



# Briefing

## Contacting schools

It has never been easier for civic groups to work with schools and colleges and the reasons for doing so have never been more compelling. Key Stage 3 and 4 both now have a dedicated Citizenship programme of study. Many different civic groups across England are already regularly working with schools and colleges and are deepening their relationships. Others are planning to get involved for the first time. However, many civic groups say that they are unsure about how to go about developing a relationship with a local school, so, Civic Voice has put together the following briefing that we hope will help you.

### Tips for contacting schools

All schools work differently and have different approaches to communication and sharing information. Schools receive lots of mail every day from companies and groups about "services" so 'cold contact' letters may not reach the right person and may be filtered out by school receptionists.

### First thing first

- ☛ Find out contact details for the school (email and telephone), typically listed on the Internet.
- ☛ It may be best to start with phoning the general reception before moving onto a specific teacher if you are unsure of which person to contact.

### Telephoning schools

- ☛ Have a pen and a piece of paper ready, or something else to take notes on.
- ☛ It may also be helpful to sit in front of a computer with the relevant documents open
- ☛ If contacting by phone, call between 8:00am to 3:00 pm. If you are trying to get in touch with a specific teacher check with the receptionist when the best time to call would be, e.g. do they have any free periods? / What time is the lunch time break?

### Introductions

Be prepared to briefly introduce yourself to the reception (name, civic society, and one or two sentences about your event). Ask to be put through to the relevant teacher; if you don't have a name, ask if you can be put through to someone in geography or responsible for citizenship, although be aware, not every school will have a dedicated person for citizenship.

If you get through to a teacher, see the next section. If not, ask the reception for an email address or the name of the person that would be most appropriate to contact.

### Remember

- ☛ All schools work differently
- ☛ Make sure you have the correct name of the school you are contacting!
- ☛ Check out the local authority website for contact information
- ☛ Schools tend to plan their timetable in June, because teachers are able to offer resignations up until May
- ☛ Promote your sessions / resources early enough to plan in the school calendar at the beginning of the year.
- ☛ Be flexible in when you can work with schools
- ☛ Be flexible in ways that teachers can engage with you – visits, outreach or online!

If the school is not responsive, target the Local Education Authority. Each Local Education Authority (LEA) works slightly differently but they all have advisors that work closely with schools around specific curriculum areas or themes. LEA advisors may meet regularly with groups of teachers in a geographic area or may lead on specific events and initiatives. They will definitely have established communication channels with schools in their area. Another approach is to contact the board of governors. The Governors contact may be on the school website.

## Speaking with teachers

- ☛ Introduce yourself as above for reception (name, civic society, one or two sentences on the work you do)
- ☛ Explain what your project is and that other civic groups have undertaken projects with schools and how your project could link in with what the children study. Tell them about any previous experience your group has working with youngsters and provide any positive feedback your group has received from other organisations (if appropriate).
- ☛ Ask for an email address to send more detailed information (they often ask you to do so before you say it). Point them to the web address of Civic Voice ([www.civicvoice.org.uk](http://www.civicvoice.org.uk)) and tell them that they can check out other activities with other civic groups online.
- ☛ Teachers will want to see clear language outlining tangible outcomes and measureable benefits to the school in terms of attainment, behaviour or other areas against which they are judged. Demonstrate very clearly the curriculum links in your project. What makes your offer the best way to support that part of the curriculum? (see the remember section for points to include)
- ☛ In the case of a school principal or a teacher not in a related field, you can say essentially the same things as above, but add you would like to be forward to the geography department. Ask them for the name of the teacher you should contact and their email address if possible and don't forget to thank the teacher for their time!

### Remember

To meet key stage 3 (11-14) your group should be offering activities that cover the following:

- ☛ Opportunities to participate in debates
- ☛ Opportunities to develop understanding of the meaning of "being a good citizen"
- ☛ Opportunities to participate in community-based activities
- ☛ Opportunities to participate in decision making and campaigning
- ☛ Opportunities to develop appreciation for our heritage
- ☛ More information at <http://bit.ly/vsAh2O>

Don't be discouraged by lukewarm replies: remember that you are offering the school an opportunity to help children become better aware of their local environment. If they do not wish to benefit from this, it is ultimately their loss!

## Celebrate successes

Schools love to show off the work off their pupils. Offer to display children's work produced via your project through connection with your museum / archive. Share successes through school assemblies or special events and even invite the Mayor!

Key link <http://www.education.gov.uk/b00199157/citizenship/ks3/programme>