Module 4: Policy Made Plain

Purpose: Participants learn what public policy is, how different policy tools shape daily life, how DC laws and regulations move through public processes, how to read policy language, and how implementation, funding, oversight, and evaluation determine whether policy produces meaningful change.

Outcomes

- Define public policy and identify laws, regulations, budgets, executive actions, court decisions, and agency practices as policy tools.
- Describe the basic path of a permanent DC bill from idea through Council action, mayoral review, congressional review, and implementation.
- Distinguish a bill, act, law, regulation, budget decision, and agency practice.
- Read a youth-friendly policy excerpt and identify its purpose, definitions, responsible institutions, requirements, funding, timeline, and accountability provisions.
- Explain why a policy may look strong on paper but fail in practice.
- Identify opportunities for youth and community participation across policy development, adoption, implementation, oversight, and evaluation.

Learning Journey

The module moves from Daily Life → Policy Tools → Public Process → Policy Text → Implementation → Accountability.

Youth begin by noticing rules and decisions that shape their lives, learn how those decisions are created, practice reading what a policy actually requires, and examine whether institutions have the resources and accountability needed to carry it out.





Curriculum Connections

Connection	How This Module Fits
Builds from	Builds on Module 2's government and budget foundations and Module 3's research, data, and verification practices.
Reuses	Verified questions, DC institution map, source checks, and careful evidence language.
Frameworks and tools	DC Policy Pathway; POLICY reading routine; Implementation and Accountability Plan.
Products to carry forward	Carry the Policy Map, Pathway, Reading Guide, and Implementation Plan into power analysis, advocacy, and campaigns.

Module at a Glance

Lesson	Primary Focus	Suggested Run Time	Key Product
1. Policy Is Everywhere.	Public policy and different policy tools	60 minutes	Policy Type Sort and Daily-Life Policy Map
2. How DC Policy Moves.	DC lawmaking, rulemaking, and public participation	60 minutes	DC Policy Pathway
3. Read the Policy.	Plain-language policy analysis	60 minutes	Policy Reading Guide
4. From Paper to Practice.	Implementation, oversight, funding, and evaluation	60 minutes	Implementation and Accountability Plan

Lesson 1: Policy Is Everywhere

Purpose: Participants define public policy and identify the different tools governments and institutions use to shape daily life.

Outcomes / Youth Learning Goals

- I can explain public policy in my own words.
- I can distinguish a law, regulation, budget decision, executive action, court decision, and agency practice.
- I can identify policies that affect young people in daily life.
- I can ask who created a policy, who implements it, and who is affected.
- I can distinguish a problem from the policy tool used to address it.

Age Adaptations

- **Ages 11–14:** Use school, recreation, transit, and library examples with picture cards.
- **Ages 15–17:** Add DC agency, Council, and budget examples.
- **Ages 18–24:** Add statutory authority, administrative rules, court decisions, procurement, and institutional policy.

Process

Participants connect policy to familiar experiences, sort examples by policy type, and trace how one daily-life rule affects people, institutions, resources, and outcomes.

Suggested Run Time

60 minutes. Follow the exact agenda below. If the group needs more processing time, reduce examples or a practice round; protect the welcome, check-in, youth choice, core participant product, reflection, and closing.

Materials and Preparation

- Chart paper, markers, sticky notes, and pens.
- Policy Type Sort cards.
- Daily-Life Policy Map worksheet.
- Posted definitions.
- Optional DC policy examples.
- Community agreements.

