Community Decisions

Unit Summary

Students get involved with community decision-making processes as they plan potential uses for a vacant building a few blocks from their school. The building lies within a community development area, and the city has asked a community advisory committee to propose possible development ideas. Students offer to study the issues and contribute their analysis to the committee. To learn how members of the community think about the issue, students develop a needs survey and poll their neighbors. As they analyze the poll results, they use the *Visual Ranking* tool to represent the most popular development ideas, and rank these along with representatives from different community groups. Student teams representing each group review the rankings by the community leaders then discuss and negotiate solutions for the vacant building. They develop oral presentations defending their choices. After discussing all the ideas, the class votes on the solutions and offers its recommendations to the community advisory committee during a monthly meeting.

Although this is a specific example, these project procedures could be used any time students have the opportunity to contribute to a community or school decision.

Curriculum Framing Questions

- **Essential Question**
  What are the individual's responsibilities to the community and the community's responsibility to the individual?
- **Unit Questions**
  How can we help our community?
  How can community decisions reflect the different needs and perspectives of members?
- **Sample Content Questions**
  Who are the participants in local government?
  How are local planning decisions made?

Instructional Procedures

Prior to Instruction
In this project, students use the *Visual Ranking* tool to evaluate design choices and establish priorities. Examine *Visual Ranking* to learn about the tool and how to use it with your students.

Set the Stage
Ask students if they have noticed the vacant building near the school. Ask what they notice about it, and how it has changed over time. They may comment that it has deteriorated, and that it is unsafe and an eyesore. Tell them that the city has asked community members to contribute to a plan for improving the vacant building situation.

Consider: What Is a Community?
Discuss the concept of community, and build a web diagram to capture student thinking. Use questions such as these to stimulate discussion:

- What are the key elements of a community?
- What different kinds of communities do we belong to? (e.g., family, school, neighborhood, city, athletic team, religious community)
- What is the role or impact of the buildings and physical surroundings on people in a community?
- How are decisions made about what happens in a community?
- Do members of a community have to agree on all issues?

Discuss constituency, the mix of distinct interest groups in a community. Discuss the challenge of making choices for a community while keeping in mind the diverse interests and needs of its constituent groups.

Invite a Guest Speaker
Invite a member from the advisory committee or a local government official into the classroom to discuss his or her work and decision-making processes. Encourage the speaker to talk about the goals of the urban development commission—how it works with citizens, city council, and various community partners to help communities improve and redevelop areas. Ask the official to talk about a recent urban development project in your community to give students an idea of what the city has already accomplished. Focus on these discussion questions during the visit:

- How can citizens have an impact on their community?
- What does community development mean?

- What is urban planning? How are the needs of a variety of people or groups (such as businesses, service industries, government, and residents) met?
- What is our local government structure?
- Can government agencies tell people and businesses what to build?
- What responsibilities do different levels of government (federal, state, and local) have when it comes to deciding where development occurs?
- How do governments use economic incentives to encourage people or businesses to build in certain areas?
- Where does the money come from to fund development projects?

Focus on Community
After discussing the idea of community and urban development, divide students into Community Development Advisory Teams of 4-5 members each. Have each team develop a draft of a needs assessment survey to poll community members about issues in the neighborhood, with a focus on ideas for replacing the vacant building in the neighborhood. Have groups identify the different constituent or interest groups in the community (i.e., seniors, people with business interests, and students), and determine the most important questions to ask. In a class discussion, have Advisory Teams share their drafts, and then synthesize team drafts into a final community needs assessment survey.

Conduct a Poll
To get a robust sample of community opinion, have each student poll at least 10 people, two from each of the different constituency groups the teams defined. When all surveys are complete, have team members combine their results and share these with the whole class. Tabulate a list of development ideas with the class and discuss criteria for deciding which items to keep on the list. Some ideas may receive so few votes that they do not merit further consideration. Others may be essentially the same (such as "playground" and "park"), and can be collapsed into one item ("park"). Narrow the list to 8-10 distinct solutions.

Possible development ideas might include:
- Community garden
- Teen center
- Skateboard park
- Affordable housing
- Public Park
- Food bank
- Community center
- Homeless shelter
- Health Center

Prepare to Prioritize
Before proceeding with the next activity, build a project in the *Visual Ranking* teacher workspace.

