

How can citizens participate?



One of the most important rights of citizenship is the right to participate in governing the nation.

Who is a citizen? This is anyone who is born in the United States or whose parents are U.S. Citizens.

Who is an alien? This is a person who is NOT citizen. Many aliens become citizens by following certain rules and procedures which are covered in upcoming lessons.

The Founding Fathers believed that the main purpose of government was to protect people's basic rights. Almost all citizens have the right to participate in governing our nation.

Below is a list of various ways one can participate. When you look at this list there are two key questions to consider.

1. What are the advantages or disadvantages of each form of participation?
 2. Are all of these forms of participation equally important in protecting our basic rights? Why or why not?
- Looking for information in newspapers, magazines, online and reference materials and then judging its accuracy
 - Voting in local, state, and national elections
 - Participating in a political discussion
 - Trying to persuade someone to vote in a certain way
 - Signing a petition
 - Wearing a button or putting a political sticker on your car
 - Writing letters to your elected representatives
 - Contributing money to a party or candidate
 - Attending meetings to gain information, discuss issues, or lend support
 - Campaigning for a candidate running for office
 - Lobbying for laws that are of a special interest
 - Demonstrating through marches, boycotts, sit-ins, or other forms of protest
 - Serving as a juror
 - Running for office
 - Holding public office
 - Serving the country through military or other service (e.g. diplomatic)
 - Disobeying laws and taking the consequences to demonstrate that a law or policy is unjust

Sadly, many citizens do not participate in our government. They do not vote or participate in any of the ways previously shown. However, there are many who believe that citizens have a responsibility to participate.

Deciding whether to participate and how much time to spend participating is important. To make good decisions, you must think about several options:

- What is the purpose of our government? Based on your belief to what degree will you participate?
- How important are your rights to you?
- How satisfied are you in the way that the present government is working?

A very important point to remember about government is that we must be sure that the people we elect can do the job that we are electing them for. You would not want a mechanic fixing your car that is not qualified to make the repairs. The same goes for public officials. In addition, once they have the job, we must keep an eye on them. If they are doing a bad job we may decide to replace them under a system called recall. However, if they are doing a good job, we may not watch them too closely.

In closing, we have to look at basic questions regarding participation and the purposes of our government.

1. Does a good citizen have a responsibility to work to improve his or her society? Why or why not?
2. If you do NOT think the government is protecting your basic rights, should you still be required to obey its laws?
3. Then, if you do NOT choose to vote or participate in any way in government, should you still be required to obey its laws? Why or why not?
4. Should a good citizen be concerned with improving the lives of those less fortunate? Why or why not?