Agenda and Activity Guide

Activity	Suggested Run Time	Purpose	Materials	Facilitator Instructions / Suggested Language
Welcome and Purpose	5 minutes	Connect policy to daily life.	Posted purpose	Say: “Public policy is not only what happens in a government building. It shapes school rules, transportation, housing, recreation, health care, public safety, jobs, and how public money is spent. Today we will learn how to recognize it.”
Check-In	5 minutes	Surface policies youth already experience.	Sticky notes	Ask: “What is one rule, requirement, service, or government decision that affected your day this week?” Youth may name a school policy, bus fare, program eligibility, curfew, library rule, or another example.
Icebreaker: Rule, Choice, or Policy?	5 minutes	Distinguish individual choices from institutional decisions.	Prepared scenario cards	Read low-stakes scenarios. Youth move to Rule, Choice, Policy, or Not Sure. Ask who made the decision, who must follow it, and what happens if it is ignored.
Mini-Lesson: Policy Tools	10 minutes	Introduce the policy landscape.	Definition cards	Define public policy as a course of action, rule, funding decision, or official practice used by government or another institution to address an issue or guide behavior. Introduce laws, regulations, budgets, executive actions, court decisions, and agency practices. Note that these tools can work together.
Activity: Policy Type Sort	15 minutes	Practice identifying policy tools.	Policy Type Sort cards	In groups, sort examples by tool. Ask groups to explain uncertain choices. Clarify that one issue may involve several tools for example, a law may authorize a program, a budget may fund it, and regulations may explain how it operates.

Activity	Suggested Run Time	Purpose	Materials	Facilitator Instructions / Suggested Language
Activity: Daily-Life Policy Map	15 minutes	Trace impact and responsibility.	Worksheet	Youth choose one policy and identify: who created it, who carries it out, who pays for it, who benefits, who may be burdened, and what questions remain. Avoid requiring disclosure of private circumstances.
Closing Reflection	5 minutes	Build a practical definition.	Exit slips	Complete: “A policy is more than a rule because....” Preview that the next lesson follows how DC policy moves through public institutions.

Facilitator Check

Listen for whether youth can name more than one policy tool and explain the difference between a policy problem, the solution being proposed, and the institution responsible for acting.

Lesson 2: How DC Policy Moves

Purpose: Participants learn the basic DC lawmaking and rulemaking processes and identify where youth and community members can participate.

Outcomes / Youth Learning Goals

- I can describe the basic path of a permanent DC bill.
- I can explain the difference between a bill, act, law, resolution and regulation.
- I can identify the roles of Council committees, the full Council, the Mayor, agencies, and Congress.
- I can name opportunities for public testimony, comments, meetings, and organizing.
- I can explain why emergency, temporary, budget, and permanent legislation may follow different timelines.

Age Adaptations

- **Ages 11–14:** Use a human flowchart and focus on the main permanent-law pathway.
- **Ages 15–17:** Add committees, two readings, mayoral action, congressional review, and agency rulemaking.
- **Ages 18–24:** Add emergency and temporary legislation, fiscal impact, legal sufficiency, statutory authority, and notice-and-comment rulemaking.

Process

Participants build a human flowchart of the DC policy pathway, compare lawmaking with agency rulemaking, and mark where young people can influence the process.

Suggested Run Time

60 minutes. Follow the exact agenda below. If the group needs more processing time, reduce examples or a practice round; protect the welcome, check-in, youth choice, core participant product, reflection, and closing.

Materials and Preparation

- DC Policy Pathway visual.
- Process-step cards.
- Bill, act, law, resolution, and regulation definition cards.
- Public participation cards.
- Tape or floor markers.
- Optional access to the Council LIMS and DC Register.

Agenda and Activity Guide

Activity	Suggested Run Time	Purpose	Materials	Facilitator Instructions / Suggested Language
Welcome and Purpose	5 minutes	Frame policy as a public process.	Pathway visual	Explain: “A policy idea does not become real just because someone announces it. It must move through institutions, decisions, funding, and implementation. Knowing the process helps us choose when and how to act.”
Check-In	5 minutes	Connect to prior civic knowledge.	None	Ask: “Where have you seen people try to influence a government decision at a hearing, meeting, protest, election, online, or somewhere else?” Participants may pass.
Icebreaker: Put It in Order	5 minutes	Activate sequencing and teamwork.	Simple process cards	Give groups a familiar scrambled process such as planning an event. After ordering it, ask what happens when a step is skipped. Connect this to public policy.
Mini-Lesson: Bill, Act, Law, Resolution, and Rule	10 minutes	Clarify key DC terms.	Definition cards	Explain: a bill is a proposal; after Council approval it becomes an act; after required review and effective date conditions it becomes a law; regulations are detailed rules issued by agencies under legal authority. A resolution is a formal statement the DC Council uses to make a decision, give direction, or approve or reject a proposed government action. A Council action often used for matters such as appointments, sense-of-the-Council statements, or actions that do not require a permanent law. Note that permanent bills generally receive committee consideration, two Council readings, mayoral action, and congressional review.

