

## Lesson 4

# Representative Group Session



### Key Terms

- representative group session
- representative group session agenda
- small group representative

### What You Will Learn to Do

- Participate in a Representative Group Session

### Linked Core Abilities

- Do your share as a good citizen in your school, community, country, and the world

### Skills and Knowledge You Will Gain Along the Way

- Identify the responsibilities of a small group representative
- Explain the impact of the representative group session agenda
- Describe the representative group session process
- Define key words contained in this lesson

### Introduction

This lesson introduces you to representative group sessions, one of two types of Citizen Action Groups. A **representative group session** occurs when all the small groups merge into a larger assembly or class to discuss an all-class or all-school position on a specific issue. Representatives are elected from each small group. These representatives then hold a meeting, which is observed by all the small groups.

The purpose of the representative group session is twofold. In the beginning, these representative sessions are simply training sessions in which you will be addressing hypothetical issues, such as gun control or the United States' policy with China. These first few training sessions will help you become familiar with the representative process in general.

After you are familiar with the representative process, the second purpose of the representative group session is to address issues that need far-reaching action and cooperation from your class or school as a whole. Your **small group representatives** will be discussing and deciding on issues (such as a school-wide parking problem) and then coming up with action steps to resolve these issues.

This process can be expanded to the next level—to your school district—where small group representatives from other schools using the Student Citizenship Training Program, gather together in larger representative sessions (see Figure 1.4.1). Thus, the representative group session mirrors the current representative process of our local, state, and federal governments.

Before a representative session can be held, however, your small group needs to elect a representative. The procedure to elect a representative from your small group differs somewhat from the way you have elected class representatives for your school government.

## Selecting a Representative

Learning how to select an effective representative will not only help your small group, but will also help you select better representatives for your student government. When you are eligible to vote, this exercise will help you support the best person for political office.



To understand how to select the best representative, you can revisit the time when our government was being formed and look at the selection of George Washington as the Chairman of the Constitutional Convention.

He was the most obvious choice for Chairman, but not because of his knowledge of government. Almost all the Founders were better educated and knew more about the workings of a government than George Washington. However, Washington had a complementary set of skills that perfectly suited him as the chosen representative for the people in this new government.

Foremost, Washington had demonstrated his strength and leadership in the American Revolutionary War. Moreover, he had proven himself trustworthy over time. He

### Key Note Term

**representative group session**—one of two types of Citizen Action Groups in which small groups elect representatives to discuss and decide on issues in front of a class or other gathering

### Key Note Term

**small group representatives**—a member of a small group who is elected to represent the group at the Representative Group Session

*Figure 1.4.1: Representatives from smaller groups gather to form larger representative group sessions.*

*Courtesy of Image Source/Corbis Images.*

*Figure 1.4.2: Because of his skills, Washington was the best choice for representative.*

*Courtesy of the Museum of the City of New York/ Corbis Images.*



was open-minded, able to look at both sides of an issue, and make wise decisions. His cooperation skills were well developed and he always treated others with the utmost fairness and respect.

In essence, George Washington (see Figure 1.4.2) was the best at the citizenship skills you have learned so far. That is why he was the best choice as a representative.

When you choose your own representative, whether it is for this representative group session, your student government, city mayor, council member, or even the President of the United States, you begin by analyzing this person's grasp and practice of seven citizenship skills: cooperation, patience, fairness, respect, strength, self-

improvement, and balance. You also look for a person who is trustworthy, intelligent, wise, and one who acts calmly under pressure; in other words, a person similar to George Washington.

Knowledge of the issues is a good trait for a representative to have, but it is not as important as these other skills. Any interested person can always learn about the issues. What helps is a person competent in the seven citizenship skills.

Recognize also that your small group's ability to pick a representative will be measured by the quality of the representative you pick. The other small groups will assume you have picked a worthy representative when she/he goes to the front of the class. Your other classmates will take what that person says as being representative of your small group's feelings and decisions, so choose wisely.

### ***How to Select a Representative***

There are three ways that you can select a representative for your small group. These steps include the following.

- **Ask cadets to volunteer if they are interested in becoming a small group representative. If no one volunteers, ask your instructor to select someone.**
- **Rate each potential candidate (hopefully you have more than one choice) on the representative rating sheet. Interviewing your prospective choices is a good way to gain more knowledge about them. Watching a debate between your choices (in a student or political election if these are held) also will give you information on a person's citizenship skills.**

- Hold an election for those in your small group who are interested in being a representative. Each group member votes for only one representative (usually the one who rated the best on the representative rating sheet). Write that person's name on a piece of paper and pass it to the group leader. The leader adds up the votes and the person with the most votes is your small group's representative. Your small group can choose to keep this representative for any period (a month, two months, semester, or year) or to elect a new representative at each representative group session.

## Representative Group Session Agenda

If you are not elected as the small group representative, you will merely observe this representative group session and then discuss it with your small group afterwards. Your instructor will give all the small groups the same issue to discuss. During the representative group session, your small group representatives will attempt to reach a class decision on the issue through a majority vote.

