected high schoolers go on to CONA in July, NJC, and Y-Corps.

THREE MEETINGS

Interest meeting, bill writing workshop, and debate training. Scripts are provided, and YMCA staff can lead any of them in person or by video.

ONE REQUIRED EVENT

The State Conference. Cabinet, Steering weekends, and national conferences are optional, and some leadership roles need a year of experience first.

EVERYONE IS A LEGISLATOR

Every student debates and votes. Writing a bill, chairing a committee, or running for office are extra roles students can choose.

ROLES STUDENTS CAN TAKE

Every student is a legislator. Students who want more can take on one of these roles.

ROLE	WHAT THEY DO	WHERE
Legislator	Writes or sponsors bills, debates in committee and chamber, and votes.	ALL
Committee Chair	Runs a committee hearing using parliamentary procedure.	ALL
Presiding Officer	Elected leaders (Youth Governor, Lieutenant Governor, Speaker, and others) who plan and run the conference.	ALL
Governor's Cabinet	Policy experts who review bills in their area and advise the Youth Governor to sign or veto. For students who have attended a prior conference.	ALL
Judicial: Attorney or Justice	Attorneys write a brief and argue an appeal; Justices hear cases and write opinions.	NY
Youth in Law	A law-focused track at the Connecticut conference.	CT
Press Corps	Reports on the conference through articles, social media, photos, and video.	NY CT
Middle School Resource Team	High schoolers (grades 10 to 12) who mentor middle school delegates.	NY

APPLICATION DEADLINES, 2026-27

NY

Cabinet October 5, 2026; Judicial October 12, 2026; Press October 31, 2026; Middle School Resource Team October 5, 2026. Committee Chairs are chosen after the new year.

CT

Cabinet October 15, 2026; Committee Chair and candidate forms February 5, 2027.

RI

Leadership team and Cabinet October 31, 2026; candidate forms February 12, 2027.

PERMISSION

All statewide roles need permission from the student's advisor, teacher, or YMCA director.

FIRST YEAR? KEEP IT SIMPLE

Legislator is the only role a first-year delegation needs. Leadership roles are a great second-year goal, and the Cabinet requires a prior conference.

► MATCHING STUDENTS TO ROLES

A quick way to talk about roles with students who ask "what else can I do?"

Loves to speak up

Legislator and bill sponsor, then Committee Chair. Running for Presiding Officer is the natural next step.

Loves to write and argue

Judicial attorney or Justice in New York, Youth in Law in Connecticut, and the Press Corps for storytellers.

Loves detail and mentoring

Governor's Cabinet for returning policy minds, and the Middle School Resource Team for older students who like to coach.

KEY DATES FOR 2026-27

Mark your state's deadlines and work backward. Conference dates are in bold.

DATE	WHAT'S DUE
NEW YORK MIDDLE SCHOOL (GRADES 6 TO 8)	
October 2, 2026	Anticipated Numbers
October 28, 2026	Registration, bills, rooming, and financial aid
November 11, 2026	Payment
November 22 to 24, 2026	Middle School Conference, The Desmond and the State Capitol, Albany
NEW YORK HIGH SCHOOL (GRADES 9 TO 12)	
Oct 5 / Oct 12 / Oct 31, 2026	Cabinet / Judicial / Press applications
December 12 to 13, 2026	Judicial Steering (Justices and Presiding Officers), Hilton Garden Inn, Nanuet
January 11, 2027	Anticipated Numbers
February 8, 2027	Registration
February 15, 2027	Bills, briefs, rooming, Presiding Officer nominations, financial aid
February 27 to 28, 2027	Legislative Steering (Committee Chairs and Cabinet), Nanuet
March 1, 2027	Payment, CONA and NJC submissions
April 2 to 4, 2027	High School Conference, Albany (student leaders arrive Thursday, April 1)
CONNECTICUT (MIDDLE AND HIGH SCHOOL)	
October 15, 2026	Governor's Cabinet application
December 18, 2026	Anticipated Numbers
January 29, 2027	Registration
February 5, 2027	Bills, rooming, candidate and Committee Chair forms, financial aid, CONA and NJC
February 25, 2027	Payment
March 4 to 6, 2027	State Conference, Hartford/Windsor Airport Marriott and State Capitol
RHODE ISLAND (GRADES 9 TO 12)	
October 31, 2026	Leadership team and Governor's Cabinet application
December 18, 2026	Anticipated Numbers
February 5, 2027	Registration
February 12, 2027	Bills, candidate forms, CONA and NJC nominations
Date coming soon	Committee Day at a host high school
Saturday, March 13, 2027	State House Day, Rhode Island State House, Providence
NATIONAL	
July 3 to 8, 2027	CONA, YMCA Blue Ridge Assembly, Black Mountain, North Carolina

Award nominations in every state are due at 9pm on the second day of the conference. Running behind on anything else? Ask Drew **before** a deadline; short extensions are usually fine.

HOW TO GET STARTED

Three moves this month: look up your state's page, reserve your spot, and get your administration on board.

► REVIEW PROGRAM DETAILS

- **Find your state's page** at nysyag.org for dates, forms, and resources.
- **Reserve your spot** with the free, no-commitment Intent Form. In New York, the High School Conference has a size cap, so submit early.
- **Book a call with Drew** to plan next steps. He's happy to Zoom with your teachers or students.

► PLAN AHEAD

Know your timeline. Find your state's bill deadline on page 7 and work backward to leave time for research, drafting, and revision.

Pick your plan. Use the Extended Classroom Plan (page 22), the two-period Bill Writing Workshop (page 27), or the one-period Fast Track (page 30).

Line up chaperones. A ratio of about one adult for every four students works well. Every adult who attends must register.

Notify families. Use the sample parent letter on page 19. Each student registers with a parent or guardian, and the registration includes the YMCA permission slip.

Ask about funding. Many schools cover costs through district funds, a local education foundation, their local YMCA, or fundraising. A Carnegie partnership through YMCA of the USA also supports new groups and scholarships; ask Drew how to apply.

► STAY INFORMED

- Watch for monthly advisor emails from ymcanys.org addresses, and ask IT to allow them (page 39).
- Follow [@northeastyag](https://www.instagram.com/northeastyag) on Instagram.
- Watch the program video: youtu.be/4ZdvqaiwQHU

► TALK TO SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS

Each school's approval process is different, so check in with your administration early to find out what yours involves. You might start with an email like this one:

Dear [\[Principal Name\]](#),

I'd like to start a YMCA Youth and Government delegation at our school this year. It's a nonpartisan civics program where students research a real issue, write a bill that amends state law, and debate it with students from across the state in the actual chambers of the State Capitol.

The program supports our ELA and social studies goals: argument writing, close reading of real statutes, research, and public speaking. In its first year, our group would only need to attend the State Conference on [\[conference dates\]](#). Reserving our spot is free, and financial aid is available so cost doesn't keep any student out.

Could we find a time to talk about what approval would look like here? The YMCA provides the curriculum and training, and their staff can visit to help us get started.

Thank you,
[\[Educator Name\]](#)

NO APPROVAL FORM NEEDED

There's no program approval form on our side. Your school's own process (a club charter, a field trip request, a board item) is all that applies.

WHY IT WORKS IN THE CLASSROOM

Youth and Government builds the skills your state assessments measure, using real laws and real decisions.

► SKILLS STUDENTS BUILD

- **Argument writing:** a bill and its defense are an evidence-based argument.
- **Close reading:** students read and amend real state statutes.
- **Research:** students find data and weigh more than one side.
- **Speaking and listening:** timed speeches, questions, and rebuttals.
- **Civic dispositions:** respectful disagreement, compromise, and leadership.

► NONPARTISAN BY DESIGN

Youth and Government doesn't support any party, candidate, or agenda. Students debate ideas, never people. A "con" speech means "here's what could be better."

In Rhode Island, students join simulated Conservative and Liberal parties as roles in the program, not real endorsements.

► USING AI

AI is a tool and it's fine to use, but it's no replacement for knowledge, understanding, and experience. Students must understand and defend their own positions.

MIDDLE SCHOOL VS. HIGH SCHOOL

The Middle School program focuses on building confidence, basic critical thinking, and working with people. The High School program goes deeper into how government works and the specifics of law.

