



# TEACHER'S GUIDE

## WHAT IS PUBLIC SERVICE RECOGNITION WEEK?

Celebrated the first full week in May since 1985, *Public Service Recognition Week (PSRW)* is a time set aside to honor the men and women who serve our nation as federal, state, county and local government employees. Throughout the nation and the world, public servants use this occasion to educate others about the work they do and why they have chosen public service careers, as well as the many ways government services make life better for all of us.

Every year, from the steps of the Capitol to the smallest towns, public servants will participate in ceremonies, information fairs, parades and other events in their honor. Although many events will likely look different this year, we still need to recognize public servants. These events are essential to opening new avenues of communication with the public about the value of government service in sustaining the quality of American life.

Above all, this is a time to stop and thank public servants for their contributions to our nation. We hope you will join us in doing so this May during *Public Service Recognition Week*.

## GET INVOLVED

For more information or to share your ideas, call us at (202) 775-9111 or email us at [psrw@ourpublicservice.org](mailto:psrw@ourpublicservice.org). Complete program details are available at [psrw.org](http://psrw.org).

## RESOURCES TO HELP YOU

The Partnership for Public Service and the Public Employees Roundtable have developed this Teacher's Guide to provide resource materials about public servants and the important work they do on behalf of Americans every day.

We hope this guide helps you to:

- Teach the value of a quality government workforce and the important role it serves in providing essential services to the American people;
- Provoke conversation and thought by students about the role of public service and how it affects them;
- Educate students about the scope and nature of government; and
- Raise awareness of public service careers.

We hope this information will facilitate a deeper and broader dialogue and understanding of government, especially during *Public Service Recognition Week*, the first week in May. This Congressionally-declared week offers a unique opportunity to provide an interactive learning experience combining school activities and field trips with local and national celebrations.

Thank you for your interest and excitement about engaging high school students in public service and citizen participation! If you have any ideas or feedback about the Teacher's Guide, please email us at: [psrw@ourpublicservice.org](mailto:psrw@ourpublicservice.org).

# DID YOU KNOW?

Public employees help the American people in many interesting ways that your students might not know about. Public servants:

## Secure our nation

- William Friedman, a civilian employee of the War Department, ultimately deciphered the Japanese diplomatic code in World War II, thus playing a vital role in winning the war in the Pacific.
- More than two million public servants protect our nation through the armed forces.
- Dr. Eddie Bernard of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration created a tsunami detection system that significantly increased the warning time before a tsunami hits land.

## Improve our health care

- Ninety-five percent of America's children are protected against major disease through vaccines administered by public employees. Thanks to the government, polio and measles have been all but wiped out in the U.S.
- A government employee invented the plastic cornea, a discovery that has returned eyesight to thousands.
- The discoveries of Dr. Douglas R. Lowy and Dr. John T. Schiller of the National Cancer Institute inspired a vaccine for a majority of cervical cancers.
- A government employee invented the CAT scan, which helps physicians diagnose cancer, brain disorders and other diseases.
- Half of all U.S. medical doctors in practice today received training as government employees working for the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.

## Help the homeless and poor

- Clara Barton's spirit of compassion led this employee of the U.S. Patent Office to found the Red Cross, a world-renowned humanitarian organization caring for lives worldwide in times of emergency.

## Invent new products that change our lives

- Herman Hollerith, a U.S. Census Bureau accountant, invented the first modern computer.
- Agricultural Research Service researchers in New Orleans created flame-retardant clothing for fire fighters and astronauts.
- Two employees of the National Institute of Standards and Technology invented the neon light.
- Employees of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers have constructed many of our nations' architectural masterpieces.

## Forge the path to new frontiers and unlock the mysteries of the universe

- The first person to set foot on the moon, Neil Armstrong, was a public employee.
- In their search to unlock the mysteries of the universe, NASA scientists discovered the first Black Hole.

