Whom Are You Going to Call?

“If you’re a mayor, and you have a problem, what do you do? You blame the provincial government. And, when you’re the provincial government and you have a problem, what do you do? You blame the federal government. And for us, we cannot blame the Queen anymore, so we blame the Americans once in a while.”

* Jean Chretien, Former Prime Minster of Canada

When people get upset about a civic issue or an issue affecting people in their community, they need to know where to turn for help. For a lot of people, their first instinct is to pick up the phone and call to complain, or to fire off an angry letter or email. The trick, of course, is knowing which level and who in government to contact over a particular issue. Contacting the wrong office can be embarrassing - not to mention a waste of time. So, it makes sense to figure out who can help you when you have something to say about an issue.

So, the first thing is to learn about different levels of government in Canada. In this activity, we focus on learning about three basic levels of government in Canada. To start with, there are a few things you need to know.

Why do we have different levels of government? Well, when Canada first became a country in 1867, this involved the creation of the rules for how we would govern ourselves or operate as a country. People writing the rules adopted what is known as the Federal system of government. What does that mean? Basically, it means one large Canadian government—the federal government—oversees issues that affect the entire country. The written rules for governing Canada are laws which are part of a document known as our Canadian Constitution. This document was originally known as the *British North America Act* and back in 1867, when these rules were written, Canada only had four provinces: Ontario, Quebec, New Brunswick, and Nova Scotia! The Canadian Constitution lists the topics and laws for which the federal government is in charge; this can be found in Section 91 of the Constitution.

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| A second level of government was also created—this is the provincial government. This level was created to support the different needs of the lands and peoples found across Canada. We are the second largest country in the world; therefore, we have a lot of diversity. Provincial governments are responsible for issues that may differ from one large region to another. Those responsibilities are listed in Section 92 of the Canadian Constitution, or “rule book of laws.” Canada's territories also have their own level of government. In Ontario, our provincial parliament, or legislative assembly, is located in Toronto, the capital of our province. |

Over time, as Canada became more urbanized, it was recognized that another level of government — the municipal level - would also be necessary to deal with issues that are unique to each city or community settlement.

As areas of Canada change or need to be recognized, other levels of government are sometimes created. Some examples of this are regional governments in parts of Ontario or Aboriginal self-government in a First Nation community.

With all these levels of government responsible for taking care of Canada, both its lands and peoples, it is important that various levels of government work together. In Canada, the people in government are elected to represent your ideas and what is best for you and your family.

Levels of Responsibility:

For each of the statements below, choose which level of government would most likely deal with the concern: Federal, Provincial, or Municipal. Indicate your choice by checking the box in the appropriate column for each situation.

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| Concern | Municipal | Provincial | Federal |
| I found a lot of bottle caps and glass in the sand at the park where my little sister likes to play. Whom can I get to come and clean it up? |  |  |  |
| I want to get a license to drive a new powerboat that I bought. Where do I go? |  |  |  |
| I’d like to find out more about where the Canadian military is currently stationed and what they are doing there. Whom should I call? |  |  |  |
| Our garbage wasn’t collected this week…AGAIN! What can I do? |  |  |  |
| I want to learn more about immigration and permanent residency. Whom can I contact? |  |  |  |
| I have a relative with a disability, and I'm concerned that she's not getting all of the services and supports to which she’s entitled. Who can help us? |  |  |  |
| I’m really concerned about poor living conditions and educational programs on First Nations reserves. Which level of government actually has the power to make a change? |  |  |  |
| Many of my friends are being criticized for skateboarding in public places. Personally, I’d really like to see a skateboard park built in my neighbourhood. Whom should I talk to about the possibility of getting this project off the ground? |  |  |  |
| I waited for what seemed to be a really long time in the hospital emergency room. Where can I go to find out how emergency rooms work and if there is something being done about this issue? |  |  |  |
| I’ve gathered signatures on a petition in support of a change I’d like to see in the education system. Whom should I speak to about this? To what level of government should I deliver the petition? |  |  |  |

Stop and play the [“Levels of Government”](https://lop.parl.ca/About/Parliament/senatoreugeneforsey/touchpoints/index-e.html) game once you’re finished.