Name: _____ Date: _____

Open Meeting Laws and the Unlocked Door

Circle group

A city council or a school board spends public money. It also makes rules for the people who live there. So most states have open meeting laws. These laws say that many government groups must do their work where the public can watch. People can only judge their leaders fairly if they can see how choices are made.

These laws usually have several rules. A group must tell the public the time and place of a meeting ahead of time. Often it posts a notice and an agenda. An agenda is a list of the topics to be discussed. The meeting must be in a place people can reach, and anyone can usually come and listen. The group also keeps minutes. Minutes are a written record of what was said and what was decided.

There are limits, because some topics need privacy. A board may close part of a meeting to talk about a worker's job or to get legal advice. Sharing those details could hurt someone. It could also weaken the town in a dispute. Even then, the group should say why it is closing the door. Final votes are often taken in public.

The rules are different in each state. A resident who wants details should check the law where he or she lives. But the main idea is shared. Government belongs to the people it serves. A locked door should be rare.

Questions

1. What do open meeting laws say?

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2. What is an agenda?

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3. What are minutes?

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4. Why might a board close part of a meeting?

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5. How do open meeting laws help residents judge their leaders?

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6. Why should a resident check the law where he or she lives?

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Words to know

agenda: a list of the things a meeting will talk about
minutes: the written notes that record what happened at a meeting
legal: having to do with the law

Talk together (every group has these)

1. Find one fact that every group read. How did your sheet say it?
2. What did your sheet tell you that you think another group's did not? Ask them.
3. What is one question about this topic that none of the sheets answered?

Name: _____ Date: _____

Open Meeting Laws and the Unlocked Door

Triangle group

When a city council or a school board makes a decision, it is spending public money and making rules for the people who live there. For that reason, most states have open meeting laws, which require many government groups to do their business where the public can watch. The idea is that people can only judge their leaders fairly if they can see how decisions are made.

These laws usually include several rules. A group must announce the time and place of a meeting ahead of time, often by posting a notice and an agenda, which is a list of the topics to be discussed. The meeting must be held in a place that residents can reach, and anyone may usually attend and listen. The group also keeps minutes, which are a written record of what was discussed and what was decided.

There are limits, because some topics need privacy. A board may close part of a meeting to talk about a worker's job performance or to get legal advice, since sharing those details could hurt someone or weaken the town's position in a dispute. Even then, the group is usually expected to state the reason for closing the door, and final votes are often taken in public.

The exact rules differ from state to state, so a resident who wants details should check the law where he or she lives. But the principle is shared widely. Government belongs to the people it serves, and a locked door should be the rare exception rather than the habit.

Questions

1. What do open meeting laws require?

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2. What is an agenda?

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3. What are minutes?

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4. Why might a board close part of a meeting?

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5. Why do open meeting laws help residents judge their leaders?

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6. Why should a resident check the law where he or she lives?

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_____

Words to know

agenda: a list of the things a meeting will talk about
minutes: the written notes that record what happened at a meeting
residents: people who live in a certain place
legal: having to do with the law
principle: a basic idea that people agree is right

Talk together (every group has these)

1. Find one fact that every group read. How did your sheet say it?
2. What did your sheet tell you that you think another group's did not? Ask them.
3. What is one question about this topic that none of the sheets answered?

Name: _____ Date: _____

Open Meeting Laws and the Unlocked Door

Square group

Whenever a city council or a school board reaches a decision, it is spending public money and establishing rules for the people who live in the community. For that reason, the majority of states have enacted open meeting laws, which require many government bodies to conduct their business in a setting where the public can observe. The underlying idea is that citizens can evaluate their leaders fairly only if they are able to see how decisions are actually made.

These laws typically contain several requirements. A group must announce the time and place of a meeting in advance, frequently by posting a notice along with an agenda, which is a list of the topics that will be discussed. The meeting must take place somewhere residents can reasonably reach, and anyone is usually permitted to attend and listen. The group is also expected to keep minutes, which form a written record of what was discussed and what was decided.

There are limits, because certain subjects call for privacy. A board may close part of a meeting to discuss a worker's job performance or to obtain legal advice, since revealing those details could harm an individual or weaken the town's position in a dispute. Even in those cases, the group is normally expected to state its reason for closing the door, and final votes are often cast in public.

The precise rules differ considerably from state to state, so a resident who wants the details should consult the law where he or she lives. Nevertheless, the guiding principle is widely shared. Government belongs to the people it serves, and a locked door ought to be a rare exception rather than a habit.

Questions

1. What do open meeting laws require of many government bodies?

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2. What is an agenda?

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3. What are minutes?

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4. Why might a board close part of a meeting?

_____

_____

5. Why do open meeting laws help residents evaluate their leaders?

_____

_____

6. Why should a resident consult the law where he or she lives?

_____

_____

Words to know

agenda: a list of the things a meeting will talk about
minutes: the written notes that record what happened at a meeting
residents: people who live in a certain place
legal: having to do with the law
principle: a basic idea that people agree is right

Talk together (every group has these)

1. Find one fact that every group read. How did your sheet say it?
2. What did your sheet tell you that you think another group's did not? Ask them.
3. What is one question about this topic that none of the sheets answered?

For the teacher: Open Meeting Laws and the Unlocked Door

Each student sheet carries a shape, not a level. The same topic and facts, written three ways.

Circle: Open Meeting Laws and the Unlocked Door

Easier · 235 words · Flesch-Kincaid grade 4.6

1. Many government groups must do their work where the public can watch.
2. A list of the topics to be discussed at a meeting.
3. A written record of what was said and what was decided.
4. To talk about a worker's job or to get legal advice.
5. They can see how choices are made instead of guessing.
6. The rules are different in each state.

Triangle: Open Meeting Laws and the Unlocked Door

This passage · 257 words · Flesch-Kincaid grade 9.1

1. Many government groups must do their business where the public can watch.
2. A list of the topics to be discussed at a meeting.
3. A written record of what was discussed and what was decided.
4. To talk about a worker's job performance or to get legal advice.
5. They can see how decisions are made instead of guessing.
6. The exact rules differ from state to state.

Square: Open Meeting Laws and the Unlocked Door

Harder · 280 words · Flesch-Kincaid grade 11.6

1. They must conduct their business in a setting where the public can observe.
2. A list of the topics that will be discussed at a meeting.
3. A written record of what was discussed and what was decided.
4. To discuss a worker's job performance or to obtain legal advice.
5. They can see how decisions are actually made.
6. The precise rules differ considerably from state to state.