



# Graphic Organizers

**Created to help increase awareness of importance of open government and freedom of information**

Mary Miller, Education Services Director  
New York News Publishers Association  
50 Colvin Avenue, Suite 102  
Albany, NY 12206



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# Sunshine Week

## Graphic Organizers

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**E-Government**

**Directions:** Look for articles in your newspaper (print or electronic) about local or state government. See if you can find more information about these stories on a government agency’s website. Go to the city, town or state agency’s website and investigate what data may already be available to the public. Record what you find using the chart below.

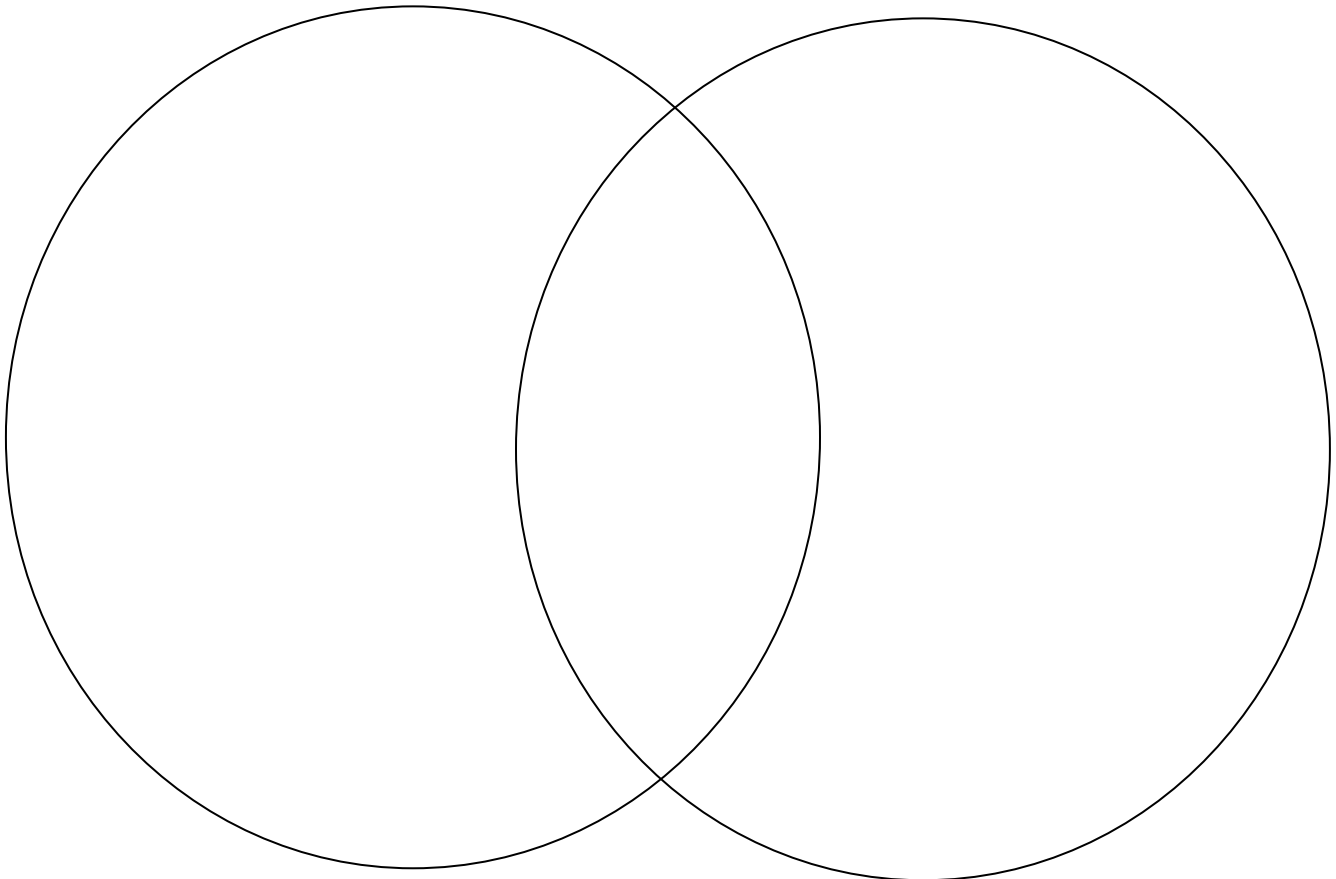
Brief summary of the newspaper article	URL of local or state government	Summary of the data available from government website

**Assessment:** What information did you learn was readily available online from your local or state government? Why do you think this information is important to the general public?