Activity	Suggested Run Time	Purpose	Materials	Facilitator Instructions / Suggested Language
Activity: Human Policy Pathway	20 minutes	Model the DC legislative process.	Step cards, floor markers	Assign steps: idea and research; introduction; committee referral; hearing or roundtable; committee markup and report; first reading; second reading; mayoral action; congressional review; effective date; implementation. Youth arrange themselves, then add participation cards where residents can testify, meet officials, submit comments, organize, or monitor.
Activity: Laws and Regulations	10 minutes	Distinguish legislation from implementation rules.	Two-column chart	Explain that laws often state authority and requirements, while agencies may issue regulations describing procedures. Use a hypothetical youth transit law and rule. Ask which body acts at each stage and where public comments may matter.
Closing Reflection	5 minutes	Identify an entry point.	Exit slips	Ask: “Which stage would you want to influence, and what would you do there?” Remind youth that timelines and procedures vary by policy type, so advocates must verify the current process.

Facilitator Check

Listen for whether youth can distinguish proposal, approval, legal effect, and implementation, and whether they understand that congressional review remains a distinctive part of DC lawmaking.

Lesson 3: Read the Policy

Purpose: Participants practice translating policy language into plain language and identifying who must do what, by when, with what resources, and under what accountability.

Outcomes / Youth Learning Goals

- I can identify the title and purpose of a policy.
- I can find definitions that change what the policy covers.
- I can identify the responsible agency or institution.
- I can locate requirements, permissions, deadlines, funding, enforcement, and reporting provisions.
- I can rewrite a policy section in accurate plain language.
- I can identify questions or gaps that require more research.

Age Adaptations

- **Ages 11–14:** Use a one-page fictional policy with highlighted sections and icons.
- **Ages 15–17:** Use a short real or adapted DC bill excerpt and a plain-language guide.
- **Ages 18–24:** Add amendments, cross-references, effective dates, severability, fiscal impact, and regulatory authority.

Process

Participants use a repeatable reading routine on a fictional youth policy, compare interpretations, and produce a short plain-language summary without changing the policy's meaning.

Suggested Run Time

60 minutes. Follow the exact agenda below. If the group needs more processing time, reduce examples or a practice round; protect the welcome, check-in, youth choice, core participant product, reflection, and closing.

Materials and Preparation

- Policy Reading Guide.
- Fictional Youth Transit Access Act excerpt.
- Highlighters and pens.
- Plain-language summary template.
- Optional glossary of legal and policy terms.

Agenda and Activity Guide

Activity	Suggested Run Time	Purpose	Materials	Facilitator Instructions / Suggested Language
Welcome and Purpose	5 minutes	Reduce intimidation around policy text.	Sample excerpt	Say: “Policy writing can feel complicated because every word may affect who is covered, what an agency must do, and whether people can hold it accountable. We do not need to be lawyers to ask strong questions and understand the main requirements.”
Check-In	5 minutes	Connect to difficult instructions.	None	Ask: “When have instructions or rules been harder to understand than they needed to be? What would have made them clearer?”
Icebreaker: Translate It	5 minutes	Practice plain-language translation.	Overly formal sentence cards	Pairs rewrite a harmless formal sentence in everyday language while keeping its meaning. Debrief the difference between simplifying and changing the rule.
Mini-Lesson: POLICY Reading Routine	10 minutes	Teach a repeatable analysis tool.	Posted POLICY prompts	Use POLICY: Purpose—what problem and goal? Operators—who must act? Coverage—who and what is included? Instructions—must, may, shall not, deadlines? Logistics—funding, data, rules, enforcement? Your questions—what is missing, unclear, or inequitable? Model one paragraph.
Activity: Mark Up the Policy	20 minutes	Identify the parts that control implementation.	Policy excerpt, highlighters	Assign colors or symbols for definitions, responsible institutions, required actions, deadlines, funding, reporting, and enforcement. Groups compare markings and cite the exact sentence supporting each interpretation.
Activity: Plain-Language Brief	10 minutes	Communicate policy accurately.	Summary template	Groups complete: This policy would...; It applies to...; The responsible institution is...; It must act by...; The policy does/does not identify funding...; Questions we still have.... Require them to separate what the text says from assumptions.