### Detailed Representative Group Session Agenda

Similar to the small group meeting agenda, a **representative group session agenda** is necessary to keep the session on track. This agenda includes the following:

1. **Small Group Meeting:** Meet as a small group. Discuss the issue given to you by your instructor or decided upon by your class. Take a majority vote on what your group agrees is the best course of action for this issue. Elect your representative, if you have not already done so. Brief your representative on the thoughts and feelings of your small group.
2. **Representative Issue Discussion:** Small group representatives meet together in the presence of small groups and discuss the issue. Make sure each small group representative has had an opportunity to speak. Use a majority vote between the representatives to decide what to do with the issue. Call for a vote from the representatives to decide on a course of action (research it further, act on it, or drop it). If there is not enough information, decide what research is needed. If any issues cannot be resolved this time (as may be the case with sensitive and highly emotional issues), delay the issue until the next representative group session or ask your instructor for guidance. The issue also can be returned to the small groups for further research and/or discussion.
3. **Large Discussion (Class-wide, School-wide, or Larger):** With your instructor, discuss the results of the representative session with all the small groups (in the first few training sessions only). Did your small group representative present your group's ideas effectively and correctly? How was the conduct and quality of the representatives themselves? How well did the representative group session function? Were the seven citizenship skills used in the representatives' meeting?
4. **Action Steps:** Representatives then decide on the action steps needed to put their decision into effect. They will assign tasks to other students. These tasks might be as simple as writing a letter to the appropriate person(s) (congressmen/women, school board) or arranging a meeting between your principal and a few of your small group representatives. If you do not have enough data to make a decision on your topic, your action step might be to find out more information on this issue.
5. **Small Group Evaluation:** During the first few training representative group sessions, you will break into your small groups and fill out a group evaluation form to evaluate the representative process. Did your group's representative follow the citizenship skills while participating in the representative group session? Did your

#### Key Note Term

**representative group session agenda**—a list of tasks or a schedule to be followed during a Representative Group Session

**small group do a good job of selecting a representative? How well did the representative process work? Any problems that come up during this evaluation step will be used for discussion at your next small group meeting.**

- 6. *Homework Assignments:* If desired by your instructor, cadets (including small group representatives) are assigned various tasks determined by the representatives.**

### *Quick Overview of the Representative Group Session Agenda*

1. Small Group Meeting
2. Representative Issue Discussion
3. Large Discussion
4. Action Steps
5. Small Group Evaluation
6. Homework Assignments

## *Small Group Representative Responsibilities*

Your duties and responsibilities as a small group representative include the following:

- 1. Communicate accurately and effectively to the rest of the representatives your small group's majority feelings and opinions, not necessarily your own opinions and feelings.**
- 2. Address other small group representatives as “the honorable representative from Group \_\_\_\_\_ (group's name or number)” rather than by name when he or she is participating in the representative group session.**
- 3. Participate fully in the representative session by speaking when addressed and by ensuring the other representatives have heard your small group's ideas.**
- 4. Be conscious of the seven citizenship skills and use them throughout the representative group session.**
- 5. Work cooperatively with other representatives to reach a majority decision by the end of the representative session. (This decision does not necessarily have to be an action step.)**
- 6. Contribute ideas and research needs to the other representatives. Help assign research or action steps to small group members.**

## *Evaluation*

After your small group or representative group session has concluded a meeting, each member of your small group will be given time to evaluate the group's participation, especially the way the group arrived at certain decisions.

The primary purpose of this evaluation procedure is to evaluate your group's grasp of the citizenship and group skills and the Citizen Action Group Process itself. This evaluation process may be the most important learning you will take with you from this course. That is why this phase is so critical.

Take time to fill out the evaluation forms during each small group meeting or the first few training representative group sessions. After you have filled them out, your small group will discuss the results. If you do not reach a consensus that each decision was arrived at properly using the seven citizenship skills (that is, one person stands up and vetoes the decision), then that decision is vetoed and no action is taken. This problem is then discussed under the Citizenship Skills Discussion of your next small group meeting.

If, however, your small group agrees the decision was arrived at properly, you are free to go ahead and act on that decision.

After you understand the evaluation procedure, begin your first small group meeting or your first representative group session. After you have worked through two or three issues in a representative group session and understand how the representative process works, you will understand how our government currently works and how you can be more effective in getting your ideas and issues heard by your representatives (for example, by working in Citizen Action Groups and having your representative present issues to your school, city, state, or federal government representatives).

This is the process upon which our government was founded, and it is the way we make our government continue to work and improve. The process itself is as important as reaching decisions. Enjoy the learning in this Citizen Action Group Process. Take time to honestly evaluate yourself and your group and then look for areas where your representative can improve.

## Conclusion

A representative group session takes place when many small groups combine into a larger group to share information about a specific issue. Representatives are elected from each small group, and these representatives then hold a meeting that is observed by all of the small groups. The representative reports back to the small group and discusses what was decided at the representative group session, and what action steps need to be taken.

Next, you will explore the United States Chief Justice game. Through this activity, you will gain an appreciation of the United States Constitution and of our democratic form of government.

## Lesson Review

1. What are the ways you can select a representative from your small group? What do you think is important when choosing a representative?
2. What is the main purpose of a representative group session?
3. What are the responsibilities of a small group representative?
4. Discuss why the evaluation step after a meeting is so important. What types of things would you evaluate?