

Counties Work

a game guide for teachers

In *Counties Work*, students learn about local government by playing a county official responding to citizen requests. They must keep citizens happy and manage county resources responsibly. Are citizens making sensible requests? Which department of local government has the solution? Do taxes need to be raised or lowered? How will citizens react—and what's the best action when crisis strikes? Challenges come from all directions in this fast-paced game!



Learning Objectives

- Simulate the role of county government, including organization, responsibilities, and services
- Identify appropriate resources and departments of county government to solve problems
- Consider how a budget and major sources of local revenue affect both services and citizens

Prerequisites

Nothing! *Counties Work* is designed to teach students about county government as they play. The accompanying lesson plan, *The Capable County*, is a good source for additional information after the students have played the game. You can find that and all of our lesson plans at www.iCivics.org/teachers.

HOW TO GET STARTED

1. Choose a name for your county.

Select a category of name sources, then browse until you find one you like. You can also choose between a county, parish or borough.



Counties Work takes about 20-25 minutes to play.

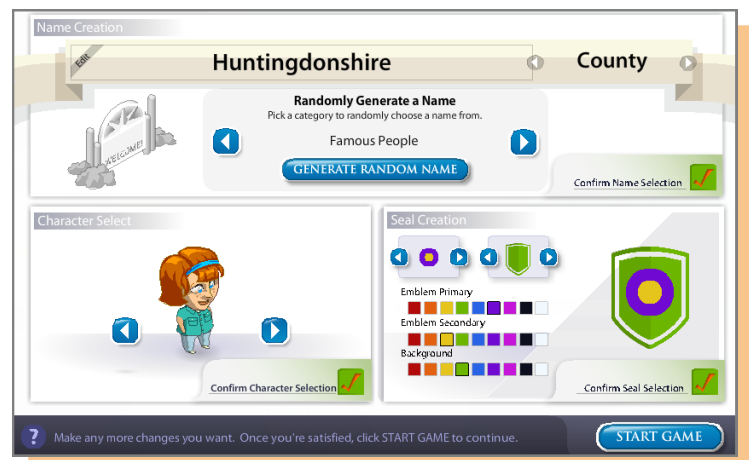
2. Choose an avatar for yourself

Pick one character out of the several options available to represent you in the game.

3. Design your seal

Mix and match shapes, pictures and colors to make a seal that will welcome visitors to your county.

4. Click on the Start Game button



HOW TO RUN YOUR COUNTY

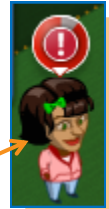
Working with the citizens

The game begins on the landscape of your newly incorporated county. The main goal of *Counties Work* is to keep citizens happy by responding to their requests.



1 A citizen will appear on the map with a message bubble overhead.

2 Click on the citizen to access the request.



3 Weighing social and economic needs, determine whether the request will benefit the community. If the request is not in the county's best interest, it should be rejected.

4 If the request is acceptable, lead the citizen to the agency that can best respond. Each building on Main Street represents a department.



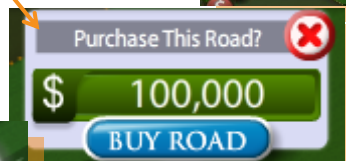
Tip: During game play, a crisis may strike! Quickly decide which department would solve the crisis most effectively. If more time is needed, click the timer at the top of the screen. This will pause the game and display the description of the crisis again.



Getting crowded?

To grow and increase the development of the county, you can select areas to build roads and attract new residents. The more residents, the higher the tax revenue! You may also get citizen requests to set up a new public area such as a park or museum. Here's how to expand:

- 1 To unlock space for new residents and projects, click on the construction cone icon where you'd like to expand. It will cost you some money, but it pays back with taxes!



- 2 Select a plot of land and build your park or building.



Tax Time!

You can adjust county property taxes and funding levels every year in January. Sales tax may be adjusted any time. Tax levels determine how much income the county receives from its residents. The amount of funds available will impact your ability to fund citizen needs. Too many taxes will keep citizens away, but too few services will make citizens unhappy. The trick is finding a good balance.



Tip: *Counties Work* may seem difficult at first because that's when a new player learns the rules of the game. Like many video games, this one has a learning curve. If you're not used to playing video games, the curve is a little steeper because you're not used to how video games often work. That part won't be such a challenge for most students. Trial and error is a critical aspect of how people learn from playing games.

Try it a few more times and soon you'll find yourself getting

GAME OVER!

The game ends after four years have passed. If citizen satisfaction is above 50%, you will be re-elected to a second term. After finishing, you can print a game certificate to provide additional information about your performance.



CLASSROOM CONVERSATION STARTERS

Pre-Game Questions

You can use these questions to lead into playing *Counties Work* in the classroom.

- What is a county? Which county do you live in? (Substitute with parish or borough as needed.)
- What services do counties provide?
 - ◊ *Answers may vary, but services might include: maintaining property records, protecting citizens, providing parks and recreational activities, health and human services, etc.*
- How do counties get money to provide services?
 - ◊ *A combination of taxes collected from people who live and work in the county and income from fees and fines.*

Post-Game Questions

Use these questions as a way to debrief the individual experiences of playing *Counties Work*.

- What was the easiest part of running a county? The hardest?
- How did you decide what projects to accept and reject?
 - ◊ *Students might mention initial costs, costs over time, if it was a good idea or not, etc.*
- What role did money play in your decisions about what projects to accept and reject?
- What is the role of counties in people's day to day lives?
- Which county department are you most interested in?

Activity Idea

- Find out more about your county/parish/borough and make a poster or brochure as a class. The National Association of Counties is a great resource at www.naco.org
- Create a Venn diagram that compares a county to a city, state or nation.