1. Set up a project called Community Decisions
2. Identify a leader within the community to represent each of the constituency groups and add them to the project.
3. Describe the project and include this prompt: Which development idea does the group you represent think is most beneficial for the community?
4. Invite the constituency group leaders to participate, giving them information on how to sign in and rank items using the *Visual Ranking* tool.
5. Assign one student team for each constituency group. If you want to make the teams smaller, assign more than one team to represent the same constituency groups (i.e., teams named Retired1 and Retired2 would both represent the interests of retirees). When students compare their rankings with other teams representing their same constituency, great discussion will result. You may even ask "twin" teams to negotiate and come to a consensus for their constituency group.
6. Populate the list with the development ideas established by the class.

Describe the next phase of instruction to the class: Each Community Development Advisory Team will act on behalf of one constituency group and rank the list of development options from the point of view of that group. Introduce the *Visual Ranking* tool using the demonstration space at Try the Tool. Show students how to rank and compare lists, and how to describe items and explain their relative merit using the comments feature. Point out the meaning of the correlation coefficient (the degree to which rankings agree or disagree). A coefficient of 1.0 is perfect agreement, and a coefficient of -1.0 is perfect disagreement.

Prior to ranking, each group summarizes the perspective its members will bring to the ranking task, and decides which criteria are important when making decisions for that group. This community decision handout expands on these questions and guides work:
- What values does your constituency group hold?
- How will your group's values affect how you will sort the solutions?
- What is your constituency group concerned with in the community?
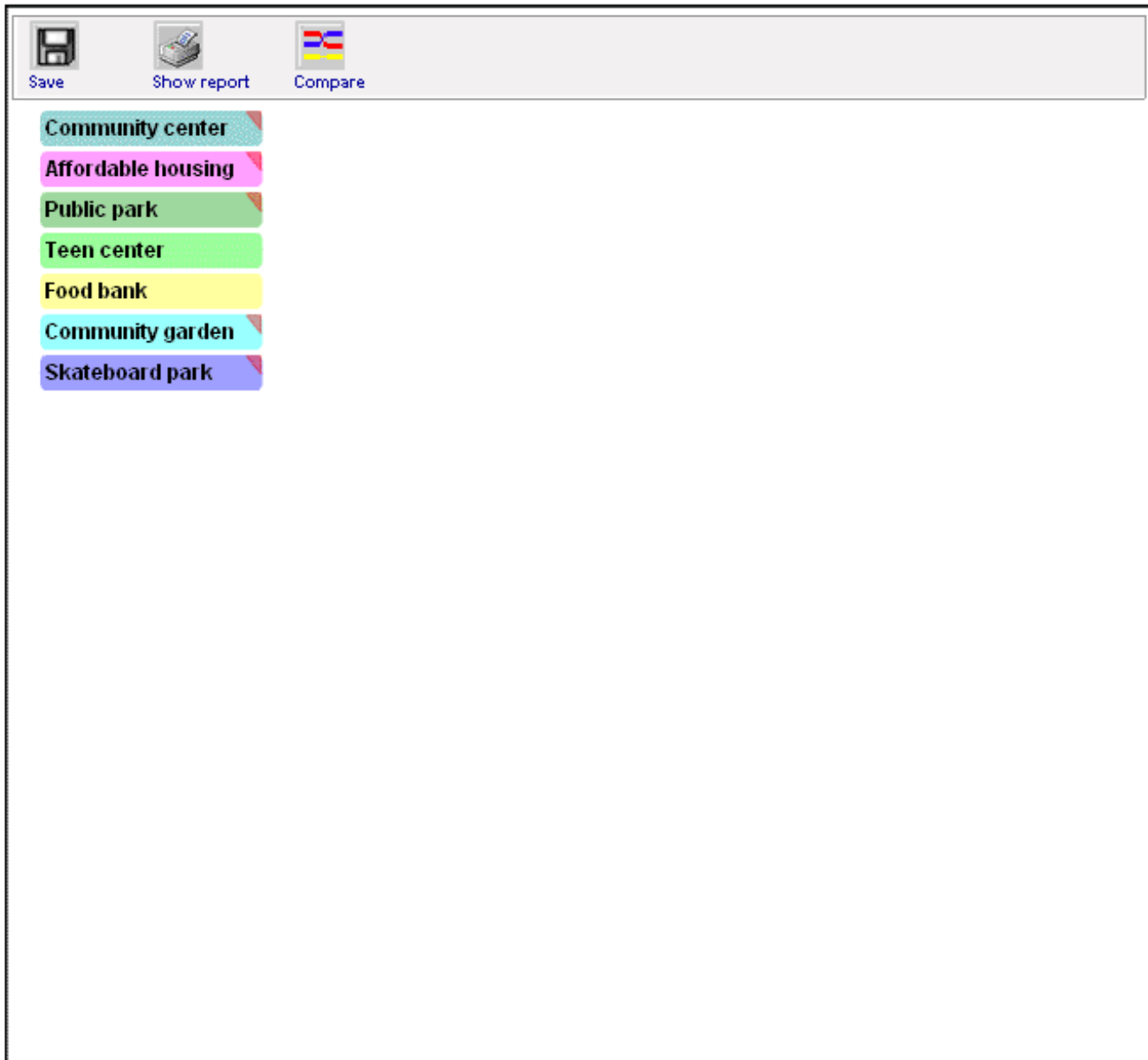
Rank Priorities Using *Visual Ranking*
Have students log in to their *Visual Ranking* team space. Point out the prompt that guides their ranking: "Which proposed idea does the community group you are representing think is most beneficial for the community?" Have each team rank the items with this in mind, and explain the relative merit of each item using the comments feature of the tool. Have teams refer to their completed handout as they rank and defend their choices. As students sort their lists, listen to their discussions and ask questions to help teams negotiate, make choices, and express their thinking.