## Public Employees also:

- Educate our children
- Help our nation's veterans and care for our wounded soldiers
- Investigate crime and prosecute criminals
- Keep our food safe
- Negotiate international agreements
- Fight fires
- Develop new technologies for renewable energy
- Manage our public parks
- Protect our environment
- Design and build our roads and bridges
- Distribute financial aid to schools and students

# PUBLIC SERVICE RECOGNITION WEEK

## GENERAL DISCUSSION ACTIVITIES

### LOCAL ISSUES

- What are the biggest problems in our school system today?
- What are the biggest problems in our community today?
- Who is affected by each of these problems?
- What are the causes of the problems?
- Who is trying to deal with the problems?
- Is the government involved? How?
- What solutions can you offer?
- How can you help?
- What are some ways people are helping each other in our community?

Idea: Discuss issues pertaining to the local, state and national level and ask your students to identify the elected official(s) that deal with the issues that arise during your discussion.

### THE PURPOSE OF GOVERNMENT

- What feature of our system do you most value? Why?
- What would you include in a charter for governing your class?
- What are the biggest threats to our system?
- What can you do to protect it?

### ROLE OF CITIZENS IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT

The city is considering an ordinance to regulate skateboarding on public sidewalks. What would you do to support/oppose such an ordinance?

### FUNCTION OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT

- How does the Student Council operate?
- How is the Student Council similar to the City Council?
- How is it different?
- Where would a city or county manager fit in?

### HOW WE CHOOSE OUR LEADERS

Present the following situation and ask students to each make a decision:

Two students are running for Student Council. Both will want you to vote for them. One has a great personality and is a hard worker. The other has some terrific ideas for the Council, which she has shared with you, and she is very shy. How will you decide who to vote for?

Use answers to facilitate a discussion of the qualities we look for in elected officials.

*Adopted from Investing in Our Future: A Handbook for Teaching Local Government (ICMA, 1990 pp. 35-36)*

# PUBLIC SERVICE RECOGNITION WEEK

## CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

Public service touches every aspect of our lives and civil servants deserved to be recognized and honored for the important work they do each day. From social studies, biology or anything in between, opportunities abound for you to integrate public service into your lesson plans. Here are some ideas for engaging your students in *Public Service Recognition Week*.

### THINK ABOUT THE ISSUES

#### Objectives:

- Increase awareness of how federal agencies affect student's lives and their communities.
- Stimulate research and reflection on issue areas and accomplishments of federal agencies.
- Inspire students to think of ways they can make a difference by becoming a public servant.

#### Activity:

Have students choose a particular issue area or areas, such as space exploration, the environment, or the safety of our nation and then draw the connection between those issues and government agencies that work on them. Discuss how those agencies help or could help the American people. (View a list of Cabinet-level agencies and their descriptions on the following pages.)

#### Discussion Questions:

1. What issues do you care about? (List them on the board or screen)
2. Why is this issue important to us?
3. What will happen if the government ignores your issue?
4. What do you think government could do better regarding this issue?
5. What other organizations or people (e.g., private sector, community groups, etc.) should the government engage to achieve its goals?
6. How can you make a difference on this issue? (This question could lead to the letter-writing activity)

### WRITE A LETTER TO A PUBLIC SERVANT

All too frequently, we hear about what's wrong with government, but very rarely do we recognize that we have the power to influence change. Encourage your students to think about issues that might affect their family and recognize ways public officials can or have helped to make a positive difference.

#### Activity:

Ask students to write letters to a relevant public official, detailing why they care about the issue and why it is important to them. Visit <http://congress.org> to search for your local Congressional member and see pages 7 and 8 for the websites and mailing addresses of Cabinet-level federal agencies. This public official could also be your local mayor or governor. Alternatively, ask students to write a letter to a public servant, such as a teacher, firefighter, cabinet secretary, or an elected leader thanking them for enacting a policy that helps their community or family.

