

**VLGMA Civic Engagement Committee Newsletter Article:  
Local Government Education Week  
January 2017**

Prepared by Doug Walker, Deputy County Executive and Emily Kilroy, Community Engagement Specialist  
(Albemarle County)

**April 2017 Local Government Education Week:  
Plan now to partner with our future (K-12 students!) to learn what we are all about!**

In 2012, the General Assembly adopted House Joint Resolution #93 proclaiming the first week of April as Local Government Education week, in honor of the formation of the Council-Manager form of government in the City of Staunton, VA. The VLGMA Civic Engagement Committee has been developing tools to engage K-12 students, our future leaders, in order to acknowledge good community building work, educate on government services provided at the local level, and increase students' awareness of career opportunities in local government. This will help us strengthen interest in local government management/public service as a viable career.

January is the perfect time to start planning for this year's Local Government Education Week, April 3 - 7. Each year, VLGMA asks each locality's governing body to adopt a proclamation honoring this week as part of this effort. A template is provided on the Civic Engagement webpage on the VLGMA website [www.icma.org/vlgma](http://www.icma.org/vlgma). However, adopting a proclamation is not enough to genuinely engage in a partnership with the local school district and the young people of our community. We hope each locality will develop an engagement plan that meets your local need.

In Albemarle County, efforts are underway to reach a wider cross-section of the community, particularly youth. Two strategies continue to yield tangible benefits – digital and focused engagement. Digital engagement has been increasing steadily over the past several years, allowing citizens to access information online in numerous forms, on-demand. Albemarle hosted several “live Tweets” in 2016, where staff shared key points on the budget development, small area plan process, and a bond referendum and responded to questions in real-time. Short informational videos hosted on YouTube allow citizens to hear and see content without having to attend an in-person meeting. Online feedback forms like SurveyMonkey and Google Forms let citizens respond to specific questions about an issue, which staff use to craft more responsive policies and programs. All of these tools are easily shareable by citizens, who spread the word about the issues they care most about. Focused engagement looks more like traditional community meetings and public hearings – but instead of hosting a stand-alone meeting, staff attend events that citizens are already engaged in – Ruritan Club, PTO, Chamber of Commerce meetings, but also drop-ins at the local library branches and tabling at local athletic fields. These focused conversations engage people who don't typically attend local government meetings and generate observations and interactions that help citizens of all ages develop an appreciation for and a better understanding of local government.

So how will your locality mark Local Government Education Week? Here are some ideas for local activities focused on engagement with K-12 students:

1. Provide for all school and public libraries the elementary school level book, Out and About At City Hall, which is available at: <http://www.capstonepub.com>. This a great illustrated resource that describes what services a locality provides and is affordable at about \$20 each in hard cover;
2. Conduct guest readings of the books to elementary classes;
3. Participate in VML's “If I were Mayor” essay contest;
4. Conduct 7<sup>th</sup> grade website scavenger hunt to learn about public services;
5. Develop a high school service learning program;
6. Conduct mock Governing Body meetings;

7. Share the Teacher's Resource Guide, including sample lesson plans designed for upper middle/high school students, to be used as part of the curriculum for meeting civics/social studies standards of learning; and/or
8. Be a guest speaker to middle or high school students regarding your career as a City or Deputy Manager and/or discuss community projects (e.g., annual budget, redevelopment effort or capital infrastructure improvements) that the students will see occurring or read in the news.

Check out this website link [www.icma.org/vlgma](http://www.icma.org/vlgma) for additional great resources and feel free to contact us with questions and/or to share additional ideas.

Doug Walker, [dwalker3@albemarle.org](mailto:dwalker3@albemarle.org) and Emily Kilroy, [ekilroy@albemarle.org](mailto:ekilroy@albemarle.org)