Compare Thinking About Design Options
Once teams have finished ranking and commenting, have them compare their lists with the lists that were ranked by the community leaders. They should read each other's comments about the relative merit of each development option. Have students discuss why their lists are alike and different. Suggest that they identify the teams that ranked items most and least like they did. Have similar and dissimilar teams meet to discuss their rankings and rationale behind the order. Some teams may want to revise their ranking based on things they learn from other teams.

Examine the Visual Ranking Activity
The *Visual Ranking* tool space below represents one team's ranking on this project. The view you see is functional. You can roll over the red triangle to see the team's comments and click the compare button to see how different teams ranked the items.

Inform and Persuade Others
Once teams are finished ranking and discussing, have teams reflect on the process by answering some of the following questions:

1. What was it like defending your group's point of view? Was it difficult? Why?
2. What was the biggest obstacle to settling on a compromise within your team? What obstacles do communities in general face when they are trying to get things done?
3. What are other similar situations where there are different groups with competing interests?

Meet again as a large group and discuss these same questions. Using a projector system and networked computer display the lists and discuss general themes that appear. Ask students to consider: Is any development idea consistently in the top of the ranking? The bottom of the ranking? Is universal agreement necessary, or even desirable?

Have teams develop a presentation that describes their processes and ranking on behalf of their constituency group. Supply the presentation rubric to guide their work. Here is one team's slideshow presentation.

Have constituent teams present, and have the class discuss merits and weaknesses of each argument. Vote on a final set of development ideas to recommend to the advisory committee at their next meeting. Make a final class presentation for the community advisory board meeting, using informative and persuasive elements from the individual presentations. If computers are available at the meeting, you can show the board the processes the class used to develop their recommendations, show the ranking tool, and even set up a team for the board so it can use *Visual Ranking* as it continues its deliberations.

Prerequisite Skills
None needed

Differentiated Instruction

- **Resource Student**
  Small group work with more advanced students.
- **Gifted Student**
  Have students draw up design plans in the form of a large-scale blueprint. They can present their blueprint with their team's media presentation.
- **English Language Learner**
  Enlist the help of bilingual students to help with translation and interpretation of concepts.

Assessment

Assess students through informal observation while they participate in different activities. Use the presentation rubric to grade team efforts and presentation.

Extensions

- Study these three voting methods--Approval, Borda Count, and Plurality-- then vote one time using each method. Discuss how different outcomes result, depending on the voting method used. Have students select the voting method they think is most fair in this instance.
- Dig deeper into the requirements for the top design solutions. For example, if students think a park is the best choice, have them identify and rank the most important features of a park using the *Visual Ranking* tool. Have students create an advertisement or poster for their development choice.
- Consider using this Urban Development Simulation*, a Webquest that has students research Chicago's Cabrini Green housing development and take a position, from the perspective of different interest groups, on whether the housing development should be torn down.

Credits

A teacher contributed this idea for a classroom project. A team of educators expanded the plan into the example you see here.

