STUDENT GOVERNMENT LOTTERIES

A step-by-step guide to improving civic education in your school with lotteries
About this Guide

Who is this Guide for?

This Guide is for educators and students who think leadership and civic education in their school could and should be better. It first introduces Student Government Lotteries as an alternative to student elections, and then explains how you can get started implementing this innovative practice in your school. If you are already familiar with this practice, feel free to skip the introduction and get right into the implementation!

Who created this Guide?

We are Democracy In Practice, a small non-profit dedicated to democratic experimentation, innovation, and capacity building. We have worked in high schools and elementary schools in Bolivia, experimenting with and developing innovative approaches to leadership and civic education, like the one highlighted in the Guide. Everything we share here comes from years of work directly with students and teachers.

Learn more about us and find more resources on our website, connect with us on social media, and let us know about your experience using this Guide!
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Introduction

Elections and schools don’t mix

Student government (also called ‘student council’) is meant to introduce young people to democracy and develop tomorrow’s leaders. Unfortunately, student elections tend to exclude all but the most popular, charismatic, and ambitious students from actively participating, as they have little chance of winning a competition for the most votes. This is unfair, and it widens the gap between students in terms of leadership and civic skill development. Elections also incorrectly teach young people that there are a few natural-born leaders, and that for the rest democracy is largely a spectator sport, where their only role is to occasionally vote for our favorite candidate.

“We wouldn't use a popularity contest to decide which few students get to learn math or history, so why are we doing this with leadership and civics?”

Adam Cronkright
Cofounder of Democracy In Practice

Every student should be given an equal chance to experience leadership and service to their school community. Every student should have an equal opportunity to develop skills relating to teamwork, deliberation, collective decision making, and public speaking.
Student Government Lotteries offer a better approach

Student Government Lotteries alleviate this problem by giving an equal chance to each and every student who wants to participate – regardless of their gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic background, grades, or their level of popularity, charisma, or ambition. The Lotteries completely replace elections, meaning there are no candidates, campaigns, or competitions for votes in the school. Instead, willing students enter the Lottery and a small number are randomly selected to form the student government. This approach is fairer than traditional elections, generates higher levels of interest and participation, and results in student governments that are more diverse and representative. The lack of competition also prevents ‘winners’ from feeling superior to their peers and others from feeling rejected. The process is simple, fun, and can easily be structured in a way that guarantees proportional representation by gender and grade level.
But doesn’t replacing elections rob students of the chance to learn about democracy?

No, we believe that what young people need most to become engaged and effective citizens are democratic skills: active listening, critical thinking, deliberating, public speaking, etc. Student Government Lotteries give all types of students the opportunity to develop these skills, instead of excluding those who are shyer and less popular in an attempt to mimic adult politics.

And we shouldn’t restrict students to thinking that elections are the only way to do democracy. In the first democracy, ancient Athens, lotteries were used for almost 200 years to fill key legislative bodies and most public offices. It’s a safe bet that young people who experience innovative and engaging student politics are more likely to be engaged in politics as adults, and may even someday invent creative ways to improve democracy.

**Civic Lotteries Around the World**

Since the 1970s, and increasingly since the 2000s, ‘civic’ lotteries are used to randomly select citizens and form Citizens’ Juries and Citizens’ Assemblies. In this way, lotteries have provided everyday people the opportunity to directly investigate and advise on political issues, ranging from healthcare cuts, to local water and transportation policy, to municipal budgets and even the shaping of a national constitution! Find an interactive map with examples from around the world on our website: [democracyinpractice.org/bigger-picture](http://democracyinpractice.org/bigger-picture)
Implementation

Ready to take action and improve leadership and civic education in your school? The following pages provide essential information you need to successfully conduct a Student Government Lottery. We'll address important aspects related to timing, explain the resources you might need, and lay out each step in the process. This will give you a template to follow to get started, but be sure to adapt your approach to fit your school as well as the resources and support available to you. Also be sure to change your approach over time as you see what works and doesn't work in your unique context.

Timing

Your options: A Student Government Lottery could be conducted at any time during the school year, provided there is still enough time remaining for the randomly selected student government to have a rewarding experience.

We recommend: Beginning of the school year
Why? It's best to form the student government early - as is normally done with student elections - so that selected students can have enough time to learn the ropes and then plan, execute, and evaluate their own initiatives.

Keep in mind: It is generally a good idea to pick an accessible time when all students can participate. On the other hand, if student government is extracurricular and requires students committed enough to stay after class, you might consider holding the Lottery after class (with lots of advanced notice) as a way to filter out students who would not regularly attend.)
You definitely need:

- Permission from the school administration
- Teacher collaboration (especially for giving up class time with students so that they can participate in the Lottery)
- Pens and paper or a computer to record the names and information of students selected in the lottery
- Lottery method and materials

You might need: A microphone/audio system if the lottery will take place in a large open area.

Your options: There are countless ways to conduct a lottery and different methods typically require different materials. You can even create your own lottery method, just make sure the process is participative, fun, and random! Common lottery methods use raffle tickets; small multi-colored objects of similar size, weight, and texture concealed in a bag (in the picture on page 4 students are using two-colored fava beans and a covered pot); or even random selection software, such as that available at random.org.