STATE CONNECTIONS

NY

Youth and Government can count toward the **Seal of Civic Readiness** when the school's Seal committee approves it. In grades 7 and 8, a student's bill can serve as the Middle School Capstone (1 point). In high school, it may count as a Civics Project (1.5 points) or 40+ hours of civic extracurricular work (0.5 point). Details: nysed.gov/standards-instruction/criteria-earn-seal-civic-readiness. See also page 21.

NY

The Middle School program reinforces the argument writing and research skills on the grades 3 to 8 ELA assessments, and wraps up in November, months before spring testing.

CT

Students read real Connecticut statutes and defend evidence-based bills, building skills on the Smarter Balanced ELA assessment and the SAT School Day, and supporting the civics coursework Connecticut requires for graduation. A full standards alignment document is available on request. Seal-Earning Units 1, 4, and 6 (page 21) build a portfolio for the new State Seal of Civics Education and Engagement.

RI

Ask Drew how the program can support your school's civics goals. Seal-Earning Units 1, 2, 3, and 7 (page 21) meet the Civic Literacy Act project rule.

“...for teenagers just learning these concepts I believe this experience is invaluable.

ADVISOR AND FORMER SOCIAL STUDIES TEACHER, NY HIGH SCHOOL

BILL WRITING TIPS

A strong bill picks one clear problem and fixes it by changing a real state law.

► THE PARTS OF A BILL

- 1 An Act To:** one sentence naming the law you change and what the bill does. About 90% of bills amend an existing law.
- 2 Purpose:** one or two sentences on the spirit of the bill. It's not an argument.
- 3 Provisions:** the step-by-step details: who oversees it, any penalties, and how it's paid for. ~~Strikethrough~~ shows deleted text, and underline shows added text.
- 4 Definitions:** the 3 to 5 key terms. Write these last.

► HOW COMMITTEES RANK BILLS

Committees score quality, not agreement:

- How clearly the bill states its purpose
- Evidence of preparation
- Importance to the state
- Whether it's realistic
- Whether it's debatable

A student can speak against a bill and still vote for it.

► TIPS FOR SUCCESS

- Start from a problem students care about locally.
- Find the current law first, then decide what to change.
- Keep it narrow. One good change beats five vague ones.
- Plan for the hard questions: who pays, who enforces, how you'll know it worked.
- Submit early. Students can revise until the Bill Book is finalized, about a week before the conference.

NEED HELP?

Ask Drew for the Bill Writing Guide and bill template, or book a bill writing workshop for your students. If a link to an older resource gives a security warning, email us and we'll send the file directly.

WHERE STATES DIFFER

NY HS

Teams of 2 to 4 students write each bill. A past topic can return with the students' own research and writing. Bills in correct format earn the Seal of State Approval.

NY MS

Each delegation brings one bill for every 8 students (or part of 8). A bill can have 1 to 8 authors. Every student is a legislator; bill author is an extra role.

CT

Each student usually writes one bill. The advisor completes the Bill Submission form.

RI

Committees aren't grouped by topic, so students hear a wide range of bills. Zoom help sessions with the youth officers run in the months before the conference.

LEADERSHIP AND NATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

Once students have a conference under their belts, there's a lot more to do. All of these are optional.

► LEADERSHIP TRAINING

NY

Steering weekends at the Hilton Garden Inn, Nanuet: Judicial Steering (December 12 to 13, 2026) trains Justices; Legislative Steering (February 27 to 28, 2027) trains Committee Chairs and the Cabinet. \$120 per student, \$180 per adult. Schools without student leaders don't need to attend.

CT

RI

Leaders train through online meetings before the conference.

► NATIONAL CONFERENCES

CONA, THE CONFERENCE ON NATIONAL AFFAIRS

High school delegates write proposals on national issues and debate them with students from across the country. **July 3 to 8, 2027**, YMCA Blue Ridge Assembly, Black Mountain, North Carolina. **\$1,250**.

NJC, THE NATIONAL JUDICIAL COMPETITION

Mock trial and appellate court for high schoolers. About \$650 plus travel; budget about \$1,200. Dates and host city coming soon.

Aid and payment plans are available for both. Payment timing never affects selection.

► SERVICE AND ADVOCACY

Y-Corps (grades 9 to 12): a summer service trip with teens from several states. Members complete 50 service hours, raise \$1,000 for the scholarship fund. **CT** Applications due January 15, 2027.

National Youth Advocate Program: a free program where high schoolers learn federal policy advocacy and speak up in Washington, DC.

NY

Youth Advocates Academy: builds up to State Advocacy Day, February 8 to 9, 2027. Applications due October 31, 2026.

National Civics Bee (grades 6 to 8): an essay and live civics competition. 2027 essays are due February 2, 2027.

HOW TO APPLY FOR CONA AND NJC

NY

National Conference submissions by March 1, 2027.

CT

Self-Nomination form by February 5, 2027.

RI

Pre-Conference Award Form by February 12, 2027.

CORE VALUES, NOT Y-CORPS

Two names that sound alike: the YMCA **core values** (Honesty, Respect, Responsibility, Caring) guide every conference, including the core value speeches. **Y-Corps** is the summer service program above.

PREPARING FOR THE CONFERENCE

What advisors need to know before the trip.

► BEFORE YOU GO

- ☐ Check your delegation's view links: registration, rooming, and bills.
- ☐ Register every adult and include them on the rooming form.
- ☐ Review the Code of Conduct with students.
- ☐ Join the adult GroupMe from the pre-conference email.
- ☐ Share the Bill Book so students can practice pros and cons.
- ☐ Note dietary needs on registration so meals are ready.

► DURING THE CONFERENCE

Your biggest job is supporting your students. Advisors also help supervise specific areas at specific times so an adult is always present. Supervision is shared, and you can partner with other advisors.

► DRESS CODE

It's a professional conference, so business attire for sessions and the Capitol, and casual clothes in the evenings. Officers dress formally throughout.

Behavior matters far more than dress code. We only ask people to wear the most appropriate clothes they can. Please don't buy new clothes just for this, and advisors decide what's appropriate for their students. No one is judged on what they wear.

WHERE STATES DIFFER

NY MS

Arrive Sunday between 1 and 3pm (closer to 3 is best). Rooms aren't guaranteed until 5pm, but there's space for luggage and changing. The conference ends at 11:30am Tuesday.

NY HS

Student leaders arrive Thursday by 3pm. General delegates check in Friday around 12:30pm. Delegations stay at The Desmond or the Hilton Garden Inn Albany Airport, never split between them.

CT

Check-in starts at 3pm Thursday. Payment is due a week before the conference (February 25, 2027).

RI

No hotel. Printed bill books are provided at Committee Day, and lunch is provided on State House Day.

CONDUCT

Respect everyone, debate ideas not people, and follow adult and YMCA guidance. There's no online campaigning, and no posters or handouts for elections.

SAFETY

Adults supervise every area of the conference. If anyone is ever in immediate danger, call 911, then contact program staff.

CELEBRATE PARTICIPATION

Whether or not their bill passes, every student who stands up and speaks in a State Capitol deserves to be recognized. Celebrating them shows other students what's possible.

► WAYS TO HONOR STUDENTS

- Give a shout-out in the morning announcements.
- Have students present their bills to a class, the school board, or the PTA.
- Invite your local legislator to hear students' bills.
- Post photos from the Capitol on your school's website or social media.
- Recognize elected officers and award winners at an assembly.
- Host a debrief lunch to plan next year's bills.
- Feature the delegation in the school newsletter.

► AWARDS AT THE CONFERENCE

Awards include Outstanding Delegate, Outstanding Bill, and Outstanding Debater, plus attorney awards and named scholarships in New York. Results go out in the post-conference email.

Advisor nominations: advisors can flag students before the conference, but the nominations that count are the ones submitted during the conference, due at 9pm on the second night.

► READY-TO-USE CELEBRATION TEMPLATES

MORNING ANNOUNCEMENT

"Congratulations to our YMCA Youth and Government delegation, who spent [dates] debating real legislation in the [State Capitol / State House]. [Student name] wrote a bill to [one-line summary], and [number] of our students spoke on the floor. Ask them about it, and watch for next year's interest meeting."

► RECOGNITION THAT LASTS

Students elected at the conference serve as next year's Youth Governor, Lieutenant Governor, Speaker, and other officers, leading the program for thousands of their peers.

2026-27 YOUTH GOVERNORS

NEW YORK Joyce Chen
CONNECTICUT Shepard Fisher
RHODE ISLAND Ella Procaccianti

SAY THANK YOU, TOO

Fill out the post-conference survey. Your feedback shapes the next conference, and it's how we learn what to celebrate.