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Visual Ranking
Content Standards and Objectives

Social Sciences (Oregon Benchmark 3, Grade 6-8)

Civics and Government

Students will:

- Understand how citizens can learn about public issues
- Identify and give examples of how individuals can influence the actions of government

Analysis

Students will:

- Examine an event, issue, or problem through inquiry and research
- Gather, use, and document information from multiple sources (e.g., print, electronic, human, primary, secondary)
- Design and implement strategies to analyze issues, explain perspectives, and resolve issues using the social sciences Clarify key aspects of an event, issue, or problem through inquiry and research
- Gather, interpret, use, and document information from multiple sources, distinguishing facts from opinions and recognizing points of view
- Examine a controversial event, issue, or problem from more than one perspective
- Examine the various characteristics, causes, and effects of an event, issue, or problem
- Consider two or more outcomes, responses, or solutions; identify their strengths and weaknesses; then conclude and justify which is the best

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Visual Ranking
Resources

Internet Resources

Urban Development Simulation
http://coehd.utsa.edu/programs/mxamlit/docs/wq4.doc*
Webquest where students represent different interest groups and decide whether a housing development should be torn down

Community and the Constitution
www.eduref.org/cgi-bin/printlessons.cgi/Virtual/Lessons/Social_Studies/US_Government/GOV0002.html*
Students identify government officials and resources on a local, state, and national level

Know your Local Government
www.eduref.org/cgi-bin/printlessons.cgi/Virtual/Lessons/Social_Studies/US_Government/GOV0024.html*
Activity introduces students to the local government structure and the people in the various community positions

PBS TeacherSource - Mathline
www.pbs.org/teachersource/mathline/concepts/voting/activity4.shtm*
Voting Methods - Approval Voting
Students examine a voting method in which voters can vote for as many candidates as they wish. Each approved candidate receives one vote, and the candidate with the most votes wins.

PBS TeacherSource - Mathline: Voting Methods - Borda Count
www.pbs.org/teachersource/mathline/concepts/voting/activity1.shtm*
In this voting method each candidate gets 1 point for each last-place vote received, 2 points for every next-to-last-place vote, etc., all the way up to N points for each first-place vote (where N is the number of candidates). The candidate with the largest point total wins the election.

PBS TeacherSource - Mathline: Voting Methods - Plurality
www.pbs.org/teachersource/mathline/concepts/voting/activity2.shtm*
Students explore the voting method they are most used to-one in which voters choose one candidate and the candidate with the most first place votes wins.

Other Resources

Technology - Hardware
- Computer
- Internet Connection

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COMMUNITY NEEDS SURVEY

In order to gain a greater understanding of the concerns of the community, the middle school is conducting a survey to understand community needs and wants. We hope to advise the Community Development Advisory Committee on what to do with the vacant building in our neighborhood. Please take a few minutes to fill this out. The greater the response, the more can be done to improve our community. Thank you for your time.

1. What do you like about living in this community?

2. What don't you like about living in this community?

3. What things would you like to see change in this community? What is this community lacking?

4. What would do you think we should do with the vacant building in our neighborhood?

5. What group(s) do you think are the most influential in this community?

COMMUNITY DECISIONS

Community Development Team Members: _____

Our school lies within an area designated as a renewal area. Our city has organized a Community Development Advisory Committee made up of community members, business leaders, and city government officials to come together to recommend what should be done with the vacant building in our neighborhood. After completing a community needs assessment survey, our class will compile a list of possible solutions. Your development team will order the final list using the Visual Ranking tool, taking on the perspective of a group within our community. We will vote on the top three solutions and present them to the Advisory Committee at its next meeting.

1. What criteria are important when deciding which solution will work best for the community? List the criteria below.

2. Before sorting, summarize the perspective of the group you are representing and the values that are important to this constituency group. Use the results of the community needs survey to help you answer:
   - What values does your constituency group hold?
   - How will your constituency group's values affect how you will sort the solutions?
   - What is your constituency group concerned with in the community?

3. Sort the list: Team members need to agree on the position of each item in the ordered list. Rank the solutions in order of importance, according to the values of your constituency group. For example, if you are taking the perspective of the Retired group, try to think about what types of community improvements would benefit your group and why. Negotiate and discuss your preferences.

4. Use the comment boxes: Develop a justification for each item to support your ranking. Explain what your top choices are and why the other choices are not as good.