## Safe Driving

**Directions:** Find an article in a recent edition of the local newspaper (print or online) about an automobile accident involving a young driver. Go online and review the information in the New York State Fact Sheet: Crashes Involving Young Drivers Ages 16-20 at [www.safeny.ny.gov/10data/YoungDrivers2006-10.pdf](http://www.safeny.ny.gov/10data/YoungDrivers2006-10.pdf).

Use the Venn diagram below to compare and contrast this article with the available state data.



Based on the information in the young driver fact sheet referenced above, on a separate piece of paper, write an editorial or create a newspaper advertisement to help educate young drivers about the potential risks they face. Be sure to give them tips to be safer, more responsible drivers.

**Assessment:** Why do you think the information about traffic accidents/safety is important to the public?

## Safe Food

**Directions:** Look through your local newspaper (print or online) for restaurant reviews. Select one that's of interest to you and then go to METRIX at <https://apps.nyhealth.gov/METRIX/main.action> (*Under category select Food Service Establishments and hit search. On the next webpage that comes up, scroll to the bottom where it says AVAILABLE DATA and click on the first Food Service Establishment Inspection for comma separated data by county. Download the 278 MB file.*) Search for the most recent health inspection data for restaurant you selected. Record the information you find in the chart below.

Restaurant Name & Location	
Type of Food Served	
Summary of Newspaper Review	
Department of Health Inspection Date	
Inspection Findings	

Keeping in mind that inspections are a 'snapshot' in time and are not always reflective of the day-to-day operations and overall condition of an establishment, would you eat there? Why or why not?

You may have noticed that NYC, Albany and Rockland Counties have specific websites created to make the restaurant inspection information more easily accessible. If you live somewhere else, you may wish to ask if your county is planning a similar site and if so when it will be available for use. If not, why isn't it being planned?

**Assessment:** Why do you think the health information provided by METRIX is important to the public?

## Safe Food – Trip to New York City

**Directions:** You are in charge of planning a trip to New York City. Select a few places to visit (The Empire State Building, the Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, a show currently on Broadway, South Street Seaport, etc.). Based on the locations you select and your schedule, find a place nearby to eat lunch. Use the interactive New York Health Department Restaurant Ratings Map on the New York Times website (<http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/dining/new-york-health-department-restaurant-ratings-map.html>) to help find food you like, can afford and is safe to eat. Use the chart below to help organize the details for your trip. **TIP:** You may need to go to transportation and specific location websites to research costs.

Parts of the Trip	Brief Description of activity	Estimated Cost
Travel to NYC		
Location 1		
Location 2		
Lunch		
Location 3		
Travel home		

Did you discover any other government websites that you could use to help you plan aspects of your trip? If so, what were they? How did this information help?

**Assessment:** What did you learn about publicly available government data that you didn't already know?

## Safe Schools

Would you like to know the number and type of reportable disruptions that occurred at your school? Was your school determined to be “persistently dangerous”? That information is readily available on New York State Department of Education’s Information and Reporting Services website at [www.p12.nysed.gov/irs/vadir/vadir-reporting.html](http://www.p12.nysed.gov/irs/vadir/vadir-reporting.html).

**Directions:** Look through your local newspaper (print or online) for article of a problem involving a local school. Can you identify which category of a Violent and Disruptive Incident Reports (VADIR) data this incident would fall under? Record your findings below.

Record the headline of the newspaper article and key facts below.	Write down which VADIR category this incident would fall under (if applicable)

Find an article about a community-based problem. Then go to the New York State Office of Emergency Management’s website [www.nyalert.gov](http://www.nyalert.gov), which is the state’s All-Hazards Alert and Notification site. This site contains critical emergency-related information including instructions and recommended protective actions developed in real-time by emergency service personnel. By investigating here, you can determine if the topic of the newspaper article is an ongoing concern or not. Record your findings below.

Record the headline of the newspaper article and key facts below.	Additional information from NYS Office of Emergency Management’s website (if any)

**Assessment:** Why do you think the safety information provided by NYS Department of Education or the Office of Emergency Services is important to the public?