INVITATION TO A LOCAL LEGISLATOR

Dear [Senator / Assemblymember / Representative Name], our students at [School] wrote and debated bills this year through YMCA Youth and Government, including one on [topic]. They would be honored to present their work to you for 20 minutes at [school, date options]. Thank you for considering it. [Advisor name, contact]

WHAT PARTICIPANTS SAY

From 220 recent post-conference surveys across New York, Connecticut, and Rhode Island.

97%

would recommend the program to others

96%

would return

91%

better understand state government

89%

can better understand multiple perspectives

89%

improved their critical thinking

85%

are more likely to vote

► PROGRAM REACH

823

students at the 2026 New York High School Conference, a record

45,000

middle and high school students a year nationwide (YMCA of the USA, 2026)

36 + DC

states with a YMCA Youth and Government program

► EDUCATORS

“It is hard for me to express how much this impacts our students in a positive way; they come back from this different students.

ADVISOR, NY MIDDLE SCHOOL

“I LOVED the value speeches and the fact that everything centered back on respect for different opinions, as I feel that is so important for kids to hear.

ADVISOR, NY MIDDLE SCHOOL

“This was my first time, and it was an awesome experience to see these kids in action. To see them debate on what they were passionate about and come up with decisions was a great experience for me.

FIRST-TIME ADVISOR, NY HIGH SCHOOL

“...for teenagers just learning these concepts I believe this experience is invaluable.

ADVISOR AND FORMER SOCIAL STUDIES TEACHER, NY HIGH SCHOOL

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

Students across all three states, from anonymous post-conference surveys, shared as written.

► STUDENTS

“I loved this all it was so much fun and I never noticed that I could speak up and argue well.”
STUDENT, NY MIDDLE SCHOOL

“Program is life-changing! Love it so much.”
STUDENT OFFICER, NY HIGH SCHOOL

“...I really want to be a legislator when I grow up and I feel like this would be the best way to prepare and to have a better understanding of topic of laws...”
STUDENT, NY HIGH SCHOOL

“Best program I’ve been to, really well organized and fun, wished the conference hadn’t ended!”
STUDENT, NY HIGH SCHOOL

“...I really enjoyed this conference and the experience that I had with it!!”
STUDENT, CONNECTICUT

“I look forward to seeing how this program develops in the future.”
STUDENT OFFICER, RHODE ISLAND

► AND ONE MORE FROM AN ADVISOR

“Many have asked about bringing the program to the HS next year and continued to speak about the program for days. Thank you to your organization and staff for providing such a wonderful opportunity for our students!”
ADVISOR, NY MIDDLE SCHOOL

USE THESE IN YOUR PITCH

The stats and quotes on these two pages are yours to use in a proposal to administrators, a parent letter, or a school board update. Ask Drew for the full survey summary.

HAVE A STORY?

If a student or parent says something that captures the program, send it to dcaldwell@ymcanys.org. With permission, we share stories in advisor emails and on nysyag.org.

Quotes are from anonymous post-conference surveys, 2024 to 2026, shared as written.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

The questions advisors ask most, in the order they usually come up.

Which states does this office run?

New York, Connecticut, and Rhode Island. Every state runs its own program, so outside these three, contact your local YMCA or search “YMCA Youth and Government” plus your state.

Does every student have to write a bill?

No. Students can attend as delegates, debate, and vote without writing a bill. Just let us know ahead of time.

How much work is it for a teacher?

It’s a low lift. One teacher can lead a delegation of 2 to 10 or more students. Most groups need just three meetings, and YMCA staff can lead any of them in person or by video.

Does it have to be a school club?

No. Most delegations are clubs, but classes, student councils, debate teams, and YMCA teen groups like Leaders Club and Achievers all work.

How many chaperones do we need?

There’s no set cap. About one adult for every four students works well, and every adult must register so they’re covered for rooms and meals.

Is financial aid available?

Yes. Aid is need-based, families apply on one form that works for every state, and no student is turned away for financial reasons. Rhode Island’s \$250 school fee can be waived. New groups can also ask about Carnegie partnership support through YMCA of the USA.

How do we pay?

Checks are preferred, payable to “New York State YMCA Foundation” or “YMCA NYS,” mailed to YMCA Youth and Government, 465 New Karner Road, Albany, NY 12205, with your invoice number. Purchase orders and credit cards (about a 3% fee) also work. Please don’t bring payment to the conference; written confirmation from an administrator that it’s on the way is enough.

What if a student gets sick and can’t attend?

Conference fees are non-refundable, including when a student is sick or cannot attend.

We’re new. What do we have to do in year one?

Only the State Conference. The Cabinet, Steering, and national conferences are optional, and some leadership roles need a year of experience first.

What is the Intent Form?

A free, no-commitment form on your state’s page at nysyag.org that reserves space for your school. In New York, the High School Conference has a size cap, so submit it early.

What do the fees cover?

The conference, two hotel nights, and all five meals, per person. Schools are never charged more when rooms can’t be filled perfectly. Rhode Island charges a school fee only, with no hotel.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Approval, deadlines, visitors, and who to call.

Does our school have to approve the group? Is there a form?

There's no program approval form. Every school is different, so check with your administration about their process.

What's the difference between the NY Middle School and High School conferences?

They're two separate conferences with their own forms and deadlines. Middle School (November) builds confidence, critical thinking, and teamwork. High School (spring) goes deeper into how government works and the specifics of law.

Can we get an extension on a deadline?

Usually, yes. Ask Drew before the deadline if you can. A bill sent late without notice may not reach the floor.

Can students use AI?

Yes, as a tool. Students must understand their bills and defend their own positions in debate.

Is it partisan or religious?

Neither. The program is nonpartisan and open to everyone. The YMCA is for all.

Do our students have to attend Steering weekends?

Only New York students who hold a leadership role (Justices, Presiding Officers, Committee Chairs, Cabinet) attend Steering. Schools without student leaders don't need to. Connecticut and Rhode Island leaders train online.

What should students wear?

Business attire for sessions and the Capitol, casual in the evenings. Please don't buy new clothes for this; advisors decide what's appropriate, and no one is judged on what they wear.

Can parents come watch?

The Capitol is a public building, so visitors can watch debates after security. Parents who register as chaperones are welcome at the hotel; unregistered visitors must check in.

Why aren't we getting emails?

School filters sometimes catch our messages. Check spam for ymcanys.org addresses and share the IT guidance on page 39.

When are award nominations due?

At 9pm on the second day of the conference, in every state. Nominations submitted during the conference are the ones that count.

Who do I contact?

Drew Caldwell, Director of Youth Development: dcaldwell@ymcanys.org, or book a call at the link on page 18.

HAVE A QUICK QUESTION AT 10PM?

Ask **Gavel**, the Youth and Government chat assistant, on nysyag.org. It answers from the same facts as this toolkit and hands you off to Drew when a human is needed.

KEY RESOURCES

Everything lives at nysyag.org. These are the links advisors use most.

WEBSITE	nysyag.org
INTENT FORM AND STATE PAGES	nysyag.org (choose New York, Connecticut, or Rhode Island)
CONTACT	Drew Caldwell, Director of Youth Development dcaldwell@ymcanys.org
BOOK A CALL	outlook.office.com/bookwithme/user/e4e92065147b46239bfa2b6e461febaa@ymcanys.org?anonymous&ep=bwmEmailSignature Or use the booking link at the bottom of any email from Drew.
MAILING ADDRESS	YMCA Youth and Government, 465 New Karner Road, Albany, NY 12205
PROGRAM VIDEO	youtu.be/4ZdvqaiwQHU
INSTAGRAM	@northeasttyag
ASK GAVEL	The Youth and Government chat assistant, on every page of nysyag.org
NY SEAL OF CIVIC READINESS	nysed.gov/standards-instruction/criteria-earn-seal-civic-readiness
BILL WRITING GUIDE, TEMPLATE, AND BILL BOOKS	On request from Drew, or your state's page
LESSON PLAN LIBRARY	Storybook County Lesson Plans (14 lessons), Seal-Earning Units (7 units with a Seal crosswalk), and the Public Speaking Skill Builders handout, pages 21 and 24: drive.google.com/drive/folders/1MieLDxVzKNq7QTWjw2EPFDggMOaaJ2US
STATE STATUTES	NY nysenate.gov/legislation CT cga.ct.gov RI webserver.rilegislature.gov/Statutes
SUPPORT THE SCHOLARSHIP FUND	Venmo @nysymca or PayPal: paypal.com/donate/?hosted_button_id=AAQ7Y74Q4UTNE

EMAIL DOMAIN TO ALLOW

@ymcanys.org. Monthly advisor emails and every deadline reminder come from here. See page 39 for IT guidance.