Activity	Suggested Run Time	Purpose	Materials	Facilitator Instructions / Suggested Language
Closing Reflection	5 minutes	Identify a policy-reading habit.	Exit slips	Complete: “The first thing I will look for in a policy is... because....”

Facilitator Check

Listen for whether youth support interpretations with policy text, distinguish “must” from “may,” and avoid filling gaps with assumptions.

Lesson 4: From Paper to Practice

Purpose: Participants examine how funding, staffing, regulations, communication, enforcement, oversight, and evaluation determine whether a policy works in practice.

Outcomes / Youth Learning Goals

- I can explain the difference between policy adoption and implementation.
- I can identify resources and actions needed to carry out a policy.
- I can identify possible implementation gaps and unequal impacts.
- I can describe oversight and accountability tools.
- I can develop questions and measures to evaluate whether a policy is working.
- I can identify community roles after a policy is adopted.

Age Adaptations

- **Ages 11–14:** Use a familiar school or recreation policy and a simple "promise versus practice" chart.
- **Ages 15–17:** Add agency plans, budgets, public information, complaint systems, and oversight hearings.
- **Ages 18–24:** Add appropriations, regulations, procurement, performance measures, enforcement discretion, administrative appeals, and policy evaluation.

Process

Participants compare a policy promise with a fictional implementation report, identify gaps, and develop an accountability plan that includes evidence, oversight questions, and community follow-up.

Suggested Run Time

60 minutes. Follow the exact agenda below. If the group needs more processing time, reduce examples or a practice round; protect the welcome, check-in, youth choice, core participant product, reflection, and closing.

Materials and Preparation

- Policy promise and implementation scenario.
- Implementation and Accountability Plan.
- Chart paper and markers.
- Sample budget, staffing, outreach, and performance information.
- Optional Council oversight questions or agency performance materials.

Agenda and Activity Guide

Activity	Suggested Run Time	Purpose	Materials	Facilitator Instructions / Suggested Language
Welcome and Purpose	5 minutes	Shift focus from passage to results.	Posted purpose	Explain: “Winning a policy is important, but adoption is not the finish line. A policy must be funded, explained, staffed, carried out fairly, monitored, and improved.”
Check-In	5 minutes	Connect to promises and follow-through.	None	Ask: “What makes you trust that a promise will actually be kept?” Invite answers such as a plan, timeline, resources, communication, responsibility, and consequences.
Icebreaker: Build It with Missing Pieces	5 minutes	Experience implementation gaps.	Simple building or drawing task with missing materials	Give groups a quick task but quietly omit one necessary resource from some groups. Debrief how unclear instructions or unequal resources affect outcomes. Do not frame individual performance as failure.
Mini-Lesson: Implementation Ingredients	10 minutes	Identify what policy needs to work.	Implementation cards	Introduce authority, regulations or guidance, funding, staffing, training, communication, access, data, enforcement, complaint processes, oversight, and evaluation. Explain that gaps can be accidental, political, or structural.
Activity: Promise vs. Practice	20 minutes	Analyze one policy implementation case, including what worked, what changed for people, what remains unfinished, and what evidence supports those conclusions.	Scenario and worksheet	Groups compare a fictional policy promise with implementation information. Ask: What happened? Who experienced the gap? Was the problem authority, funding, staffing, access, enforcement, communication, or something else? What evidence is still needed?

Activity	Suggested Run Time	Purpose	Materials	Facilitator Instructions / Suggested Language
Activity: Accountability Plan	10 minutes	Plan post-adoption advocacy.	Accountability Plan	Groups identify: the responsible agency; one output measure; one outcome measure; an equity question; documents or testimony needed; an oversight venue; and one community action. Explain that performance oversight hearings, public records, agency reports, and community monitoring can reveal implementation problems. Use DATA to distinguish the measure, context, and missing voices, then use PAUSE to verify any claim before it enters the accountability plan.
Closing Reflection and Bridge	5 minutes	Connect policy knowledge to advocacy.	Exit slips	Ask: “What is one question advocates should keep asking after a policy passes?” Close: “Now that we can recognize, follow, read, and monitor policy, we are ready to organize people and influence it.”