## Make an App for That

[Data.gov](http://www.data.gov) is a website established to increase the ability of the public to easily find, download, and use datasets that are generated and held by the Federal Government. Members of the public have submitted many applications that use the data posted on Data.gov. The applications showcased online at <http://www.data.gov/developer-apps-showcase?page=1> include the winners of contests and challenges from groups around the world. They shine because they convert datasets to information that is more accessible to the public, thus making it easier for them to use that data in making decisions. From the best town to find a job to seeing the environmental health of your community, these applications, mashups, and visualizations bring a variety of government data to your computer, phone or other mobile device.

**Directions:** After you've explored the apps on Data.gov, think about the available data on local and state government websites and brainstorm a new app you think would be useful to the public. Use the chart below to organize your thoughts. You may work alone or in small groups.

Who would use this App?
What will this App do?
Which set of government data will this App access?
When and how often is the data updated?
Why is this information important to the public?
How will people access this App? How much would you charge for its use?

Assessment: What was the most interesting part about “Making an App”?



## Know the Terms

Match these words and phrases with the appropriate definitions below:

	Terms	Letter of the correct definition
1	Freedom of Information Act	
2	Freedom of the Press	
3	Inalienable Right	
4	Democracy	
5	Committee on Open Government	
6	Transparency	
7	Exemption	
8	Record	
9	Executive Session	
10	Open Meeting	

- A. A right according to natural law, a right that cannot be taken away, denied or transferred
- B. A form of government in which the supreme power is vested in the people and either exercised directly by them or through freely elected representatives
- C. The right to publish newspapers, magazines and other printed matter without prior governmental restriction
- D. Not subject to or release from an obligation or duty
- E. The full, accurate and timely disclosure of information
- F. Responsible for overseeing and advising with regard to the Freedom of Information Law, the Open Meetings Law and the Personal Privacy Protection Law in New York state.
- G. A federal law enacted in 1966 requiring that government records, except those relating to national security, confidential financial data and law enforcement, be made available to the public on request
- H. Any information kept, held, filed, produced or reproduced by, with or for an agency in any form whatsoever.
- I. The official convening of a public body for the purpose of conducting public business
- J. A portion of an open meeting during which the public may be excluded

**Follow up:** Look through the newspaper for current examples of these terms. Which did you find? Which proved difficult to find? What one new thing did you learn from this activity?

## Public Documents in the News

Look through the newspaper (print or electronic) for articles that refer to information obtained from public records – for example: police reports, school board or city council meeting briefs, state or national budget/financial records. Select one article and answer the following questions.

What are the key facts reported in this article? \_\_\_\_\_

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If freedom of information laws didn't exist, which of these facts would not be known? Why?

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What issue in society is being addressed by having this information known publicly?

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How does this issue affect you? \_\_\_\_\_