FORMS RUN ON

Airtable. Registration, bills, rooming, and your delegation's view links all use airtable.com.

OLDER LINKS

Some school filters flag resources on our previous website. If a link gives a security warning, email us and we'll send the file directly.

CUSTOMIZABLE TEMPLATES

Copy, fill in the [blue brackets], and send. The Word version of this toolkit has these ready to edit.

SAMPLE PARENT/GUARDIAN ANNOUNCEMENT

Dear Parent/Guardian,

I'm excited to share that our school will take part in YMCA Youth and Government this year. In this nonpartisan civics program, students research a real issue, write a bill that changes state law, and debate it with students from across the state in the actual chambers of the State Capitol.

Students will meet [when and where] to write bills and practice debate. The State Conference is [dates] at [location]. [For overnight conferences: Students stay at the hotel with adult chaperones, and the fee covers lodging and all meals.]

The cost is [amount]. Financial aid is available, and no student is turned away for financial reasons. Each student registers online with a parent or guardian, and that registration includes the YMCA permission slip.

To learn more, visit nysyag.org or reach out to me with any questions. I'm excited for our students to find their voices.

Sincerely,
[Advisor Name]

SAMPLE STUDENT INTEREST FLYER TEXT

Want to write a real law?

Join Youth and Government! Pick an issue you care about, write a bill to fix it, and debate it in the real State Capitol with students from across the state.

No experience needed. You don't even have to write a bill to join.

Interest meeting: [date, time, room]

Advisor: [name]

SAMPLE PERMISSION NOTE FOR CLASS TIME

Dear Parent/Guardian,

As part of our [class/unit], students will research a state issue and draft a bill using the YMCA Youth and Government format. Attending the State Conference is optional.

If you'd like your child to attend, please complete the online registration by [deadline]. If you have questions, contact me at [email].

Thank you,
[Teacher Name]

MORE TEMPLATES

The principal email is on page 8, the IT allowlist request is on page 39, and celebration templates (announcement, social post, legislator invitation) are on page 13.

CHOOSE YOUR OWN ADVENTURE

Three flexible ways to launch Youth and Government with your students. Pick the one that fits the time you have.

01

Extended Classroom Plan

4 TO 6 WEEKS

A full unit or club season, from interest meeting to conference-ready.

Page 22

02

Bill Writing Workshop

2 CLASS PERIODS OR CLUB MEETINGS

Students go from idea to a reviewed draft bill.

Page 27

03

Fast Track to Your First Bill

1 CLASS PERIOD OR HOMEWORK

A structured worksheet that produces a submission-ready first draft.

Page 30

► WHICH ONE FITS?

IF YOU HAVE	USE	WHAT STUDENTS LEAVE WITH
A club that meets weekly all fall or winter	Extended Classroom Plan , paced to your state's bill deadline	Submitted bills, debate practice, and a delegation that knows the rules
Two class periods inside an existing unit	Bill Writing Workshop , with the Bill Builder Worksheet	A peer-reviewed draft ready to submit
One period, or a homework assignment	Fast Track , worksheet only	A complete first draft to type into the bill form
Ten spare minutes at any meeting	Public Speaking Skill Builders (page 24), two or three drills at a time	Louder, clearer, braver speakers, and the habit of practicing
A class that loves stories and argument	Literary Character Court (page 33) as a warm-up to the judicial programs, or another Storybook County lesson plan (link on page 33)	Courtroom roles, evidence-based argument, and a ranked choice vote

WE'LL TEACH IT WITH YOU

Whichever you choose, YMCA staff can co-teach or lead any session, in person or by video. Book a time on page 18.

TIMING BY STATE

NY MS start in September for October 28 bills. **CT RI NY HS** start by December for February deadlines.

TWO LESSON PLAN SERIES TO DOWNLOAD

Beyond the three plans in this toolkit, two complete series are ready to use. Both run on the same Youth and Government processes, both are free, and both live in one folder.

SERIES 1 · PRACTICE THE PROCESS

Storybook County Lesson Plans

Real Youth and Government processes practiced on public domain characters: Humpty Dumpty's wall, Jack's beanstalk, the Three Little Pigs' building code. Fourteen stand-alone lessons of three or four 30-minute sessions each, teachable alone, in any order, or as a full model-government unit that ends with a classroom State Conference.

- Writing a Bill
- Committee Hearing and Bill Ranking
- Floor Debate and Parliamentary Procedure
- Presiding Officer Training
- The Governor's Cabinet and Veto Override
- The Governor's Theme and State of the State
- Running for Office and Elections
- Lobbyists and Youth Advocates
- The Press Corps
- The Court of Appeals
- Middle School Resolutions
- Core Value Speeches
- Service Learning and the Service Focus
- Proposals and Roundtables (CONA)

Best for: new delegations, clubs, and ELA or social studies classes that want the skills without real-world politics. Grades 9 to 12, adaptable for middle school.

SERIES 2 · EARN THE SEAL

Seal-Earning Units

Seven multi-week projects that turn a student's real Youth and Government work into the documented, rubric-scored evidence a school Seal Committee can accept. Each unit maps to the **NY** Seal of Civic Readiness point values, the **CT** State Seal of Civics Education and Engagement portfolio, and the **RI** Civic Literacy Act student-led civics project.

- **1. The Civics Capstone** through Youth and Government: NY 4 points
- **2. Policy Advocacy Through a Bill:** NY High School Civics Project, 1.5 points
- **3. The School Equity Review:** NY High School Civics Project, 1.5 points
- **4. The Service Focus Project:** NY Service-Learning, 1 point; CT community service
- **5. The Legislative Research Project:** NY Civic Knowledge, 1 point
- **6. The Youth and Government Portfolio:** NY Extracurricular, 0.5 point; CT engagement evidence
- **7. The Student-Led Civics Project:** NY Middle School Capstone, 1 point; RI project

Best for: returning delegates, juniors and seniors, and advisors working with a Seal coordinator. The series overview includes a Seal crosswalk for all three states.

DOWNLOAD BOTH SERIES

One folder holds every lesson, unit, overview, and form, plus the Public Speaking Skill Builders handout (page 24), as branded PDFs:

drive.google.com/drive/folders/1MIeLDxVzKNq7QTWjw2EPFDqgMOaaJ2US

A SEQUENCE THAT WORKS

Storybook County in the fall to learn the process, then one Seal-Earning Unit alongside the student's real bill. Start with the Seal Committee in September and get the point value in writing before the work begins.

EXTENDED CLASSROOM PLAN

Designed for 4 to 6 weeks of class time or weekly club meetings. Adjust the pace to your state's bill deadline.

WEEK	KEY ACTIVITIES	SKILLS ADDRESSED
1. Interest and Orientation	• Show the program video. • Explain the student journey (page 5) and roles (page 6). • Brainstorm local problems students care about.	• Identify how state government affects daily life • Describe the roles of citizens in a democracy
2. How a Bill Becomes Law	• Map the real legislative process in your state. • Read one current statute together. • Students pick an issue and a partner or team.	• Explain the legislative process • Close reading of primary legal texts
3. Research	• Find the current law the bill will change. • Gather data and at least two viewpoints. • Fill in the Bill Builder Worksheet (page 31).	• Evaluate sources and evidence • Analyze multiple perspectives
4. Writing Workshop	• Run the Bill Writing Workshop (page 27). • Peer review with the ranking criteria. • Revise and submit by your state's deadline.	• Argumentative writing • Constructive feedback
5. Parliamentary Procedure	• Teach the order of debate and motions (page 23). • Mock committee hearing on two student bills.	• Speaking and listening • Rules of order and civil discourse
6. Conference Prep	• Practice 4-minute openings and 1-minute speeches. • Review the Bill Book and prepare questions. • Cover conduct, dress code, and logistics.	• Public speaking • Preparation and responsibility

TIMING BY STATE

NY MS start in September for October 28 bills.

CT RI NY HS start by December for February deadlines.

SHORT ON WEEKS?

Weeks 3 and 4 are the heart of it. If you only have three meetings, do Week 1, then run the two-period Bill Writing Workshop (page 27) and fold parliamentary procedure into the second period.

