October 2015

4-H 403 Water Riches for Youth: Elected Official Workbook

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Water Riches for YOUth

Elected Official Workbook

4-H Youth Development
Cooperative Extension, Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources
University of Nebraska-Lincoln
Date

Your name, Your title

Your business name

Business address

City State ZIP

Dear ____________________________

As you probably are aware, our city’s current landfill has been condemned and the city must build a new one and have it operational in 24 months. Because of this immediate problem, I am in the process of putting together a task force to help locate a new landfill.

I am asking you to serve on this task force. Although you will have a vote on the landfill site decision since you are a member of the ____________________________ Committee, I feel it is important to have an elected official on the task force. And while, altogether, the task force members will provide a balance of knowledge, insight, and interest, you understand the complex task of making public policy decisions and will serve as a unique and invaluable member of this team.

Some of the groundwork has already been laid for this task force. My office has narrowed the number of possible sites down to five. Once the task force has met and discussed all five sites, your committee will narrow the field to three, then two, and finally, to its final recommended site.

We hope this will be a rewarding experience for you. I feel it will be very beneficial to bring together a cross-section of professionals and citizens to help make this important decision. I thank you, in advance, for the time and effort you will put in to help your community in this way.

The first meeting of this task force will be ____________________________.

If you have any questions, feel free to call my office at ____________________________.

We look forward to meeting you at the first meeting. ____________________________

Sincerely,

Mayor

For this activity, you might be: a City Councilperson, county commissioner, A Natural Resources District board member, or any other elected official who might be involved in helping make this kind of decision.

Think about some of the possibilities. Then you decide which elected official you are for this program. Once you decide, fill in the appropriate information within this letter.
Your role is to listen to all the arguments, weigh the alternatives and the consequences and, finally, take action to do something!

Read this carefully to discover your inside information!

Role of Elected Official

On this team, you are the elected official who makes public policy decisions that will affect everyone in your jurisdiction. (NOTE: If you don’t know what that word means, look it up right now and write a simple explanation in the margin.)

In this particular case, your position becomes more complicated because you know the State Department of Transportation and other agencies have been looking at land that is included in Site D for a new highway. There has been no formal notification on this, yet, but you know there is a strong possibility for the new highway. You also realize that the highway would help your community in the long run. In real life, an elected official might withhold this information because making the highway public knowledge might put a stop to the project. By sharing the information, however, you will help your team make their best, most informed decision. How you handle this situation is completely up to you.

Your role on this team is going to be essential, because you are going to help your teammates make a decision that taxpayers will be able to afford and community citizens will support. Citizen support is always necessary at election time because your past decisions influence how all individuals will vote.

During this problem-solving activity, you are going to:
• learn who your local, state and national representatives are,
• discover how elected officials set public policy, and
• learn how difficult it is to balance long- and short-term costs, benefits and consequences.

Overview

Welcome to Water Riches for YOUTH! You’re going to find this a different kind of learning activity, so pay close attention.

This situation involves locating a new landfill in your community from among five sites. Careful consideration must be given to this issue. Your team must consider a variety of social, economic, political and environmental issues when determining which site to recommend.

You have been assigned to a community task force. The mayor’s letter identified a serious problem with the landfill and a solution must be found.

As a member of this task force or team, you will take the role of a community resident with particular views and perspectives of the problem. The different ideas from the team members will help reach the best decision.

If you don’t understand how this activity works, you’re going to have trouble serving as a team, so please:
• READ this workbook carefully,
• THINK about your responsibility to your group, and
• PERFORM your role so your group can work effectively.

This workbook will guide you through interesting team problem-solving activity.

NOTE: You are the ONLY member of your team receiving the information contained in this workbook. You need to understand your role and the information in this workbook.

Remember, a team is only as good as its weakest member. So do the best job you can — that’s all your team asks.
Here's How This Activity Works

◆ Study the Sites
Your teacher will provide site sheets with basic data and maps. Study the information provided. Ask questions. Search for other additional information that will help to make a decision. Look for long term and short term impacts of different decisions. Talk to experts in your community to help you gather information. You may have to make assumptions or guess about how the sites might be used and the environmental threats at the sites.

◆ Group Meetings
Your group will alternate between GROUP MEETINGS and INDIVIDUAL WORK SESSIONS. Your teacher will help you get the first group meeting underway and may call additional meetings from time to time when necessary.

The Team Leader will call the group meetings.
During the group sessions, you will discuss which landfill site to select. When your team seems ready (has discussed the issues, looked at options, weighed the trade-offs of each site), you may call for a vote to determine the end of one round and the beginning of the next round. At the end of each meeting you’ll need to complete the questions at the end of your workbook and discuss how your team is working.

◆ Rounds
During Round 1, all five sites will be discussed, and a vote will be taken to decide which three sites to continue discussing.
During Round 2, three sites will be discussed, and a vote will be taken to decide which two sites to continue discussing.
During Round 3, two sites will be discussed and a final vote will be taken to decide which site the group supports.