We recommend: Raffle tickets
Why? It's important to keep things simple - especially when you're first starting out. Once lots of teachers and students experience Student Government Lotteries and support their use in your school, you can experiment with more creative approaches that require more time, organization, and support.
1. **Gain support and buy-in**

Meet with school leadership, teachers, and students to present the idea of Student Government Lotteries and explain the need to replace elections. If possible, inform parents/guardians about the change. Note that we provide short videos on our website that you can use in your presentation.

*Keep in mind:* It is a good idea to ask them who typically wins student elections, whether that outcome is fair, and whether the typical student-candidates are the only students who can and should develop leadership skills. Invite them to share questions and concerns, offer ideas, and voice support for the initiative. If you are wanting to implement other related innovations, like rotation and horizontal teamwork, discuss these changes with school leadership, teachers, and students as well. See page 20 for links to step-by-step Guides like this one that explain those other innovations.
2. Decide which groups should be proportionally represented

If possible, discuss with students and teachers which groups, if any, should be proportionally represented in the student government.

Ask questions like:

• Is gender balance important?

• Should each grade level have the same number of representatives? Or should there be a higher portion of older students?

• Should the student government have a representative from each classroom?

Keep in mind: We find that student governments typically work best with around 8 members and should not have more than 12.
3. Secure an accessible space, date, and time

Once the school is generally in agreement with changing from elections to Lotteries, work with teachers and administrators to settle on a date, time, and location for the Lottery to prevent scheduling conflicts with other parts of the school curriculum. Try to get as many teachers and staff as possible to commit to being present and assisting with the Lottery.

*Keep in mind:* Conducting the Lottery with the entire school at the same time can be exciting but it can also be chaotic! On the other hand, conducting the Lottery with different parts of the school at different times is more manageable but typically generates less buzz and enthusiasm!
4. Plan the Lottery

- **Select/design lottery method.** Choose or create a lottery method that is fun and that utilizes resources already present in the school or the community. As mentioned earlier in the Resources section, it could involve selecting different objects out of a box, raffle tickets, a computer software, or any other method involving randomness, but we recommend keeping it simple and understandable. If possible, engage students in designing the Lottery.

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**Keep in mind:** Different lottery methods take different amounts of organization and time. A computer program can randomly select 10 out of 1000 students in a split second, but this process is less visible and engaging. Meanwhile, having the entire school face off in many rounds of ‘Rock, Paper, Scissors’ until only 10 students remain is fun, but it is also chaotic and time consuming. Try to design a lottery in a way that strikes the best balance given the amount of space, time, and support you have.
• Design for the different groups, if any, identified in step 2 that need to be proportionately represented. For example, let's say your school wants to have a student government with 10 members and an even gender balance. Then simply conduct one lottery with only female students to select 5 student government members, and conduct a separate lottery with only male students to select the other 5. This way, it doesn't matter if 60 female students volunteer to participate in the student government and only 20 male students volunteer, you can be sure to end up with a student government that has exactly 5 females and 5 males. You see, you can't control who is selected in a lottery (that's because it's random!), but you can control who enters the lottery and how many people are selected. Keeping groups separate allows you to ensure they are proportional represented in whatever way you decide.

One more example: Let's say your school has 5 grade levels and you also want each grade to be equally represented. Simply conduct separate lotteries for females and males in the first grade level, selecting 1 of each. Then repeat this for each of the other 4 grade levels to finish with a student government that has balanced representation by both gender and grade level. You can also use this method to give a stronger representation to a certain group, such as seniors. Continuing with the above example, you could randomly select 2 females and 2 males in separate lotteries with just the senior class, and only 1 female and 1 male for each of the other 4 grade levels to achieve a student government with and even gender balance and 12 members, 1/3 of whom are seniors.

Keep in mind: You may want to adjust the number of students that make up the student government to make it easier to achieve proportional representation. For instance, a student government with 7 members cannot have an even gender balance, whereas one with 6 or 8 can.
Organize roles and responsibilities. How many people will be needed to administer the Lottery? To record Lottery winners? To maintain order during the Lottery? And who will take on these responsibilities? Teachers? Students?

Keep in mind: Those administering the Lottery should not participate in it in order to ensure a fair process, so typically teachers administer the first Lottery and subsequent Lotteries can be administered by outgoing students who are finishing their term of office in the student government.

5. Conduct the Student Government Lottery

Different Lottery methods require different steps, but most are relatively straightforward. Whatever method you choose, there are important things to keep in mind when conducting the Student Government Lottery:

- **Clearly explain roles.** Make sure that everyone understands their different roles and responsibilities, including teachers or students who will administer the Lottery, record the information of those selected, and maintain order.

- **Explain what it means to enter student government.** Before inviting students to voluntarily participate in the Lottery, be sure that they understand both the ways in which they could benefit from participating in student government, as well as the responsibilities and commitments that the Lottery is assigning. It needs to be clear that although this is fun it is not a game, and that those selected will be expected to attend student government meetings and actively contribute to student government projects.