DEBATE AND PARLIAMENTARY PROCEDURE BASICS

A one-page reference for Week 5, or to post in your classroom.

► HOW EACH BILL IS HEARD

- 1 Opening:** the sponsors present the bill (4 minutes). Unused time is saved for the closing.
- 2 Technical questions:** questions that ask for facts only, not opinions.
- 3 Debate:** con and pro speeches alternate, starting and ending with a con. Speeches run about 1 minute.
- 4 Closing:** the sponsors respond and sum up.
- 5 Decision:** committees rank bills; chambers vote. A simple majority passes a bill.

VETO OVERRIDES

If time allows, a vetoed bill can be overridden with a two-thirds vote of the chamber.

► MOTIONS

IN COMMITTEE

Point of information, point of order, and point of personal privilege.

IN CHAMBER, ALSO

Division of the house, extending debate, and previous question (ending debate), which needs a two-thirds vote.

► DECORUM

- Speak through the chair: “Thank you, Chair. [Name], [delegation].”
- Refer to others as “a previous speaker.”
- Debate the bill, never the person.
- No props and no clapping after a vote.

Try it: “Thank you, Chair. Maya Lopez, Saratoga delegation. I rise in opposition. A previous speaker said the bill is paid for, but Section 3 names no funding source...”

The full rules and chair script are in the front of each conference Bill Book.

PUBLIC SPEAKING SKILL BUILDERS

Fifteen short, repeatable drills for storytelling, delivery, confidence, impromptu speaking, and brevity. Each takes 3 to 10 minutes, needs no materials, and the numbered steps are the script. Pick two or three per meeting.

► **STORYTELLING** Four drills for finding the one true point of a story, shaping someone else's material, and editing without mercy.

1

Six-Word Story

STORYTELLING • SOLO THEN PAIRS • 5 MIN

Forces you to find the one true point of your story before you pad it with detail.

1. Write your Story of Me/Us/Now in exactly six words.
2. Read it aloud to a partner.
3. Expand it to a full 60-second story, keeping that six-word core as the spine.
4. Partner checks: does every sentence still serve that core line?

BUILDS: STORY OF ME/US/NOW

2

Story Swap

STORYTELLING • PAIRS • 8 MIN

Teaches the difference between a fact and a narrative by forcing you to shape someone else's raw material.

1. Trade one true personal detail with a partner: a challenge, a change, a moment.
2. Each person turns the other's detail into a Y story: person, challenge, intervention, change.
3. Tell it back to its original owner.
4. Owner confirms: did it capture the real shape of what happened?

BUILDS: THE Y STORY FORMAT

3

Ask-First Drafting

STORYTELLING • SOLO • 10 MIN

Prevents the "great story, no point" problem by locking in the call to action before anything else.

1. Write only the ask or call-to-action sentence first.
2. Work backward: what story would make that ask land?
3. Draft the story toward that one sentence.
4. Read the ask aloud last, exactly as first written. Does the story earn it?

BUILDS: EVERY STORY ENDS WITH AN ASK

4

Cut It in Half

STORYTELLING • SOLO • 10 MIN

A direct drill for the 10%-keep editing rule: cut on purpose before someone else cuts for you.

1. Take a finished story or statement draft.
2. Physically cross out half the words.
3. Read the cut version aloud. Does the ask still land?
4. Repeat once more, cutting another 20%, if time allows.

BUILDS: KEEP THE 10%, CUT THE REST

WHERE THESE FIT

Weeks 5 and 6 of the Extended Classroom Plan, the last ten minutes of any club meeting, and the night before the conference. Student leaders can run every drill themselves.

QUICK SESSION PLANS

20 minutes, first meeting: drills 1, 5, 7. **30 minutes, before bills are due:** 3, 4, 10. **45 minutes, conference week:** 9, 12, 13, 15. **CONA prep:** 12, 13, 14.

HOW TO RUN ANY DRILL

1

Name the one skill it builds, in a sentence.

2

Demonstrate it once yourself. Students relax when the adult goes first.

3

Run it in pairs or small groups so everyone speaks, not one volunteer.

4

Debrief in two minutes: one thing that worked, one thing to try next time.

FEEDBACK THAT HELPS

Specific beats nice. "Good job" teaches nothing; "you hit the center point twice and skipped the left" changes the next round.

Keep it to one thing per round, and let students give it. Listeners who must name what worked learn as fast as the speaker.

PUBLIC SPEAKING SKILL BUILDERS

► **DELIVERY** Four drills for projection, posture, and eye contact, the habits that get heard across a chamber.

5 Volume Ladder

DELIVERY • SOLO OR PAIRS • 5 MIN

Finds the “address the whole chamber” volume without it feeling like shouting.

1. Deliver one line at a whisper.
2. Deliver the same line at normal conversation volume.
3. Deliver it again at full chamber-address volume.
4. Partner names which volume felt the most natural, and the most effective.

BUILDS: PROJECT YOUR VOICE

6 Hands-Behind-the-Back Opening

DELIVERY • SOLO • 3 MIN

Breaks the habit of defensive, closed-off posture before it starts.

1. Clasp hands behind your back for the first 15 seconds of your opening.
2. Release into natural gesture for the rest of the statement.
3. Notice the moment your hands want to come forward; that’s often where the real point begins.

BUILDS: DON’T CLOSE YOURSELF OFF

7 Three-Point Eye Contact

DELIVERY • SOLO OR GROUP • 5 MIN

A concrete fix for “no eye contact” and “not addressing the whole chamber.”

1. Pick three fixed points across the room: left, center, right.
2. Deliver your statement, consciously landing on each point at least once per minute.
3. Listener tracks which point got skipped.

BUILDS: ADDRESS THE WHOLE CHAMBER

8 Walk-and-Talk

DELIVERY • SOLO • 6 MIN

Most speakers find their stronger, more grounded version by comparing both and feeling the difference.

1. Deliver a full opening statement while slowly pacing.
2. Deliver it again standing still, planted.
3. Partner names which version felt more confident.
4. Keep that version’s posture for the next practice round.

BUILDS: CONFIDENCE AND RHYTHM

► **CONFIDENCE** Three drills for staying composed under interruption, a weak draft, or the urge to hedge.

9 Interruption Drill

CONFIDENCE • PAIRS • 6 MIN

Builds the “defend it under questioning” muscle from the CONA proposal format.

1. Speaker begins their statement.
2. Partner interrupts mid-sentence with a tough technical question.
3. Speaker finishes the thought, answers directly, and returns to the speech without losing the thread.
4. Repeat with a harder interruption.

BUILDS: DEFEND IT UNDER QUESTIONING

10 The Bad Draft

CONFIDENCE • SOLO OR GROUP • 5 MIN

Separates good content from good delivery, so speakers see they can carry a shaky draft, and that a great draft still needs strong delivery.

1. Write (or use) a deliberately weak, thin opening statement.
2. Deliver it with full confidence and commitment: eye contact, projection, pacing, the works.
3. Audience rates delivery and content separately.
4. Discuss: how far did delivery alone carry a weak draft?

BUILDS: CONFIDENCE AND CHARISMA

11 Apology Ban

CONFIDENCE • GROUP • 10 MIN

Directly trains “never apologize for having the microphone.”

1. One full practice round, no exceptions: no “sorry,” “I guess,” “this is probably wrong, but...,” or any hedge.
2. Listeners call out any hedge the instant they hear it.
3. Speaker restarts the sentence without the hedge.
4. Debrief: how did cutting hedges change how confident the speech sounded?

BUILDS: NEVER APOLOGIZE FOR THE MIC

SCORING THAT MATCHES THE CONFERENCE

Debate rubrics reward speakers who concede what should be conceded and keep the thread under questioning. Drills 9, 13, and 14 train exactly those lines.

PUBLIC SPEAKING SKILL BUILDERS

- **IMPROMPTU AND Q&A** Three drills for speaking with zero prep, conceding without surrendering, and working a statistic in on the spot.

12 Table Topics

IMPROMPTU AND Q&A • GROUP • 10 MIN TOTAL, 60 SEC EACH

Builds the same muscle CONA roundtables and technical questions demand: speaking with zero prep.

1. Draw a random prompt: a Storybook County topic, or a real bill topic.
2. 30 seconds silent prep, no notes allowed after that.
3. Deliver 60 seconds, no stopping.
4. Group names one thing that worked under pressure.