◆ Individual Work Sessions
During the individual work sessions, each team member will work from his/her workbook, will work to find answers to questions that arose during the previous group session, and will work on the laboratory experiences and special activities the teacher may assign.

◆ Your Unique Role
Each person has a specific role, different from the others on the team. Read about the group problem. Talk with your parents and others in the community for ideas. Participate in the meetings as you think someone in your role would act.
Your teacher will evaluate the productivity of the entire group as well as your contribution.
Moving Through the Rounds

Be Prepared!

One of the best ways to approach a problem-solving activity is to come to the meetings prepared. By writing down what you want to accomplish, when, how and who should be involved, you will help the group find workable alternatives and solutions.

This group problem-solving activity will take place in three rounds. Round 1 will begin only after the teacher and team leader believe everyone is ready. Rounds Two and Three will be called in that same manner.

If team members need more time to gather information or ask more questions — either individually or in group discussion — the round continues. A ROUND ENDS ONLY AFTER A VOTE IS TAKEN!

ROUND 1:
• The group will meet to discuss the features, advantages and disadvantages of each of the five possible sites for the landfill.
• Before closing Round 1, the group will VOTE to continue studying THREE sites. Since you have a specific goal to keep the landfill away from your site, you will probably want to enter Round 1 with strong arguments in favor of the other sites and against the one closest to you.

ROUND 2:
• Discuss the advantages, disadvantages, alternatives to and consequences of the three sites still being considered.
• Vote on the three sites to narrow the field to two.

ROUND 3:
• Discuss the two sites, as above.
• Vote on which site group prefers.
• Prepare for final presentation, as teacher directs.

This workbook has a series of activities you complete during this project. Your teacher may provide additional activities and resources for you to use.
How Elected Officials Set Public Policy

Your team has been asked to make a "public policy" decision, that is, a decision that will affect a variety of groups of people ("public").
And whatever is decided becomes the course of action or rules that must be followed ("policy").
Every organization in society — businesses, governments, tribes, schools, families, churches, and social organizations — operate according to rules or policies.
In the United States, people elect representatives at all levels — local, county, state and national — to help us decide what our public policies are going to be. That’s what you are in Water Riches for YOUth! — because you are an elected representative.

ACTIVITY: Who are your elected officials?

There are many elected representatives at all levels of government who are setting policies. This activity will help you understand who your elected representatives are. Elected officials have a difficult task in making public policy decisions that are fair for all citizens. They must study the issue carefully to determine if the policies that have been proposed are really the best option for the community as a whole.
Other members of the team in this exercise represent interests of different citizen's groups. Listen to them carefully to gain their views, seek information from the most reliable source, then make your decision of what is best for the community.
In the state and federal legislature individuals known as lobbyists are hired by special interest groups to represent them in persuading elected officials to support their proposals. Lobbyists provide a wealth of information to elected officials but must be remembered as special interest representatives.

Who are some of the elected officials who represent your community?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Name</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School board member</td>
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<tr>
<td>City council member</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>County commissioner</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Natural Resources District Board Member</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>State Legislator</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Senator</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Representative</td>
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</table>

Using your resources, add to the list

Select one of the local elected officials you’ve listed. Arrange an interview. Find out what type of public policy they are involved in setting and what steps they follow. Ask them what kinds of solid waste issues they deal with. Use open-ended questions (questions that ask for more than a yes or no answer) during the interview to get the most information.
Porosity is the percentage of open space as compared to the total space (volume) of an area.
The top of the zone of saturation is called the WATER TABLE. Some water underlies the earth's surface almost everywhere; there is water beneath hills, mountains, plains and deserts. However, it may not be available in usable quantities, be easily accessible or fresh enough for use without treatment.

Ground water may seep to the land surface in a marsh. But in some arid areas it may lie many hundreds of feet below the surface and be difficult to locate and use.

Ground water is stored in — and moves slowly through — moderately to highly permeable layers of rock or sediment called aquifers. Aquifers literally carry water underground. After entering an aquifer, water moves slowly downhill toward lower-lying places.

Water is discharged from aquifers as springs, or it may seep from an aquifer into streams. It also can be removed by drilling a well into the aquifer. A well actually creates a space into which water can flow, accumulating enough so it can be pumped to the surface.

An aquifer may consist of a layer of sediment such as gravel or sand, a layer of sandstone or cavernous limestone, a rubbly top or base of lava flows, or even a large body of massive rock (such as fractured granite) that has sizable openings.

An aquifer may be only a few feet thick or it may be tens or hundreds of feet thick. It may lie a few feet below the land surface or thousands of feet below the surface.

The amount of water that soaks into the ground depends on how well the water can enter (INFILTRATE) the soil. The rate (SPEED) at which water can move through the pores is called the soil's PERCOLATION RATE.

For example, clay has very small soil particles that fit together tightly, creating very small spaces between the particles. Clay has a slow percolation rate.

Sand, on the other hand, has large particles that fit loosely and with generous spaces between the particles. This causes sand to have fast infiltration and percolation rates.