- **Count well.** Once students have volunteered to enter the Lottery, be sure that they are properly counted (or that all raffle tickets are in the container). Any mistake will require that the whole process be redone.

- **Clearly explain the lottery method.** Explain the lottery process to all students and check if participants have any questions.
• **Prevent cheating.** If the lottery method involves students reaching into a box, bag, pot, etc., make sure that participants roll up their sleeves and clearly demonstrate that their hand is empty, before they reach in to draw. If you are using a different lottery method, think creatively beforehand about how someone might try to cheat or rig the process, and take steps to prevent it.

• **Complete the Lottery.** Make sure that the full lottery process is completed and that everyone remains present until the end. For example, if the lottery method used involves having students draw two different colored marbles out of a bag, even if it appears that all the winning marbles have been selected, each remaining student must still draw a marble to ensure that the Lottery was properly administered. If, for instance, the last student reaches into the bag and there is no marble left for him or her draw, or there are two marbles, the Lottery was flawed and must be redone to ensure fairness.
• **Select backups.** It is typically a good idea to select extra students to replace any student government members who cannot, for whatever reason, finish their term of office. One backup for each student government member is typically a good ratio, and if proportional representation is important it is preferable that these backup students match those they would replace in terms of gender, grade level, etc.

• **Record details of those selected.** Record the important information about those selected (and any backups selected), including their name, grade level, classroom/homeroom, and contact details.

• **Present winners.** Present the newly selected student government to the student body. It is also a great idea to ask for an applause for all the students who participated in the Lottery, even those who were not selected.

• **Take pictures/video (if permitted).** It is a great idea to take pictures and video during the Lottery to share with students and staff, provided you have the proper authorization from the school, students, and/or parents/guardians.
6. Connect with parents/guardians

In some schools, student governments meet after class, in which case it is generally necessary to get written consent from the parents/guardians of selected students for them to participate in meetings.

However, even when parental consent is not needed, it is a great idea to inform parents/guardians about the Student Government Lottery, inform them that their student has been selected to serve on student government, explain the benefits this experience offers, and clarify the responsibilities and commitments their student will be assuming. Most parents/guardians are delighted that their student has been awarded this unique opportunity, and support at home can help students get the most out of the experience of serving in student government.
7. Orient Lottery winners

Newly selected student government members will need orientation and capacity building if their term of office is to be successful and educational. This is especially true of a diverse, randomly-selected student government, which typically needs more initial help establishing group norms and routines than a preexisting group of likeminded friends who campaigned together to win an election.

Student government members will also need guidance in selecting different team roles and responsibilities, whether using traditional roles like President, Vice President, etc., or rotating responsibilities in a horizontal team structure. This guidance can range in comprehensiveness from a couple of workshops at the start of the year, to weekly capacity building and advising throughout. The more support student governments are provided, the more they will achieve and the more they will gain from the experience, and lots of great techniques and ideas for serving as a student government advisor can be found on our website.
Avoid ‘Teacher-Mode’!

If you are a teacher, resist the temptation to go into ‘teacher-mode’ when working with the student government. That is, provide training and guidance, challenge them with an occasional timely question, but let students take the lead. It’s your job to set them up to make wise decisions and work effectively and democratically together, but it’s their job to make the decisions and do the work!

It is especially important that students decide for themselves which initiatives they want to work on (preferably in a way that includes voices from the whole school, such as by conducting a simple poll). The more ownership students feel over their student government and its initiatives, the more enthusiasm they will feel and effort they will put in. See our ‘Tips & Tricks’ Guide for specific suggestions on how to push students to take the lead.

8. Evaluate

Evaluate the Lottery and the orientation of new student government members. What went well? What didn’t go well? What things would you like to change next time? Are there any new ideas you’d like to try if you did it again? It’s best if you involve students and teachers - anyone who participated and also those who chose not to. Their feedback will help you learn and improve the experience.

9. Repeat

Conduct a new Student Government Lottery at the start of each school year to form a new student government, or further increase participation by conducting student Lotteries and changing student government membership multiple times each year. We have a step-by-step guide for how to rotate student government in this manner, and you can find more information about it on page 20.
Conclusion

Our hope is that having read this Guide, you’re ready to start sharing these ideas and finding others in your school who want to improve student government. On the following page, you can also find information about other Guides that will help you improve other aspects of your student government. Whether you’re an educator or a student, with enough time, creativity, and hard work, you can gather the support needed to conduct a Student Government Lottery at your school and reinvent leadership and civic education!

So, what are you waiting for?
Other related Guides

While the focus in this Guide is on Student Government Lotteries, we typically combine Lotteries with two other innovations previously mentioned: horizontal teamwork and rotation. On the ‘Resources’ Page of our website, we have step-by-step guides like this one, as well as how-to videos for incorporating these and other student government innovations: www.democracyinpractice.org/resources/

But even if your school only replaces elections with lotteries and changes nothing else about its student government program, it will make leadership and civic education far more inclusive and engaging!

Sharing this Guide

Please feel free to share this Guide, any other resources we provide, and the ideas they contain. After all, we want to get the word out! We only ask that you credit our work.

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