BUILDS: CONA ROUNDTABLE READINESS

13 Concede-and-Pivot

IMPROMPTU AND Q&A • PAIRS • 6 MIN

Models the debate rubric's "conceded what should be conceded" standard without abandoning the position.

1. Partner raises a genuinely strong con argument against the speaker's bill or position.
2. Speaker concedes the valid part in one sentence.
3. Speaker pivots back to their position in the next sentence.
4. Repeat with a different con, raising the difficulty each round.

BUILDS: CONCEDE WITHOUT SURRENDERING

14 Rapid-Fire Statistics

IMPROMPTU AND Q&A • GROUP • 8 MIN

Builds the Statistics component of the opening-statement framework on demand, not just in prepared drafts.

1. Facilitator hands the speaker a random statistic (real or invented for practice).
2. Speaker has 10 seconds to work it into a sentence supporting their bill or position.
3. Group rates: did the stat land naturally, or feel bolted on?
4. Rotate through the group.

BUILDS: THE STATISTICS COMPONENT

PROMPTS FOR TABLE TOPICS

"Should Storybook County license giants?"
 "Convince the Three Bears to lock their door."
 "Defend your bill to a skeptical parent in 60 seconds." "What should every freshman know about the Capitol?" Keep a jar of these; students add their own.

- **BREVITY** One drill for compressing gracefully under a hard stop: the four-minute clock, and real life.

15 The Elevator Cutoff

BREVITY • PAIRS OR GROUP • 8 MIN

Trains graceful compression under a hard stop, useful for both the 4-minute chamber clock and a real elevator speech.

1. Speaker begins delivering their full opening statement.
2. Facilitator calls "time" at 30 seconds, far short of the real limit.
3. Speaker must instantly summarize everything left in one or two sentences.
4. Discuss: what did the compressed version keep, and what did it correctly cut?

BUILDS: BREVITY AND THE ELEVATOR SPEECH

RUN IT AS A FOUR-WEEK ARC

Week 1: Storytelling drills 1 and 3. **Week 2:** Delivery 5, 6, 7. **Week 3:** Confidence 9 and 11, then 10 for fun. **Week 4:** Impromptu 12 and 13, and finish with the Elevator Cutoff so everyone has felt the clock before the real one.

COMPANION

These drills come from the Public Speaking Skill Builders deck and are also in the lesson plan folder (page 21) as a standalone handout. Every drill pairs with a Storybook County lesson: Core Value Speeches, Running for Office, Floor Debate, and Proposals and Roundtables.

BILL WRITING WORKSHOP LESSON PLAN

Designed to fit in 2 class periods or club meetings (45 minutes each). This workshop takes students from an idea to a peer-reviewed draft bill, using the Bill Builder Worksheet on page 31. It fits into regular class time and works for grades 6 to 12.

► OBJECTIVES

Students will:

- Identify a real problem in their community or state.
- Find the current law that relates to it.
- Write a clear, realistic bill that changes that law.
- Anticipate the strongest arguments against their bill.
- Give and use peer feedback based on the ranking criteria.

► AT A GLANCE

PERIOD	FOCUS	WORKSHEET STEPS
1 (page 28)	Finding the problem and the law	Steps 1 and 2
2 (page 29)	Drafting and peer review	Steps 3 to 6

TEACHER RESOURCES

- Program video: youtu.be/4ZdvqaiwQHU
- Bill Writing Guide and template (from Drew)
- A sample Bill Book
- Whiteboard or projector, timer

STUDENT RESOURCES

- Bill Builder Worksheet (page 31)
- Device for research
- Your state's statutes website

STATE STATUTES

- NY** nysenate.gov/legislation
- CT** cga.ct.gov
- RI** webserver.rilegislature.gov/Statutes

FACILITATION NOTE

About 90% of bills amend an existing law. Finding that law is the hardest and most valuable step, so give Period 1 the time it needs. Model one statute search on the projector before students try their own.

ANTICIPATE • 10 MINUTES

Step 1: Think-Pair-Share

- Write on the board: “What’s one thing in our town or state that should work better?”
- Students jot 2 to 3 ideas, discuss with a partner, and share.
- Examples: later school start times, safer crosswalks, recycling in apartments, cell phone rules.

Step 2: Introduce Youth and Government

- Say: “What if you could write the law that fixes it, and argue for it in the State Capitol?”
- Optional: show the program video (3 minutes).

REFLECT • 5 MINUTES

Exit ticket: “Our bill would change ____ so that ____.”

ENGAGE • 30 MINUTES

Step 3: Narrow the Idea (10 minutes)

- Teams complete Step 1 (IDENTIFY) on the Bill Builder.
- Push for one specific problem, not a whole topic.

Step 4: Find the Law (20 minutes)

- Teams search their state’s statutes for the related law (Step 2: FIND).
- Model one search on the projector first.
- If there’s no law, that’s fine: they’ll write a new section.

FACILITATION NOTE

About 90% of bills amend an existing law. Finding it is the hardest and most valuable step.

► NARROWING IN PRACTICE

TOO BROAD	NARROW ENOUGH TO WRITE
“Fix school lunches”	Require every public school to offer one hot vegetarian option daily
“Make roads safer”	Lower the speed limit to 20 mph within 500 feet of any K-8 school during arrival and dismissal
“Do something about phones”	Require districts to adopt a written cell phone policy and share it with families each fall

ANTICIPATE • 5 MINUTES

Ask: “What makes a bill hard to argue against?”
Look for: clear, realistic, paid for, and enforceable.

EXPLORE • 35 MINUTES

Step 5: Draft (15 minutes)

- **An Act To:** one sentence naming the law and the change.
- **Purpose:** the spirit of the bill in 1 to 2 sentences.
- **Provisions:** who does what, penalties, and funding.
- **Definitions:** 3 to 5 key terms, written last.

Step 6: Plan for Opposition (5 minutes)

Teams complete Step 4 (DEFEND): the two hardest questions they’ll face, and their answers.

Step 7: Peer Review (10 minutes)

Teams swap drafts and score them on the ranking criteria:

- Is the purpose clear?
- Is there evidence of preparation?
- Is it important to the state?
- Is it realistic?
- Is it debatable?

Step 8: Revise and Submit (5 minutes)

Option 1 (best): submit through your state’s bill form in class.

Option 2: finish at home and submit by the deadline.

REFLECT • 5 MINUTES

Remind students: their voices matter, their bill will be heard, and a con speech against it is a chance to make it better.

► PEER REVIEW CARD

Copy one per team, or have reviewers write on the back of the draft.

CRITERION	SCORE 1 TO 5	ONE SENTENCE OF FEEDBACK
Clear purpose		
Evidence of preparation		
Important to the state		
Realistic		
Debatable		

FAST TRACK TO YOUR FIRST BILL

Designed to fit in 1 class period or as a homework assignment. This Fast Track activity guides students through a complete first draft in one sitting, using the Bill Builder Worksheet.

► BUILT FOR CLARITY AND ACCESSIBILITY

- Light research: one statute search
- No multi-day scaffolding needed
- Built-in structure supports all learners

Students who finish the worksheet will have a first draft ready to type into their state's bill form. Revision time makes it stronger, but it's optional.

► OBJECTIVES

- Identify a real problem in the community or state.
- Find the related state law.
- Organize a bill using the four bill sections.
- Prepare for the toughest questions.

► MATERIALS

- Program video: youtu.be/4ZdvqaiwQHU
- Bill Builder Worksheet (next pages)
- Device with internet for the statute search

ANTICIPATE

- Introduce Youth and Government and show the video.
- Frame the goal: "Today you'll draft a real bill to fix a real problem."

IF STUDENTS ARE STUCK ON AN IDEA

- "What do you complain about that the state could fix?"
- "What rule would make school or your town fairer or safer?"

TEACHER GUIDANCE

- Encourage narrow, realistic ideas, not broad topics.
- Focus on logic, not perfect legal language.

SUGGESTED PACING (45 MINUTES)

Video and framing 8 • Steps 1 and 2 on the worksheet 15 • Step 3 drafting 12 • Steps 4 and 5 defend and check 7 • Step 6 submit or assign as homework 3.

► WHAT A FIRST DRAFT CAN LOOK LIKE

An Act To amend the Vehicle and Traffic Law to create school-zone speed limits during arrival and dismissal.

Purpose: Students walking to school are hit at crosswalks every year. This bill slows traffic when children are most likely to be in the road.