#### Objectives:

- Link issues that affect students to public service and public servants.
- Develop civic participation by reaching out to a public official.
- Recognize civil servants for their accomplishments.

#### Discussion Questions:

1. Why do you care about this issue?
2. Why would the public official care about your issue?
3. What will your next steps be?

### THE PUBLIC SERVICE CALL TO ACTION

#### Objectives:

- To demonstrate constructive steps that can be taken to influence public policy.
- To encourage students to take active roles in their communities through civic education and participation.

#### Activity:

Discuss with the class ways in which they might influence or affect a public policy of specific interest to them. Have your students break into small groups to pick an issue and come up with a plan for how to make their voices heard on the issue.

1. If the class wanted to influence the development of local homeless policy or the availability of student loans for college, what steps might they take? Have the class list possible approaches. Would they gripe to their friends? Educate themselves to government/political issues? Write a letter to Congress? Volunteer for a political campaign?

2. Have your students break out into small groups and pick an issue to focus on, such as:
  - Cancer research;
  - Housing mortgage rates;
  - Education;
  - Public transportation;
  - Student loans; or
  - Environment.
3. Possible approaches include:
  - Writing to public officials;
  - Attending public forums or town meetings;
  - Organizing petitions;
  - Learning about issues;
  - Campaigning for candidates who support particular issues;
  - Drafting letters to the editor;
  - Requesting information from government agencies;
  - Joining associations that are issues oriented (e.g., Maryland's "Save the Bay" campaign); and
  - VOTING!!!

### HOMETOWN HEROES

Inviting a federal, state, county or local government employee to speak to young people can be a powerful way of sharing the importance of public service. Consider inviting public servants you know to the classroom to give a presentation on their work. Examples of public servants (federal, state, and local government employees) include:

- Firefighters;
- Police and law enforcement officials;
- Elected officials;
- Social workers;
- Members of the military; and
- Employees of your local branches of federal agencies (see <http://usa.gov> for a list)

Still looking for ideas? Check out the blue pages in your phone book for nearby public service offices that may have employees who would be interested in visiting your site. Or use a web search engine to locate "federal agencies" in your area.

If you plan to bring a public servant to speak at your school or organization in conjunction with *Public Service Recognition Week*, please let us know: [psrw@ourpublicservice.org](mailto:psrw@ourpublicservice.org).

### PROFILES OF PUBLIC SERVICE

Looking for public service information to post in your classroom or highlight in a program? Great stories about public servants abound! You may have parents,

guardians or volunteers in your midst who work in public service fields. If not, students can still learn about interesting careers, how people are using their academic background to help solve some of our nation's biggest challenges and why public service matters through profiles of service. Some of our favorites can be found at the following links:

- <http://servicetoamericamedals.org>
- <http://makingthedifference.org>
- <http://washingtonpost.com/politics/fed-player>

### SERVICE LEARNING PROJECTS

Service-learning is a method of teaching, learning and reflecting that combines academic classroom curriculum with meaningful service in the community to enrich the learning experience, teach civic responsibility, encourage lifelong civic engagement, and strengthen communities.

Service-learning can also connect young people with local, state and regional public servants and can work in conjunction with Hometown Heroes. If you are looking for ways for your students to participate in *Public Service Recognition Week* activities, consider one or more of the following:

- Have students present their service-learning project and/or research to a local elected official.
- Invite the mayor to participate in a service-learning project your class plans, such as school beautification or a Habitat for Humanity project (see below for more ideas);
- Ask a firefighter or police officer to work with students to develop a school safety plan;
- Invite a local EPA employee to speak to your class about environmental policy affecting the community before or after the class cleans up a local stream; and/or

Interested in learning more about service-learning or getting project ideas for your class, youth club or after-school program? Check out one or more of the following sites:

- <http://servicelearning.org/slice>
- <http://gotoservicelearning.org>
- <http://learningtogive.org>
- [http://gysd.org/project\\_ideas](http://gysd.org/project_ideas)

# FEDERAL AGENCIES

Below you will find a list of the 15 Cabinet-level federal agencies, along with their website, mailing address and issues they cover that might appeal to your students:

Department of Agriculture  
1400 Independence Avenue, SW  
Washington, DC 20250  
<http://usda.gov>

The Department of Agriculture works to:

- Help combat poverty through assistance programs;
- Provide the nation with quality food and resources; and
- Supply food to the U.S. as well as to other countries around the world.

