



Boys State

American Legion Boys State is among the most respected and selective educational programs of government instruction for U.S. high school students. A participatory program in which students become part of the operation of local, county and state government, Boys State was founded in 1935 to counter the socialism-inspired Young Pioneer Camps. The program was the idea of two Illinois Legionnaires, Hayes Kennedy and Harold Card, who organized the first Boys State at the Illinois State Fairgrounds in Springfield.

American Legion Auxiliary sponsors a separate but similar program for young women called Girls State.

At Boys State, participants learn the rights, privileges and responsibilities of franchised citizens. The training is objective and centers on the structure of city, county and state governments. Operated by students elected to various offices, Boys State activities include legislative sessions, court proceedings, law-enforcement presentations, assemblies, bands, choruses and recreational programs.

Legion posts select high school juniors to attend the program. In most cases, individual expenses are paid by a sponsoring post, a local business or another community-based organization.

Boys State programs currently exist in all Legion departments in the United States except Hawaii. As separate corporations, Boys State programs vary in content and method of procedure, but each adheres to the same basic concept: teaching government from the township to the state level.

For more information:

Please review [eligibility and dates](#) to find a program and contact information in your state.

Boys Nation

Two representatives from each of the 49 Boys States represent their state at Boys Nation in Washington, where the young leaders receive an education on the structure and function of federal government.

The first Boys Nation – then called Boys Forum of National Government – convened at American University in Washington in August 1946. The 1946 American Legion National Convention adopted the event as an official youth activity. Three years later, it became American Legion Boys Nation.

At the event, each delegate acts as a senator from his Boys State. The young lawmakers caucus at the beginning of the session, then organize into committees and conduct hearings on bills submitted by program delegates.

Senators learn the proper method of handling bills, according to U.S. Senate rules. Participation in the political process is emphasized throughout the week, including organization of party conventions and nominating and electing a president and vice president.

The week of government training also includes lectures, forums and visits to federal agencies, national shrines, institutions, memorials and historical sites. On Capitol Hill, Boys Nation senators meet with elected officials from their home states.

Since Boys Nation began in 1946, a number of its graduates have been elected to public office, including presidents, congressmen, state governors and state legislators. Many others have been inspired to work for the campaigns of individuals seeking public office.