Provisions: (1) The speed limit within 500 feet of any public K-8 school is 20 mph for one hour before and after the school day. (2) Districts post signs; the state Department of Transportation reimburses the cost. (3) Fines are double the standard amount and fund crossing guard positions.

Definitions: "School day" means the hours set by the district calendar. "Arrival and dismissal" means the hour before and after the school day. (Illustration only. Teams check their own state's law and format.)

BILL BUILDER WORKSHEET

NAME(S)

DELEGATION

STEP 1: IDENTIFY

Name one specific problem in your community or state.

The problem is:

It affects these people:

I know it's a problem because (fact or data):

STEP 2: FIND

Find the state law that relates to your problem.

Law name and section (for example, Education Law § 3204):

Right now, the law says:

TIP: NO LAW ON IT YET? THEN YOUR BILL ADDS A NEW SECTION. NAME WHERE IT WOULD GO.

STEP 3: WRITE

An Act To: amend _____ to _____

Purpose (the spirit of your bill, in 1 to 2 sentences):

Provisions (who does what, penalties, how it's paid for):

1.

2.

3.

BILL BUILDER WORKSHEET

Definitions (3 to 5 key terms, written last):

TERM	MEANS

STEP 4: DEFEND

What are the two hardest questions someone could ask about your bill?

TOUGH QUESTION	YOUR ANSWER

TIP: THINK ABOUT COST, WHO ENFORCES IT, AND HOW YOU'D KNOW IT WORKED.

STEP 5: CHECK

Score your draft the way a committee will:

☐ Clear purpose ☐ Evidence of preparation ☐ Important to the state ☐ Realistic ☐ Debatable

The strongest part of our bill is:

.....

One thing we'll improve:

.....

STEP 6: SUBMIT

- ☐ Type your bill into your state's bill submission form. Your advisor has the link.
- ☐ Check your state's deadline on page 7.
- ☐ Practice a 4-minute opening speech.

OPTIONAL: PEER REVIEW

Swap with another team. What did they do really well? What's one suggestion to make it even better?

.....

.....

EXAMPLE TOOLS: LITERARY CHARACTER COURT

A two-part unit that turns favorite stories into a case for justice. Built from lesson plans by Youth and Government educators, and great for clubs, ELA, or social studies.

► HOW THE UNIT WORKS

1

Character Proposals and Ranked Choice Voting

Teams argue which storybook character should stand trial and why. The class votes with a ranked choice ballot to pick the case.

4 sessions: three 30-minute prep sessions and one 60 to 90 minute presentation and voting session.

2

Literary Character Mock Trial

The class puts the winning character on trial, with a judge, attorneys, witnesses, and a jury.

4 to 5 sessions of 30 minutes (45 minutes for the trial day is best).

► LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Apply legal concepts like intent, negligence, and burden of proof to a text.
- Build arguments from both sides, using evidence from the story.
- Understand courtroom roles and how ranked choice voting works.
- Practice public speaking, questioning, and teamwork.

GROUND RULES

Argue from the text, not personal opinion or a character's popularity. Treat every role with respect, including the defendant.

STORYBOOK COUNTY LESSON PLANS

This court is the companion to 14 lessons that use public domain stories to practice real Youth and Government processes: bills, committees, floor debate, presiding, the Cabinet, elections, lobbying, press, the Court of Appeals, resolutions, core value speeches, service, and CONA proposals. Each is three or four 30-minute sessions. Seven Seal-Earning Units are in the same folder (page 21): drive.google.com/drive/folders/1MieLDxVzKNq7QTWjw2EPFDqgMOaaJ2US

► AT A GLANCE

GRADES	9 to 12, adaptable for 6 to 8
SUBJECTS	civics, law, literature, public speaking
GROUP SIZE	10 to 30 students
CHARACTERS	Goldilocks, the Big Bad Wolf, Ebenezer Scrooge, Rip Van Winkle (all public domain)

HOW IT CONNECTS TO YOUTH AND GOVERNMENT

NY

The Judicial program is an appeals court: attorneys write briefs and argue before Justices. This unit is a trial, which is a great first step.

CT

A natural warm-up for Youth in Law.

NAT'L

NJC includes a mock trial track for high schoolers.

Session 1: Introduction and Character Selection (30 min)

- **Hook (5):** “Has a character ever done something that seemed wrong or unfair?”
- **Legal concepts (10):** hand out the Legal Concepts Cheat Sheet (page 37).
- **Brainstorm (10):** list public domain characters who may have committed a crime (against society) or a tort (a civil wrong against a person).
- **Teams (5):** groups of 2 to 3 each pick one character. New characters need teacher approval.

Session 2: Building the Legal Argument (30 min)

- **Review (5):** revisit the cheat sheet and assignments.
- **Research and outline (20):** teams find the offense, its definition, and possible defenses, citing specific moments from the story.
- **Check-in (5):** circulate and coach.

FACILITATION NOTE

What matters is what the text supports, not what students personally think of the character.

Session 3: Preparing the Presentation (30 min)

- **Refine (5):** find gaps and the strongest defense against your own case.
- **Build (20):** follow the outline at right. Assign roles: presenter, researcher, legal expert. A little humor is welcome.
- **Practice (5):** rehearse and trade feedback.

Session 4: Presentations and Voting (60 to 90 min)

- **Presentations (30 to 45):** strict time limit, about 4 minutes per team.
- **Ranked choice voting (10):** explain how it works (page 35).
- **Vote (5):** students rank every case by strength of argument.
- **Count and discuss (15 to 20):** tally round by round on the board, explaining each step.
- **Wrap-up (5):** every team did real legal work; one case had to be chosen.

PRESENTATION OUTLINE

1. **Character and story:** a quick introduction.
2. **The alleged offense:** the crime or tort, in one sentence.
3. **Evidence and legal basis:** specific moments from the text, tied to the cheat sheet.
4. **Answering the defense:** the best excuse, and why it fails.
5. **Conclusion:** why this case deserves a trial.

PRESENTATION RUBRIC (100 POINTS)

Clarity of argument	25
Evidence from the text and legal basis	25
Persuasiveness	25
Presentation skills	15
Teamwork	10

Support

Give teams a short list of possible offenses.

Challenge

Research a real statute or court case that fits.

RANKED CHOICE VOTING: HOW TO COUNT

Voters rank the options in order instead of picking just one.

► STEPS FOR COUNTING

- 1** Count **first choices** for each case.
- 2** Find the **majority**: more than half of the ballots still in play.
- 3** Majority? **That case wins.**
- 4** No majority? Remove the case with the fewest first-choice votes.
- 5** Move **those ballots** to each voter's next choice still in the race.
- 6** Repeat until one case has a majority.

KEEP IT NONPARTISAN

Ranked choice voting is used in some places, such as New York City primaries, and debated in others. Ask students what supporters and critics each say, rather than telling them which is better.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Did the first-round leader win? Why or why not?
- How did it feel to rank instead of choose one?
- Would the result change with a single-choice vote?

WORKED EXAMPLE: 24 BALLOTS, MAJORITY IS 13

CASE	ROUND 1	ROUND 2	ROUND 3
Goldilocks	9	10	11
The Big Bad Wolf	7	9	13 ✓
Ebenezer Scrooge	5	5	out
Rip Van Winkle	3	out	out

Rip Van Winkle had the fewest first choices, so his 3 ballots moved to their next choice (1 to Goldilocks, 2 to the Wolf). Still no majority, so Scrooge's 5 moved (1 and 4). The first-round leader didn't win.

OFFICIAL BALLOT: WHICH CHARACTER GOES TO TRIAL?

Rank every case by the **strength of the argument**, not how popular the character is. 1 = strongest case. Use each number only once.

	Goldilocks
	The Big Bad Wolf
	Ebenezer Scrooge
	Rip Van Winkle
	

TALLY SHEET

CASE	ROUND 1	ROUND 2	ROUND 3
Majority needed			

BEFORE YOU START: ASSIGN ROLES

Judge (1)	Runs the courtroom, rules on objections, instructs the jury.
Bailiff (1)	Opens court, calls and swears in witnesses, keeps time.
Prosecution (2 to 3)	Proves the charges beyond a reasonable doubt.
Defense (2 to 3)	Tests the prosecution's case and presents the defense.
Defendant (1)	Plays the character; may choose whether to testify.
Witnesses (2 to 4)	At least one for each side, prepared with their own team.
Jury (the rest)	Weights the evidence and reaches a verdict.

