

SEAL-EARNING UNIT

Earning the Civic Seal Through YMCA Youth and Government

Subject	Civics, Government, Social Studies, Service-Learning
Grade Level	9-12 (Unit 7 adapts to grades 6-8)
States Covered	New York (Seal of Civic Readiness), Connecticut (State Seal of Civics Education and Engagement), Rhode Island (Civic Literacy Act student-led civics project)
Format	Seven multi-week units. Each is a complete project a student can submit to a school Seal Committee, with Youth and Government as the vehicle: real issues, real law, real officials, real audiences.

Why This Series Exists

YMCA Youth and Government already asks students to do what the civic seals reward: research a real problem, write a bill that amends real law, defend it under questioning, lobby, serve, reflect and present. The problem is that most of that work never gets documented in the form a school Seal Committee can accept. These units close that gap. Each one takes a Youth and Government process and runs it as a documented, rubric-scored project that produces the evidence a committee needs, while the student also prepares for the conference.

The first set of lessons in this toolkit (Storybook County) teaches the processes on fictional characters. This set assumes students know the processes and asks them to use them on something that matters to them.

The Units and What Each Can Count Toward

- 1. The Civics Capstone Through Youth and Government.** The capstone follows the nine steps in NYSED's sample capstone assignment (Handbook Appendix T): identify, analyze, root causes, alternatives, evaluate, strategies, act, reflect and present, carried out as a full bill project with testimony to real officials. New York: Civics Capstone Project, 4 points if the Seal Committee accepts it. Rhode Island: can fit the student-led civics project. Connecticut: civic engagement project and portfolio evidence.
- 2. Policy Advocacy Through a Bill (High School Civics Project).** A shorter project: identify an issue, research and evaluate current policy, write a bill, communicate recommendations to officials. New York: High School Civics Project, 1.5 points (may be earned twice). Rhode Island: can fit the student-led civics project. Connecticut: portfolio evidence.
- 3. The School Equity Review (High School Civics Project, modeled on NYSED Handbook Example 2).** Analyze the school's own discipline and participation data, review the code of conduct, and bring a resolution with recommendations to

the principal or board. New York: High School Civics Project, 1.5 points. Rhode Island: can fit the student-led civics project. Connecticut: portfolio evidence.

- 4. The Service Focus Project (Service-Learning, 25 Hours).** Investigation, preparation, action, reflection and demonstration, led through the Lieutenant Governor's service focus and the delegation's Service-Learning Liaison. New York: Service-Learning Project, 1 point (may be repeated). Connecticut: can document the required civic engagement project.
- 5. The Legislative Research Project (Civic Knowledge).** A research paper and memorandum of support built on the original law, its history, other states' approaches and a fiscal analysis. New York: Research Project, 1 point in the Civic Knowledge column.
- 6. The Youth and Government Portfolio (Extracurricular Participation, 40 Hours).** Documenting a year of delegation meetings, steering and state conferences with a log, artifacts and a reflective presentation. New York: Extracurricular participation, 0.5 points (may be repeated). Connecticut: documents involvement in a civic organization, one of the law's examples of a civic engagement project.
- 7. The Student-Led Civics Project (Middle School Capstone and Universal Format).** A resolution-based project for grades 6-8 and for any student who needs a standards-aligned civics project. New York: Middle School Capstone Project, 1 point (grades 7-8). Rhode Island: can fit the Civic Literacy Act project requirement. Connecticut: portfolio evidence.

▲ Seal Crosswalk

New York Seal of Civic Readiness, six points required, at least two from Civic Knowledge and two from Civic Participation. Youth and Government work can be submitted for:

- ▶ Civic Knowledge: Research Project (Unit 5), 1 point.
- ▶ Civic Participation: Civics Capstone (Unit 1), 4 points. High School Civics Project (Unit 2 or 3), 1.5 points each, up to twice. Service-Learning (Unit 4), 1 point each. Extracurricular 40 hours (Unit 6), 0.5 points each. Middle School Capstone (Unit 7), 1 point, grades 7-8 only.
- ▶ Example paths to six points: Capstone plus Research plus one more Civic Knowledge point from coursework. Or Policy Advocacy (1.5) plus Equity Review (1.5) plus Service (1) plus Portfolio (0.5) plus Research (1) plus one coursework point.
- ▶ The remaining Civic Knowledge points come from the school: four social studies credits, Regents performance, or advanced social studies courses. New York is moving to a single diploma starting in 2027 to 2028, and seal criteria may change.

