

Berkeley Osher Lifelong Learning Institute

Local Government From The Ground Up – Syllabus

Summary: By learning about cities, counties, school districts, and special districts, OLLI members will understand the impact that different types of local government have on their daily lives and that individual voices, votes, and actions can truly make a difference on the local level. Topics covered include how and why cities, counties, school districts, and special districts were formed, the range of services they provide, and their history and organizational structure. Current issues facing local government leaders today will also be discussed. This course utilizes PowerPoint slides in all discussions, interactive activities, real-life examples, and allows ample time for questions and answers.

Week One – Overview

We will start to answer the age-old question: What does local government really do? We will begin with an overview of cities, counties, school districts, and special districts including how and why cities and counties were formed along with their function and purpose. We will also run through a brief history of California government and its impact on local government highlighting the Progressive Movement, the Ralph M. Brown Act (decisions must be made in public and not in the backroom), and the Political Reform Act of 1974. We will then explore the different types of school districts and special districts throughout the state.

Week Two – Cities and Counties

We will learn about how and why cities and counties were formed, their function and purpose, and the different types of services each provides. We will then explore the difference between a strong Mayor and the Council-Manager form of government and touch upon several issues facing cities and counties today.

Week Three – Local Government Financing

Where do my tax dollars go? In this lesson we will focus on city and county revenues and expenditures. We will then delve into the impact Proposition 13 has had on local government's ability to raise revenue.

Week Four – Regional Government and How You Can Make a Difference

We will explore regional government by looking at the Bay Conservation and Development Commission, the Bay Area Air Quality Management District, the Association of Bay Area Governments, and the Metropolitan Transportation Commission. We will then explore the "hidden" layers of local government right here in the Bay Area. In addition, students will learn how they can get involved and make a difference in each level of local government, including volunteer opportunities.

There are no required readings for this course. There is a wonderful booklet prepared by the Institute of Government Studies that should be available on the OLLI student website which parallels the course discussion and goes into further detail for those who are interested. In addition, students are encouraged to seek out stories about local governmental agencies in

their own community from the newspaper, online news, website blog, or other sources, and bring questions for the class to discuss.

Class location: GBC Suite 365

Daren Fields is a consultant in local government having served for over twenty-five years as a department head, assistant city manager, and city manager for several municipalities in the San Francisco Bay Area. Daren is passionate about teaching others about local government and brings an insider's perspective and enthusiasm to the classroom.

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