Session 1: Roles and the Case (30 min)

- **Case review (5):** read the case packet (sample on page 37).
- **Roles (10):** hand out role sheets (page 38).
- **Team time (10):** prosecution drafts its opening; defense drafts its theory of the case; judge and bailiff learn the trial order; jurors list what each side must prove.
- **Check-in (5).**

Session 2: Witnesses (30 min)

- **Direct exams (15):** each team writes questions for its own witnesses and rehearses with them. Witnesses stick to the facts in the packet.
- **Jury instructions (10):** jurors review the instructions and the elements of each charge.
- **Check-in (5).**

Session 3: Cross and Objections (30 min)

- **Cross-exams (10):** short, leading questions that test the other side's witnesses.
- **Objection drill (15):** practice the objections on page 37, with the judge ruling.
- **Openings and closings (5):** finalize drafts.

SESSION 4: THE TRIAL (45 MIN RECOMMENDED)

PHASE	MINUTES
Court called to order	1
Opening statements, prosecution then defense	2 + 2
Prosecution witnesses: direct, cross, and redirect	5 each
Defense witnesses: direct, cross, and redirect	5 each
Closing arguments, defense then prosecution*	3 + 3
Jury instructions	2
Deliberation and verdict	8

*New York has the defense close first and the prosecution last. Only have 30 minutes? Use one witness per side, and deliberate in a short Session 5.

ASSESSMENT

- **Judge:** order, fair and clear rulings.
- **Attorneys:** legal reasoning, questioning, persuasion.
- **Witnesses:** consistency with the packet, credibility.
- **Jurors:** reasoned verdict tied to the elements.
- **Everyone:** participation and teamwork.

DEBRIEF QUESTIONS

- What did the prosecution have to prove, and did it?
- Why does the burden of proof rest on the prosecution?

SAMPLE CASE AND CHEAT SHEETS

SAMPLE CASE PACKET

The People v. Goldilocks

Charges (from the fictional Storybook Penal Code):

1. Trespass in a Dwelling: a person (a) knowingly (b) enters or stays (c) in a home (d) without permission.

2. Criminal Mischief: a person (a) intentionally or recklessly (b) damages (c) property belonging to someone else.

Agreed facts: Goldilocks entered the Bears' cottage while they were out. She ate Baby Bear's porridge, broke Baby Bear's chair, and fell asleep in Baby Bear's bed. She ran away when the Bears returned.

Witnesses: Papa Bear and Baby Bear (prosecution); Goldilocks, if she chooses, and a Forest Ranger who found her lost that morning (defense).

Questions to argue: Did she know it was someone's home? Was the door open? Did she mean to break the chair, or was it an accident? Does being lost and hungry excuse her?

LEGAL CONCEPTS CHEAT SHEET

- **Crime:** an act the law forbids and punishes, brought by the government.
- **Tort:** a civil wrong that harms someone, who can sue for damages.
- **Intent:** did the person act on purpose?
- **Negligence:** failing to take the care a reasonable person would.
- **Proximate cause:** the act that directly led to the harm.
- **Liability:** legal responsibility.
- **Defense:** a legal excuse or justification, like necessity.
- **Beyond a reasonable doubt:** the high standard of proof in criminal cases.

COMMON OBJECTIONS

Leading	On direct, the question suggests the answer.
Relevance	It doesn't relate to the charges.
Hearsay	Repeating what someone else said, to prove it's true.
Speculation	Asks the witness to guess.
Argumentative	Arguing with the witness instead of asking.
Asked and answered	The question was already answered.
Outside the packet	The witness invents facts not in the case packet.

Say: "Objection, Your Honor. [Reason]." The judge answers "Sustained" (allowed) or "Overruled" (denied).

JURY INSTRUCTIONS

Members of the jury, you have heard all the evidence. Weigh it fairly and apply the law as I explain it. Your verdict must rest only on the evidence and the law, without bias.

The defendant is presumed innocent. The prosecution must prove each element of each charge beyond a reasonable doubt. A reasonable doubt is a doubt based on reason and common sense, not mere speculation.

If you are not convinced beyond a reasonable doubt, you must find the defendant not guilty of that charge. If you are, you must find the defendant guilty. Please deliberate carefully until you reach a unanimous verdict.

VERDICT FORM

Charge 1, Trespass in a Dwelling

☐ Guilty ☐ Not guilty

Charge 2, Criminal Mischief

☐ Guilty ☐ Not guilty

Foreperson: _____

ROLE SHEETS AND TRIAL SCRIPT

Cut these apart and hand one to each student.

Judge

Before: learn the trial order, the charges, and the objections. **During:** keep order, treat both sides fairly, rule on objections, call attorneys to the bench when needed, and read the jury instructions.

“Please be seated. Court is now in session.” “Counsel, please approach.” “Sustained.” “Overruled.”

Prosecution Attorney

Before: plan how to prove every element, write direct questions for your witnesses, and predict the defense. **During:** open, question witnesses, cross-examine, object when needed, and close.

“May it please the court, I represent the People.” “The evidence will show...”

Witness

Know your character and the packet facts. Answer clearly and consistently, stay in character, and don’t invent new facts. “I don’t remember” is an honest answer when true.

Juror

Listen closely, take notes on each element, stay impartial, and base your vote on the evidence and the law. Jurors may submit written questions to the judge, if the judge allows.

Bailiff

Opens court, calls witnesses, swears them in, and keeps time with signs.

“All rise. The court is now in session, the Honorable [Name] presiding.” “Do you swear or affirm that the testimony you are about to give will be the truth?”

Defense Attorney

Before: find the weak element in the prosecution’s case and build your theory. **During:** open, cross-examine, present your witnesses, and close.

“The prosecution must prove every element beyond a reasonable doubt, and it cannot.”

Defendant

Know the charges and help your attorneys. You have the right not to testify, and the jury may not hold that against you.

TRIAL ORDER AT A GLANCE

1. Bailiff opens court; judge welcomes the jury.
2. Prosecution opening, then defense opening.
3. Prosecution witnesses: direct, cross, redirect.
4. Defense witnesses: direct, cross, redirect.
5. Closings (in New York, defense first, then prosecution).
6. Judge reads jury instructions.
7. Jury deliberates and the foreperson reads the verdict.

Adapted and expanded from lesson plans shared by Youth and Government educators. Simplified for classroom use; real courts follow more detailed rules.

IT GUIDANCE FOR EDUCATORS

Making sure program emails and forms reach you and your students.

► AT A GLANCE

- Program emails come from **@ymcanys.org** addresses.
- Registration, bill, and rooming forms, and your delegation's view links, run on **Airtable**.
- Program information lives on **nysyag.org**.
- Some school filters flag older links on our previous website. If a resource link gives a security warning, email us and we'll send the file directly.

OPTION A

Ask IT to Allowlist

Email sender domain:

@ymcanys.org

Web access:

nysyag.org

airtable.com

OPTION B

Families Register at Home

Each student registers individually with a parent or guardian, so registration can be done from home on any device. Advisors can always email information directly to program staff if a link won't work.

TIP: STUDENT NETWORKS ARE OFTEN MORE RESTRICTED THAN STAFF NETWORKS. ASK IT TO TEST ON A STUDENT DEVICE.

► SAMPLE EMAIL TO YOUR IT TEAM

Subject: Allowlist request for YMCA Youth and Government

Hello **[IT Contact]**,

Our school is taking part in YMCA Youth and Government, a civics program run by the Alliance of New York State YMCAs. Advisors receive program updates by email, and students and families register and submit bills through online forms.

Some of these messages and pages may be getting filtered. Could you take a look and let me know what you'd recommend? The program uses email from @ymcanys.org, the website nysyag.org, and forms hosted on airtable.com.

Thank you for your help,
[Name, Title]

STILL NOT GETTING EMAILS?

Check your spam or quarantine folder for ymcanys.org, add dcaldwell@ymcanys.org to your contacts, and tell Drew which address to use. A personal email as a backup is fine.

LET'S GET YOUR STUDENTS TO THE CAPITOL.

Drew Caldwell, Director of Youth Development
Alliance of New York State YMCAs

dcaldwell@ymcanys.org · nysyag.org · [@northeastyag](https://twitter.com/northeastyag)

Book a call using the link at the bottom of any email from Drew, or ask Gavel on nysyag.org.



YMCA Youth and Government is nonpartisan and open to all.
This toolkit is a general overview. Dates and details may
change; your state's page and program emails have the
latest.

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