Facilitator Check

Listen for whether youth identify concrete implementation conditions, distinguish outputs from outcomes, and include community experience as evidence rather than relying only on agency reports.

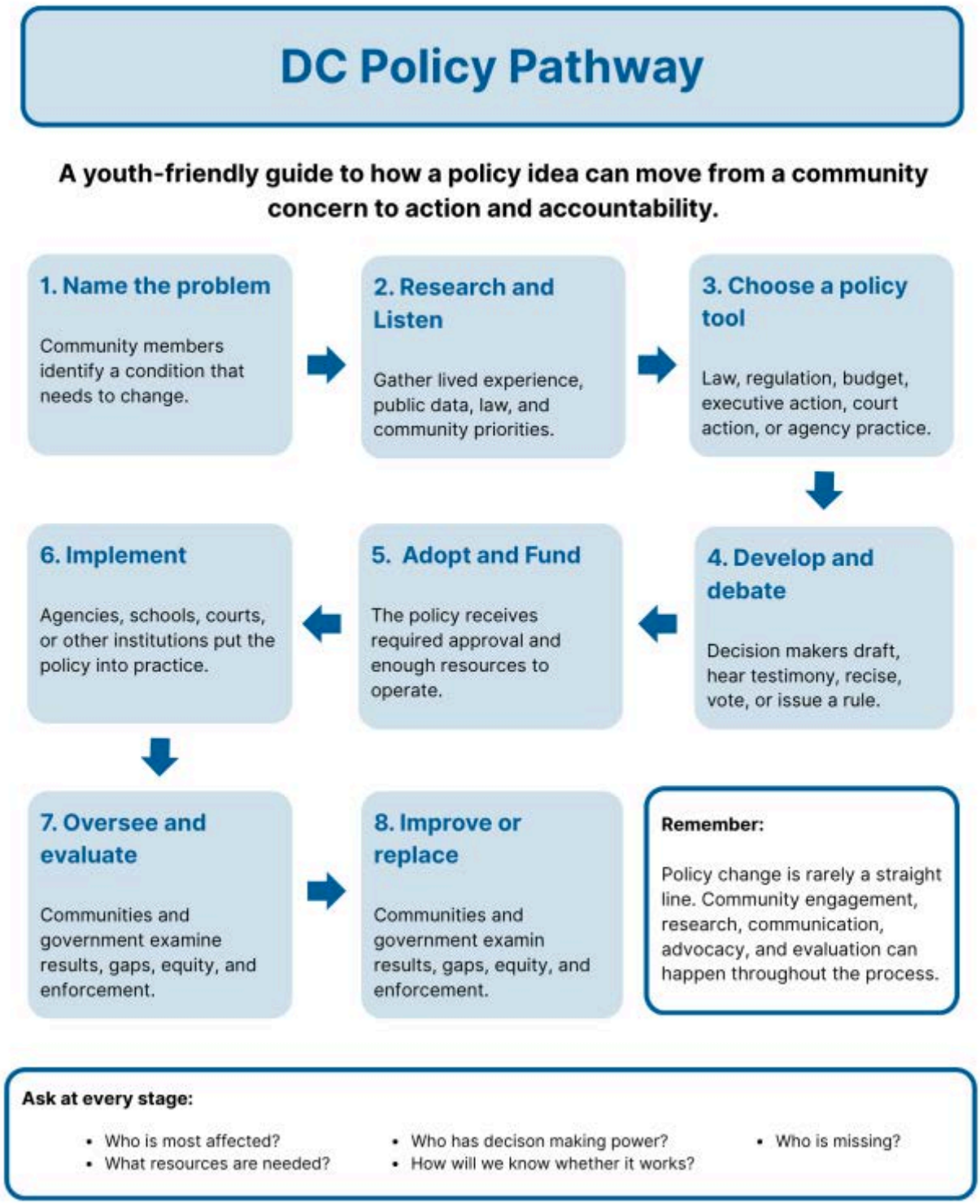
Module Appendix

This appendix contains facilitator references, printable tools, examples, and sources for further research. Materials may be adapted for age, access needs, session length, and the issue being studied.