Department of Commerce  
1401 Constitution Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20230  
<http://commerce.gov>

The Department of Commerce works to:

- Provide jobs for the American people; and
- Be a catalyst for trade, running a business, or even creating a unique product.

Department of Defense  
1400 Defense Pentagon  
Washington, DC 20301-1400  
<http://defense.gov>

The Department of Defense works to:

- Provide national security;
- Provide military education resources; and
- Strengthen and recruit for the U.S. military.

Department of Education  
400 Maryland Avenue, SW  
Washington, DC 20202  
<http://ed.gov>

The Department of Education works to:

- Ensure that America's schools are providing students with a quality education;
- Help provide funds for students to go to college; and
- Provide schools with good teachers, proper facilities and encourage the use of modern technology.

Department of Energy  
1000 Independence Avenue, SW  
Washington, DC 20585  
<http://energy.gov>

The Department of Energy works to:

- Provide the U.S. with safe energy that powers homes, schools, businesses, etc.; and
- Oversee nuclear weapons and nuclear power use in America

Department of Health and Human Services  
200 Independence Avenue, SW  
Washington, DC 20201  
<http://hhs.gov>

The Department of Health and Human Services works to:

- Protect the health of all Americans;
- Prevent child abuse and domestic violence; and
- Provide services for older Americans.

Department of Homeland Security  
U.S. Department of Homeland Security  
Washington, DC 20528  
<http://dhs.gov>

The Department of Homeland Security works to:

- Protect the nation against future terrorist attacks;
- Guard borders and airports from any threats to security; and
- Coordinates the nation's response to future emergencies.

Department of Housing and Urban Development  
451 7th Street, SW  
Washington, DC 20410  
<http://hud.gov>

The Department of Housing and Urban Development works to:

- Create policy for zoning and housing;
- Help Americans become homeowners; and
- Provide shelters for the poor.

Department of the Interior  
1849 C. Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20240  
<http://doi.gov>

The Department of the Interior works to:

- Protect America's natural resources such as our public parks and lakes;
- Use science to manage and sustain the resources that are available; and
- Honor the nation's responsibilities to Indigenous peoples.

Department of Justice  
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20530-0001  
<http://justice.gov>

The Department of Justice works to:

- Enforce the law and ensure fair administration of justice;
- Foster safe communities;
- Investigate federal crimes and operate penitentiaries; and
- Help prevent violence.

Department of Labor  
200 Constitution Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20210  
<http://dol.gov>

The Department of Labor works to:

- Improve working conditions; and
- Protect retirement and health care benefits.

Department of State  
2201 C Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20520  
<http://state.gov>

The Department of State works to:

- Build and develop relations with other countries; and
- Manage more than 260 embassies around the world to represent the U.S.

Department of Transportation  
1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE  
Washington, DC 20590  
<http://dot.gov>

The Department of Transportation works to:

- Oversee highways, transits and other transportation programs; and
- Ensure the safety of American's traveling through the U.S. borders.

Department of the Treasury  
1500 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20220  
<http://treasury.gov>

The Department of the Treasury works to:

- Help manage America's debt;
- Supervise banks; and
- Print money and stamps.

Department of Veterans Affairs  
810 Vermont Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20420  
<http://va.gov>

The Department of Veterans Affairs works to:

- Protect the rights of Americans who have served in the armed forces; and
- Promote the hiring of veterans, benefits, and provides social support services.



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