New York State Conference of Mayors and Municipal Officials

Essay Contest for 8th Graders
Fourth Annual

For more information visit www.nycom.org

Contest Deadline: March 9, 2020

If I Were Mayor, I Would...
The New York State Conference of Mayors (NYCOM) is a statewide association that serves nearly 600 member municipalities (cities and villages) in New York State.

NYCOM provides a variety of services to our members, including a municipal inquiry service that provides answers from NYCOM's staff of legal and programmatic experts to questions on legislative and legal matters, finance, economic development, labor relations, and state and federal programs.

NYCOM advocates on behalf of cities and villages at the State Capitol.

NYCOM hosts annual conferences, training schools and regional seminars on current municipal issues, where local officials receive practical information assisting them in their roles.

www.nycom.org
Use this guide to help foster your ideas, offer solutions and enhance your community “If You Were Mayor...”:

- Essay should begin with “If I Were Mayor, I Would” and should clearly state What, Why and How you would undertake such action (350-500 words).
- Be creative, clear and use proper grammar.
- When writing your essay, make sure you consider what you can and cannot do as Mayor.
- Learn more about your city or village:
  - Visit our website (www.nycom.org), read your local newspaper, visit your city or village website, and ask your mayor and other local officials to come and talk to your class about what they do.
Each level of government – local, state and federal – provides a variety of services to the public. Federalism is formed by a system of shared, distributed power between federal, state and local government.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT
• Local government is granted power by the state. Each state has its own way of structuring its local governments (cities, villages, towns, counties, boroughs, etc.). Local governments generally take responsibility for parks and recreation services, police and fire departments, housing services, emergency medical services, municipal courts, transportation services (including public transportation), land use regulations and public works (streets, water and sewer, snow removal, signage, garbage collection, etc.).

STATE GOVERNMENT
• Each of the 50 states within the United States has its own Constitution modeled after the U.S. Constitution and is divided into three branches of government: Legislative (makes laws-State Legislature), Executive (carries out laws-Governor) and Judicial (evaluates laws-State Courts).
• State government generally takes responsibility for establishing local government, issuing licenses, regulating intrastate commerce, enforcing the State Constitution, creating and collecting state taxes, building highways, and overseeing core services provided to its residents (Education, Social Services, etc.).

FEDERAL GOVERNMENT
• The federal government’s powers are defined in the U.S. Constitution. The federal government is divided into three branches of government: Legislative (makes laws-Congress), Executive (carries out laws-President) and Judicial (evaluates laws-Supreme Court).
• Among the federal government’s many responsibilities are printing and regulating our currency, providing for our national security, regulating commerce and enforcing the U.S. Constitution.
If you are a Mayor, then you live in and serve as the chief executive officer of a CITY or VILLAGE.

- **A CITY** is formed by and operates pursuant to a charter. *A charter is a document approved by the State Legislature that establishes the city’s boundaries and defines its organizational structure, powers, functions and procedures.* There are 62 cities in New York State ranging in population from 3,000 to 8 million.

- **A VILLAGE** is formed after submission of a petition and a vote of the residents within the proposed village boundaries, in order to provide municipal services the surrounding town does not (water, sewer and police, etc.). *Each village operates under the State Village Law.* There are currently 536 villages in New York State.

*TOWNS were formed by the State Legislature and generally provide a more limited set of services. Towns are typically more rural and less densely populated than cities and villages. They have supervisors (not mayors) that serve as the chief executive officer.

The difference between cities and villages has nothing to do with their size. Both have mayoral forms of government and generally serve densely populated areas.
The mayor is the chief elected official and is seen as the leader of the city or village and the face of the community. Local government is the government closest to the people, where residents know and can directly communicate with their mayor and other local officials.

- A CITY has a Mayor and a City Council. There are several forms of city government. It’s important to determine which applies to your city because it determines what a mayor can and cannot do.
  
  **Strong mayor:** The mayor is the CEO of the city. The council is the policymaking body. The mayor prepares the budget, appoints/removes department heads and has veto power over city legislation.
  
  **Manager form:** The mayor is a ceremonial position and the council is the policymaking body. A city manager is the CEO and prepares the budget and appoints/removes department heads.

- A VILLAGE has a Mayor and a Board of Trustees. The mayor is the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the village and is also a member of the legislative branch (Board of Trustees). The Mayor appoints village employees, prepares the budget and oversees the day-to-day operations of a village. The Mayor does not have veto power. However, some villages have adopted the Manager form of government.

The Mayor works with the City Council or Village Board of Trustees to decide how the city or village should spend its money (recycling, street paving, more parks, salaries, etc.).
The charts below are general examples of how local officials work together to get things done in the community.

CITY MAYOR (strong)

Who Do I Work With to Get Things Done?

The Mayor in both a CITY and a VILLAGE must work with the other officials within their municipality in order to get things done.

- City Council or Board of Trustees
- Department Heads (highway, police, fire)
- Budget Officer
- Municipal Clerk
- Planning and Zoning Board
I CANNOT!!!

- Build private structures (*build/run a store or restaurant*)
- Encroach on parental rights (*un-ground you*)
- Accept, give away or loan public money or resources (*buildings, prizes, gifts, private transportation and meals*)
- Interfere with school rules (*how many days you go to school or lunch choices, teacher pay, safety*)
- Infringe on Constitutionally protected rights (*Freedom of Religion or Freedom of Speech*)
- Take or purchase an abandoned building (*must follow a process*)

BUT I CAN!!!

- Lead and collaborate on the building of municipal projects (*parks, roads, public housing*)
- Use the “bully pulpit” to shape public opinion and the decisions of the legislative branch (*city council or village board*)
- Promote and implement shared services with other governments (*water or fire department*)
- Apply for grants -- money from the state or federal government-must state specific grant (*improve parks, roads and sidewalks*)
- Increase or decrease taxes (*spend or save*)

SHOULD!!!

Perform my duties to the best of my ability
Oversee the day-to-day operations of the city or village
Follow a Code of Ethics
Consider the needs of my residents
Enforce and prosecute all violations of laws, rules and regulations
Do I need a Local Law or a Resolution?

In villages and cities, **local laws** can be passed by the Board of Trustees (village) and by the City Council (city). Both can also adopt less formal **resolutions**.

A **LOCAL LAW** is the highest form of legislative power a municipality has and must be voted on and approved by the Council or Board. Actions taken by local law usually involve the structure of government, transfer of power from one official or body to another, a change of standard or rule, and establishing a regulation or violation. *Examples include:* regulating abandoned properties, establishing fees to discourage actions such as speeding, littering and setting curfews.

A **RESOLUTION** is a less formal action. It may be adopted without notifying the public. They are usually used for actions concerning the day-to-day work of the city or village. A resolution is NOT a law. *Examples include:* naming a day after someone or something, transferring money from one account to another, recognizing an individual or organization for their good work or supporting a proposed state law.
This PowerPoint presentation is provided to you by the New York State Conference of Mayors (NYCOM) to promote NYCOM’s 8th Grade “If I Were Mayor, I Would…” contest, and to provide students with a better understanding of local government in New York State and the role of a Mayor. If you have any questions, please contact Jennifer Purcell of the NYCOM staff at (518) 463-1185 or via email at jennifer@nycom.org.