Appendix Index

- Appendix A: DC Policy Pathway Visual.
- Appendix B: Policy Type Sort Cards.
- Appendix C: Daily-Life Policy Map.
- Appendix D: DC Policy Terms.
- Appendix E: POLICY Reading Guide.
- Appendix F: Fictional Youth Transit Access Act.
- Appendix G: Implementation and Accountability Plan.
- Appendix H: Completed Example.
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Appendix A: DC Policy Pathway Visual



Appendix B: Policy Type Sort Cards

Example	Suggested Category
The Council passes a requirement that every public high school provides free menstrual products.	Law
An agency publishes detailed procedures for how schools order, store, and report supplies.	Regulation or agency rule
The annual budget provides funding for supplies and staff.	Budget decision
The Mayor directs agencies to coordinate a citywide youth services plan.	Executive action
A court decides that an agency applied a rule unlawfully.	Court decision
A recreation center changes its registration procedure within existing authority.	Agency practice
A nonprofit recommends that the city expand evening transit.	Policy proposal or advocacy position—not yet official policy

Appendix C: Daily-Life Policy Map

Prompt	Notes
Policy, rule, or decision	
What problem is it supposed to address?	
What policy tool is being used?	
Who created or approved it?	
Who implements it?	
Who funds it?	
Who benefits?	
Who may face barriers or burdens?	
What evidence would show whether it works?	
What questions remain?	

Appendix D: DC Policy Terms

Term	Youth-Friendly Meaning
Bill	A proposed law introduced for consideration.
Act	A bill that the Council has approved and transmitted for the next required steps.
Law	An act that has completed the required approval and review process and taken legal effect.
Regulation / Rule	Detailed requirements or procedures issued by an agency under authority granted by law.
Resolution	A Council action often used for matters such as appointments, sense-of-the-Council statements, or actions that do not require a permanent law.
Budget	A legal and financial plan that authorizes how public money may be raised and spent.
Agency Practice	The way an institution carries out its responsibilities, which may be guided by law, regulation, policy manuals, or discretion.

Appendix E: POLICY Reading Guide

Letter	Question
P — Purpose	What problem does the policy name, and what outcome is it trying to create?
O — Operators	Which agency, official, school, court, or institution must act?
L — Limits and Coverage	Who and what are included or excluded? Which definitions matter?
I — Instructions	What must, may, or must not happen? What deadlines apply?
C — Capacity and Consequences	What funding, staffing, data, enforcement, reporting, or complaint process is included?
Y — Your Questions	What is unclear, missing, unfunded, inequitable, or dependent on later rules?

Appendix F: Fictional Youth Transit Access Act

This fictional excerpt is for learning only and is not a real DC law.

Beginning October 1, 2027, the Department of Transportation shall establish a Youth Mobility Pass Program providing no-cost public transit access to District residents ages 11 through 24 whose household income is at or below 300% of the federal poverty level. The Department shall publish an application in plain language and in the six languages most commonly used by District residents. The Mayor shall include funding sufficient to administer the program in the proposed annual budget. The Department shall report every six months on enrollment, application denials, average processing time, and participation by ward and age group. Within 120 days of enactment, the Department shall issue rules governing verification, appeals, replacement cards, and privacy protections.

Analysis prompts: What must happen? Who is covered? Who is excluded? Which deadlines matter? What depends on the budget? What later rules are required? What equity, privacy, or access questions remain?

Appendix G: Implementation and Accountability Plan

Area	Planning Question	Our Notes
Authority	Does the responsible institution have clear legal authority?	
Funding	What money is authorized or still needed?	
Staffing and Training	Who will carry out the policy, and what support do they need?	
Access and Communication	How will affected people learn about and use it?	
Rules and Procedures	What guidance, forms, regulations, or technology are needed?	
Equity	Who may face barriers or unequal outcomes?	
Outputs	What immediate products or services should be delivered?	
Outcomes	What change should people experience?	
Oversight	Who will review performance, spending, complaints, and results?	
Community Role	How will youth and residents monitor, respond, and recommend improvements?	

