The Project Citizen simulated hearing is the culmination of an interactive civic education program designed to engage adolescents in the civic life of their communities. In Project Citizen, a group of participating young people identify and analyze issues and problems facing their community (school, neighborhood, town/city, state). They select one of these issues or problems for detailed study. After they complete their research, they propose a public policy to deal with that issue or problem. Finally, they develop an action plan detailing the steps to take to have their public policy proposal adopted by the appropriate government authorities.

The purpose of the simulated hearing (the oral presentation component) is to teach students to present and defend reasoned opinions related to influencing public policy decision-making in their communities.

For the simulated hearing, students or youth organization members are subdivided into four groups, one group for each section of the portfolio. Each group has the following responsibility for the following primary task:

- **Portfolio Group 1**: Explaining the problem
- **Portfolio Group 2**: Examining alternative policies
- **Portfolio Group 3**: Proposing a public policy
- **Portfolio Group 4**: Developing an action plan

Each group will make a prepared four-minute presentation. The group will then respond for six minutes to follow-up questions posed by you and other members of the evaluator panel. Each of the four groups will address your panel for a total of ten minutes. At the conclusion of each presentation, you and the other panel members should provide constructive feedback (see the “Feedback” section on page 64 for details).

The following information has been prepared to assist you in asking follow-up questions to each of the four groups. Please remember that these questions are suggested only as a guide to help you elicit additional information or elaborate on information presented in the testimony.

The purpose of the follow-up period and guiding questions is to help you determine how much the students have learned about the problem they have investigated and the information-gathering and problem-solving processes they have used. The more you learn about what the students have studied and proposed, the better you will be able to evaluate their presentation.

The following information has been prepared to assist you in evaluating the presentations of each of the four portfolio groups. The entire class developed a portfolio based on their research. The portfolio has two components: a display component and a documentation component. The two components taken together constitute the portfolio. The prepared statements and answers to your follow-up questions will be based on the portfolio. You will evaluate the student presentation using the five sections of the “Project Citizen Hearing Evaluation Rating Sheet” (Appendix F, pages 65–66), one for each of the four display and binder sections and one that is an overall evaluation of the students’ presentations.
Portfolio Group 1 should provide a detailed explanation of the issue or problem chosen by the class and why that particular issue or problem was selected. During the prepared testimony phase, the group should be able to provide a detailed description of the problem's scope and impact on the community.

Possible follow-up questions might include the following:

- How widespread is this issue or problem in your community?
- Is this an issue or problem that people in your community think is important? How do you know?
- What has public reaction to the issue or problem been?
- What sources of information did you use to research the issue or problem?
- What more did you learn about the issue or problem as a result of your research?
- What branch of government do you think should be dealing with the issue or problem? Why?
- Are there policies, regulations, ordinances, or rules in place now that address the issue or problem? Do you believe they are adequate to deal with the problem? Why or why not?
Portfolio Group 2 should focus on explaining present or alternative policies designed to solve the problem or address the issue. In some instances, no policy exists, so students are expected to develop public policy alternatives to address the problem.

Testimony should include strengths and weaknesses of existing or proposed policies. Where no policy exists, students should explain what alternative policy proposals may be pending or are being recommended by their classmates, community groups, special interest groups, formal boards, the legislature, or city councils. Advantages and disadvantages of each policy or proposal should be presented and discussed.

Possible follow-up questions might include the following:

- What sources did you use to locate existing or proposed policies?
- What more did you learn about the issue or problem after you examined alternative policies?
- If a public policy currently exists, why does it need to be changed?
- Which groups or individuals support the existing policy or proposed new policy and what are the reasons for their support?
- Which groups or individuals oppose changing the policy or proposed new policy and what are the reasons for their opposition?
- Were there other policies or solutions that you did not include in your portfolio or in your presentation? If so, what are they? Why did you exclude them?
Portfolio Group 3 should focus on the policy or solution being proposed by the class. The group’s explanation should include a clear rationale for making changes to existing policy, eliminating existing policy, or implementing new policy. If appropriate, the students should present a cost analysis. The group must include an explanation of why its proposed policy does not violate the federal or state constitutions.

Possible follow-up questions might include the following:

- What branch or agency of government is the proposed policy directed toward? Why is it directed toward this branch or agency?
- Have you considered the total cost of implementing your policy? Why or why not? If you have, what is the total cost and what is included in the cost?
- Where would the funds come from? What resources besides money might be needed?
- Does the civil community or private sector (business) have any responsibility to correct the problem or assist in carrying out the proposed public policy?
Portfolio Group 4 should focus on giving a detailed explanation of the steps needed to have the proposed policy adopted by the appropriate government officials. Testimony should include a statement on how long it might realistically take to get the proposed policy adopted and implemented.

Possible follow-up questions might include the following:

- How could the groups or individuals who support your proposal help to influence or convince government officials to adopt your proposal?
- Are there other individuals or groups who might support your recommended solution or policy? Why would they support your recommended solution or policy?
- What individuals or groups oppose your recommended solution or policy? What are the reasons for their opposition?
- How would you respond to the arguments of the individuals or groups that are opposed to your policy?
- How long would it take to implement the proposal?
- What results would you expect if you carried out your action plan?
- What do you think might happen if your proposal were not adopted?
GENERAL QUESTIONS

If appropriate, these general questions might be asked of any of the four groups:

- How does the [legal or law case] you mentioned in your testimony support your position?
- What did you learn about the role of government officials by participating in Project Citizen?
- What did you learn about the issues or problems facing your community by participating in Project Citizen?

FEEDBACK

The simulated hearing component of Project Citizen is an extension of classroom learning. As such, it presents another opportunity for you to help students understand the complexity of the public policymaking process. After each group presents its section of the portfolio, you are expected to provide the students with feedback on their presentation. These remarks should be short but constructive. You should commend the students for their work and help them learn from the process.

Always begin with positive remarks and add helpful examples of how the students might improve their presentation. For example, you might say “I liked the way you explained the problem statement. I would suggest that you include more data on the number of people affected by this serious problem.”

Students will undoubtedly make errors in their presentation. During the feedback session, please make any corrections in a tactful, sensitive, and diplomatic manner. For example, “Your presentation included an important reference to the Supreme Court’s ruling in New Jersey v. T.L.O. That case relates to the Fourth Amendment's prohibition of unlawful search and seizure. Because your presentation focused on free speech, you might think about using the Tinker v. Des Moines case instead.”