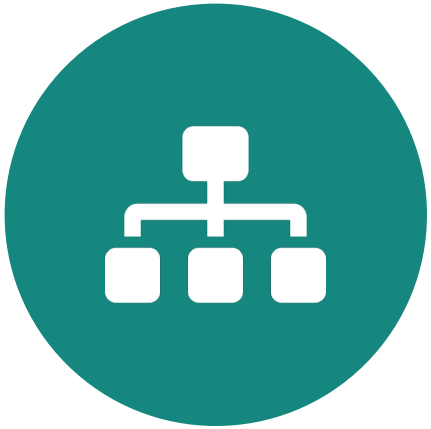
LEADERSHIP FOUNDATIONS · SESSION 4 OF 10

Understanding Systems

How city, county and school decisions get made, and where residents can step in.

A companion series for Neighborhood Leadership Cleveland participants



You cannot change a system you cannot see.

Decisions about streets, housing, safety, schools and budgets move through specific offices on specific schedules. Knowing the map lets you show up at the right place at the right time.

SESSION 4 · SYSTEMS

Who decides what

City Council

15 members, one per ward. Passes laws and approves the city budget.

Mayor and departments

Run city services: housing, streets, parks, health, safety.

Cuyahoga County

County Executive and 11-member Council. Health and human services, courts, elections.

CMSD Board

Sets school policy and budget. Accepts public speakers at business meetings.

Planning Commission

Reviews zoning and development. Meets 1st and 3rd Fridays.

State of Ohio

Sets many rules for cities, schools and benefits.

SESSION 4 · SYSTEMS

How a city ordinance becomes law

1. **Introduced** — A council member or the mayor's office submits legislation.
2. **Committee** — Assigned to a committee for hearings and questions.
3. **Amended** — Changes can be made. This is when advocacy matters most.
4. **Council vote** — The full council votes at a regular meeting.
5. **Mayor** — The mayor signs it, or vetoes and council may override.

SESSION 4 · SYSTEMS

Five ways to be heard

Public comment

Register from noon Wednesday to 2 pm Monday. First 10 speakers get 3 minutes.

Written comment

Submitted online and shared with all council members.

Ward meetings

Ward clubs and community meetings listed on the council events page.

Call your ward office

Every ward has an office line. Ask for a meeting.

Cleveland 311

Report service problems and track them.

SESSION 4 · SYSTEMS

Stay informed without extra effort

Council e-newsletter

Council-wide list, plus ward newsletters on each ward page.

City newsletter

Signup at the bottom of every clevelandohio.gov page.

County newsletters

County News Now and topic newsletters.

Signal Cleveland

Local news plus Documenters notes from public meetings.

SESSION 4 · SYSTEMS

Following an issue through the system

Where to look

- Council legislation search (Legistar)
- Meeting calendar and agenda PDFs
- TV20 and council livestreams
- Documenters meeting notes

What to watch for

- Which committee holds the item
- Hearing dates and public comment windows
- Budget amounts and who receives them
- Who spoke for and against

SESSION 4 · SYSTEMS

Decoding legislation with AI

- Paste public legislation text from Legistar.
- Ask for plain language, then read the original yourself.
- Confirm dates and amounts in the official record.

PLAIN-LANGUAGE PROMPT

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Below is the text of a Cleveland City Council
ordinance.

Explain in plain language at a 6th grade
reading level:
- what it would do
- who it affects
- how much money is involved
- what questions a resident might ask at a
hearing

[paste ordinance text]
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ACTIVITY · 25 MIN

Civic scavenger hunt

1. Use phones and the Leader Hub.
2. Work in pairs.
3. Find each item at right.
4. First pair to finish shares their route.
5. Everyone signs up for one newsletter.

FIND AND WRITE DOWN

Your ward and council member

Your ward office phone

The next council meeting date

One item on a committee agenda

How to register for public comment

Your County Council district

SESSION 4 · SYSTEMS

What to remember

- Know who decides: council, mayor, county, schools.
- Advocacy matters most in committee.
- Public comment has a clear sign-up window.
- Newsletters bring the news to you.

Next: Managing conflict and change.

KEEP LEARNING

Cleveland City Council

Find your ward · clevelandcitycouncil.gov

Legislation and agendas

cityofcleveland.legistar.com

Signal Cleveland and Documenters

Meeting notes and newsletters · signalcleveland.org

Board of Elections voter tools

boe.cuyahogacounty.gov/voters