Appendix H: Completed Example

Question	Example Response
Problem	Some young people miss school, work, health care, and community activities because transportation is unaffordable or unreliable.
Policy Tool	A law creates a youth mobility program; the budget funds it; agency rules explain eligibility and appeals.
Responsible Institutions	DC Council, Mayor, transportation agency, and transit partners.
Policy Requirement	Provide no-cost transit access to eligible youth and publish accessible application procedures.
Implementation Risk	Insufficient funding, difficult documentation, slow processing, limited language access, or low public awareness.
Output Measure	Number of passes issued and average application processing time.
Outcome Measure	Change in missed school, work, medical, or program trips among participants.
Equity Question	Are participation and denial rates different by ward, age, disability, language, or housing status?
Community Action	Testify during budget and oversight hearings, gather user experiences, request public data, and propose improvements.

Appendix I: Sources and Further Research

Last reviewed: September 10, 2026. Recheck time-sensitive laws, budgets, procedures, officeholders, program eligibility, and application deadlines before facilitation.

- Council of the District of Columbia. (n.d.). *How a Bill Becomes a Law*. Provides an official, step-by-step overview of how permanent legislation moves through the DC Council. It covers the development and introduction of a bill, committee referral and public hearings, committee action, two Council readings, mayoral review, and congressional review. This is an accessible starting point for youth and facilitators learning the DC legislative process. Open resource.
- Council of the District of Columbia. (n.d.). *Legislation & Laws*. Serves as the Council's main gateway to legislative resources, including the Legislative Information Management System, the DC Code, the lawmaking process, Home Rule information, DC statutes, and historical regulations and resolutions. Open resource.
- Council of the District of Columbia. (n.d.). *Legislative Information Management System*. Provides the official system for researching and tracking DC Council legislation. Users can search for bills and resolutions and review related hearing records, committee reports, votes, amendments, and legislative history. This resource is especially useful for following a current policy proposal or researching what happened to an earlier measure. Open resource.
- DC Law Library. (n.d.). *Code of the District of Columbia*. Provides a searchable online publication of the laws currently codified in the DC Code. Users can browse by title and chapter, search for key terms, and review references to related laws and legislative history. The website is updated as new laws are codified, so users should note the "current through" date shown on the site. Open resource.
- Office of Documents and Administrative Issuances, Government of the District of Columbia. (n.d.). *District of Columbia Municipal Regulations and District of Columbia Register*. Provides access to the District's official rulemaking publication system. The DC Register publishes notices, proposed and final rules, mayoral orders, and other official actions. The District of Columbia Municipal Regulations contains the regulations adopted by District agencies. This resource can help participants follow how agencies turn laws into detailed rules and procedures. Open resource.
- Office of the City Administrator, Government of the District of Columbia. (n.d.). *DC Government Organization*. Explains the District government's executive, legislative, and judicial branches. It describes the roles of the Mayor, City Administrator, DC Council, Advisory Neighborhood Commissions, local courts, and independent

agencies, while also noting Congress's continuing authority over the District. Open resource.

- Council of the District of Columbia. (n.d.). *Hearings*. Provides access to live and archived DC Council hearings and meetings. Facilitators and participants can use it to observe how Councilmembers question witnesses, how residents provide testimony, and how public records contribute to policy discussions. The Council's hearing system also provides hearing notices, witness information, and instructions for submitting testimony. Open resource.
- Council of the District of Columbia. (n.d.). *Performance Oversight*. Provides current and archived schedules, agency responses, pre-hearing questions, hearing materials, and related documents used during the Council's annual review of District agencies. The materials can help young people investigate whether agencies carried out promised programs, spent public money as intended, and responded to community needs. Open resource.

Source and Accuracy Notes for Facilitators

- Verify procedures and timelines before each session. DC legislative calendars, committee assignments, rules, and agency processes can change.
- The main legislative pathway in this module describes permanent legislation at a youth-friendly level. Emergency, temporary, budget, referendum, initiative, and federal processes have important differences.
- DC lawmaking includes congressional review under the Home Rule framework. Review periods and effective-date requirements can vary by legislation type.
- The DC Official Code and DC Register are primary legal sources, but facilitators should not provide legal advice or interpret disputed legal questions without qualified support.
- When using a real policy, distinguish introduced, amended, enacted, effective, funded, regulated, and implemented status.