5. Compare rankings: Compare your lists to other teams' lists. Notice how different constituency groups rate the list differently. Why do you think this is? What is important to the other groups? Use this information as you prepare your presentation to defend your ranking.

6. What are your top three solutions, and why?

Community Decisions Presentation Rubric   Name _____

	4	3	2	1
Content (justification of ranking and use of survey results)	Choice of ranking is clearly justified and based on survey results. The defense of the ranking has a logical progression with clear point of view.	Ranking is explained. Includes some logical information with results used from the survey. The point of view is a bit unclear.	Team's ranking is not clearly explained and defended. Little mention of survey results.	Information is incomplete, out of date and/or incorrect. No mention of survey. Lacks a clear point of view.
Mechanics (proofreading and grammar)	Information presented in a clear sequence. Formatting is consistent throughout presentation. Clear evidence of proofreading. No noticeable errors.	Information presented in order. Formatting may vary, does not interfere with presentation. Adequate evidence of proofreading. Few errors do not detract from presentation.	Some information out of order. Formatting inconsistencies detract from presentation. Some evidence of proofreading. Errors detract from presentation.	Information is disorganized. Inconsistent formatting interferes with presentation. Little or no evidence of proofreading. Errors interfere significantly.
Presentation (responsibilities, slide content and format)	Everyone works well together to present information. Roles and responsibilities are divided equally. Slideshow includes more than 7 slides. Effective use of text, Visual Ranking screen shot, and backgrounds.	Most of the time everyone works well together. Responsibilities are shared, but some do more than others. Show includes 5-6 slides. Effective use of text, Visual Ranking screen shot, and backgrounds.	Presentation includes fewer than 4 slides. Choices of fonts, background colors, transitions and sounds are somewhat distracting.	Some people do all of the work; responsibility is not shared or equally divided. Choices of fonts, background colors, transitions and sounds are distracting.
Delivery (clear voice, preparedness)	Uses a clear voice so audience members can hear presentation. You have obviously practiced your presentation.	Uses a clear voice so audience members can hear presentation. You have done some practicing.	Voice not clear which makes it difficult for audience members to hear presentation. You put in minimal presentation practice.	Voice not clear which makes it difficult for audience members to hear presentation. No effort put into practicing.

Community Renewal Project

Community Development Team

Constituency Group: *Retired*

Community Needs Assessment Results

- Community Issues
  - Adults:
    - Not enough affordable housing
    - Vandalizing public property
    - Safety
    - Need a place to take classes or learn new skills
  - Teens:
    - Nothing to do around the neighborhood
    - No where to hang out

Community Problem:
Vacant building in the neighborhood

Constituency Group: Retired

- Values that influence design choices:
  - Safe and affordable neighborhood
  - Opportunities to connect with others
  - Place to learn new skills

Top Three Choices

1. Community Center

2. Affordable Housing

3. Community Garden

Lowest ranking item: Skateboard Park

Possible Solutions and Our Ranking

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Visual Ranking

Project Name: Community Design Decision   Need Help? Done

Prompt: Which proposed idea does the constituency group you are representing think is most beneficial for the community?

Save   Show report   Compare

Community center → **It can offer many different programs so it will benefit many**

Affordable housing → **It is difficult for retired people in the community to afford good housing on a restricted income**

Community garden → **It would be a nice place to spend time outside--our neighborhood doesn't have a garden.**

Teen center

Food bank

Skateboard park → **Skaters would use the park instead of business and school parking lots, but it would only directly benefit a few people in the community.**

Community Center

- We can have different programs at a community center so it can benefit many.
  - Computer classes
  - Sports teams
  - Job training

Affordable Housing

- It is difficult for some people in the community to afford good housing

- On average, it costs $1,181 for a monthly mortgage payment*

*oregon.debt-services.us/oregon-housing-costs.shtml

Public Park

- Our community doesn't have a park in the neighborhood.

- The closest park is 7 miles away from the school so you can't walk to it.

Comparisons

We have positive correlations with all of the other teams in the class but we agree most closely with the Adult and Business groups.

- **Adult: strong positive correlation of .89**
- **Business: strong positive correlation of .71**
- **Parent2: strong positive correlation of .61**
- **Retired2: moderate positive correlation of .43**
- **Parent: weak positive correlation of .32**
- **Student: very weak positive correlation of .04**

Conclusion

- A community center is our top choice for replacing the vacant building. It will provide a place for people of all ages to hang out and get involved with the community.