Connecticut State Seal of Civics Education and Engagement (Public Act 26-1; boards may award it starting with the class of 2027): the State Department of Education sets the criteria, which include two years of history or social science with a U.S. government or civics course, at least one civic engagement project (such as involvement in a civic organization), and civics proficiency shown by an assessment, a portfolio or another mastery-based measure. Districts choose whether to offer it. Units 1, 4 and 6 can document the civic engagement project and supply portfolio evidence of civics proficiency; the coursework part is met through the school's history and civics classes. Advisors should bring the crosswalk to the district's seal coordinator to confirm acceptance before the year starts.

Rhode Island's 2021 Civic Literacy Act (students must demonstrate civics proficiency as defined by their district; each district must provide at least one student-led civics project in middle or high school, aligned with state standards): Units 1, 2, 3 and 7 are designed to fit the law's project definition; confirm with the district that it will count. The project is student led, may be individual, small group or class wide, and is designed to build students' ability to reason from evidence and to understand connections between federal, state and local policies that affect their community. Each of these units shows where it meets those criteria.

▲ How to Use the Series

- ▶ **Start with the Seal Committee.** In September, the advisor meets the school's seal coordinator with this overview and the unit the student plans to complete. Get written confirmation of the point value before the work begins.
- ▶ **One student, one unit per year, is realistic.** A delegate who completes Unit 2 as a sophomore, Unit 4 as a junior and Unit 1 as a senior could submit work worth up to 6.5 Civic Participation points, if the Seal Committee accepts each project; the seal still requires at least two Civic Knowledge points.
- ▶ **Group work is allowed; evidence is individual.** Every unit's verification form has the student document their own role.
- ▶ **The conference is the audience, not the deliverable.** A bill passed at the state conference is wonderful evidence, but the seal is earned by the documented process, so a bill that fails in committee can still qualify if the documented work meets the committee's criteria.

▲ Shared Forms (and the unit that contains each)

- ▶ Issue Selection Form and Seal Committee Pre-Approval (Unit 1)
- ▶ Stakeholder Map and Officials Contact Log (Unit 1)
- ▶ Reflection Prompts, Civic Readiness Domains (Unit 1)
- ▶ Original Law Worksheet and Memorandum of Support template (Unit 2; also used in Units 1 and 5)
- ▶ Service Hours Log and Site Supervisor Verification (Unit 4)
- ▶ Participation Log and Advisor Verification Letter (Unit 6)
- ▶ Problem Finder, Evidence Triangle and Who Decides? Ladder (Unit 7)

▲ Language and Standards Notes

The program is YMCA Youth and Government. "Core values" means the YMCA's caring, honesty, respect and responsibility. Y-Corps is the separate summer service program and is referenced only in Unit 4, where its hours may apply with Seal Committee approval. New York point values are from NYSED's published criteria (checked October 2026). Connecticut's criteria are set by the State Department of Education and each district decides whether to offer the seal; Rhode Island's civics proficiency is defined by each district. Confirm with your school before starting.

▲ Civic Readiness Domains (New York)

Every unit's assessment is organized by the four domains the seal is built on, so a committee can see the match at a glance.

- ▶ **Civic Knowledge:** a fundamental and functional knowledge of government, law, history, economics and current events.
- ▶ **Civic Skills and Actions:** analytic, verbal, communication, media literacy and other skills, applied.
- ▶ **Civic Mindsets:** the mindset of a participant in a democratic society, including a commitment to democratic values and informed participation.
- ▶ **Civic Experiences:** developmentally appropriate civic experiences in varied settings and for varied purposes.