The Saturated Zone

Rain and snowmelt that seeps into the ground continues downward under the force of gravity until it reaches a depth where water fills all of the openings (pores) in the soil or rock. This is called the SATURATED ZONE. The saturated zone may include water-filled crevices or fractures in the upper layer of bedrock. Deeper bedrock layers may have few or no crevices where water can penetrate.

The Unsaturated Zone

A zone is usually present between the water table and the land surface where the openings, or pores, in the soil are only partially filled with water. This is the UNSATURATED ZONE. Water seeps downward through it to the water table below. Plant roots can capture the moisture passing through this zone, but it cannot provide water for wells.

Questions

1. Explain the difference between surface and groundwater.
2. Look at sites and determine whether the groundwater, surface water, or both could become polluted from a landfill located in that site.
Establishing Public Policy

People involved in making public policies, in general, follow six steps. They are:

1. Define the issue
2. Identify the interested parties
3. Understand perspectives (viewpoints)
4. Analyze perspectives and information
5. Take a stand
6. Take action

STEP 1: Define the issue
This step already has been done for you. You must decide which site will be selected for your community’s new landfill.

STEP 2: Identify the interested parties
After Round 1, in the following chart, write the names of the people on your team and why they are interested in where the landfill goes. Identify any other groups who are not represented, but who may also be interested in this issue.
STEP 3: Understand perspectives (viewpoints)

Using the following form, record the information about each individual or group that you have identified in Step 2.

Under “Expected Opinions,” write how you think the people would respond when asked which of the three remaining sites should be selected and why.

Then interview each person and write down what they say they want under “Actual opinion.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PERSON</th>
<th>POSITION/SPECIAL INTEREST</th>
<th>EXPECTED OPINIONS</th>
<th>ACTUAL OPINIONS</th>
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<td>Elected Official</td>
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Establishing Public Policy (continued)

**STEP 4: Analyze perspectives and information**

Once you have gathered the information, you must try to analyze all the ways each site will affect each person, the environment, the economy of your community, etc. After Round 2, fill in the following chart to determine the advantages and disadvantages of the remaining 2 sites.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Site __</th>
<th>Site __</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Advantages</strong></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Disadvantages</strong></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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*10-Elected Official*
STEP 5: Take a stand

Now that you have gathered and analyzed all the information, it's time to take a stand. Before you begin Round 3, review your notes from the previous activity pages and from your committee meetings. Answer the following questions and be prepared to listen carefully during Round 3.

1. From the analysis sheets you developed, which site is preferable to you?
2. Is either site acceptable and why not?
3. Which offer advantages to the greatest number of people?

Once it is time to vote, ask yourself these questions:

* What is the majority opinion of your team?
* Which will save the taxpayers the most money?
* Which will affect the environment the most?
* Which will have the least negative impact on your next election campaign?
* Which will provide the greatest benefit to the most people?
* Ten years from now, is your choice likely to be a wise one?
* Fifty years from now?
* Once this issue is decided, what can you do to make sure your decision will be the right one in the long-run?

1. Write your preferred decision here
2. Write your vote here
3. If number 1 and 2 are not the same, why not?
4. Write the final decision of the group here

STEP 6: Take action

Public policy decision makers often make decisions with some type of voting process. The policy decisions are then generally implemented and carried out by agency staff. In your community, who might be responsible for carrying out this decision?
Water Riches for YOUth!

Evaluating Our Progress after Round 1

Rate yourself on the following items with 5 being the best.

I was prepared for our meeting 5 4 3 2 1
I shared information that helped us evaluate the sites 5 4 3 2 1
I listened carefully to what others had to share 5 4 3 2 1
I asked questions to gain more information 5 4 3 2 1
When I didn't agree with someone, I did so in a friendly manner 5 4 3 2 1

What is one thing you can do next time to help the group function better?

Answer the following questions as a group.

As a group, what are some things you all need to work on next time?

What is the most important thing you accomplished in this round?

What would you like to accomplish in the next round?

Evaluating Our Progress after Round 2

Rate yourself on the following items with 5 being the best.

I was prepared for our meeting 5 4 3 2 1
I shared information that helped us evaluate the sites 5 4 3 2 1
I listened carefully to what others had to share 5 4 3 2 1
I asked questions to gain more information 5 4 3 2 1
When I didn't agree with someone, I did so in a friendly manner 5 4 3 2 1

What is one thing you can do next time to help the group function better?

(continued on page 11)
Answer the following questions as a group.

What are some things you all need to work on next time?

What is the most important thing you accomplished in this round?

What would you like to accomplish in the next round?

Evaluating Our Progress after Round 3

Rate yourself on the following items with 5 being the best.

I was prepared for our meeting
I shared information that helped us evaluate the sites
I listened carefully to what others had to share
I asked questions to gain more information
When I didn’t agree with someone, I did so in a friendly manner

Answer the following questions as a group.

What is the most important thing you accomplished in this round?

What do you feel the strengths of your group were?

What do you feel the weakness of your group were?

What other type of problems may you solve in the future using this same technique?