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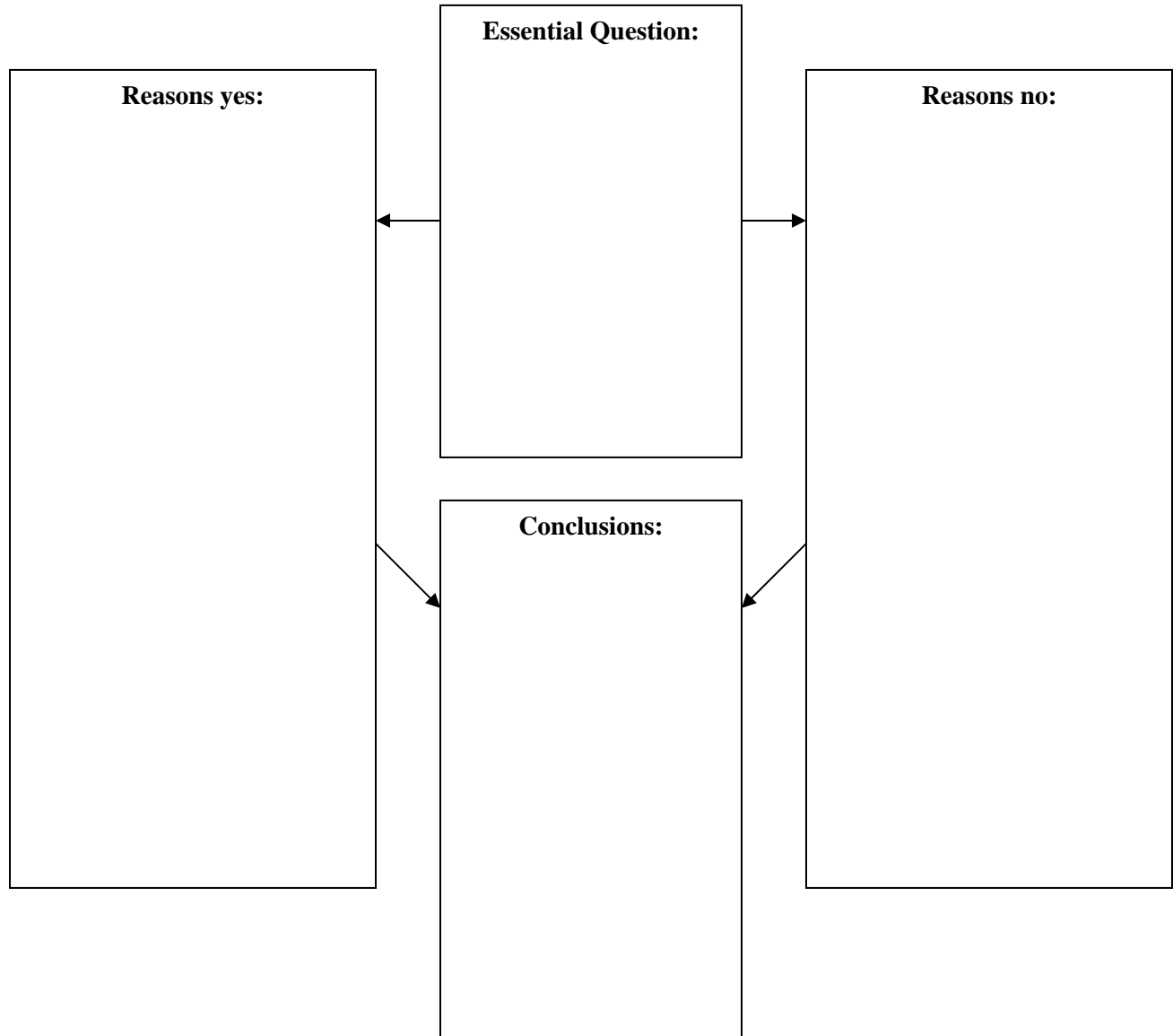
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**Follow up:** Share your observations with the class. What did you learn by completing this activity?

## Writing an Editorial: My Right to Know

After reviewing the Freedom of Information Act (1966) or New York State’s open government laws, working with a small group of students, decide what public record you’d like to have access to. Under the law do you have a right to that information? Review several newspaper editorials paying close attention to the writing style and content. Now write your own editorial defending your right to know. Prepare an outline before writing. First, choose and write an “essential question” such as – Should citizens have access to the public record you selected? List reasons citizens and leaders give for answering “yes” or “no” to the question. Be sure to back up your conclusion/opinion with facts.



**Follow up:** Can you think of instances when information should be kept secret? Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of keeping information from the public.

This activity was originally developed for *Community Connections with Geography and the Newspaper* curriculum guide for the NAA Foundation by Dr. Sandra Cook.

## **Editorial Cartoon**

Now that you have a better understanding of the importance of open government and freedom of information create your own editorial cartoon for Sunshine Week. If editorial cartoons are new to you, you might want to learn more them before you start. Visit the Association of American Editorial Cartoonist's website *Cartoons for the Classroom* at <http://nieonline.com/aaec/cftc.cfm>.

**Follow-up:** Display the finished cartoons on a class bulletin board. Was this assignment harder or easier than you expected it would be? Why?

## Sunshine Poem

Now that you know more about the principles of Sunshine Week, why not write a poem about it? Acrostics are a fun poetic form that anyone can write. The first letters of each line spell out a word or phrase, in this case SUNSHINE. Each line in the poem should describe the main topic, Sunshine Week – open government and freedom of information.

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**Follow-up:** Display the finished poems on a class bulletin board. Was this assignment harder or easier than you expected it would be? Why?

## The “Public Watchdog”

Look through the newspaper, print or digital, for examples of the news media acting as the “public watchdog.” These stories could be at the national, state or local level. Select stories about each of the levels of government listed below. Explain why it is important for citizens to know about the news reported in the stories.

Government official/group	Which story?	Why citizens should be informed
National elected official (The President or a member of Congress)		
State elected official (The governor, state lawmaker)		
Local elected official (Mayor, city council representative, etc.)		
Local governmental group (Zoning commission, waste authority)		
Tax supported service agency (Human service agencies)		

**Follow-up:** Look at the information on your chart. Which of the articles is most important to you as a citizen? Discuss your ideas with another student.

This activity was originally developed for *Citizens Together: You and Your Newspaper* curriculum guide written by Sherrye Dee Garrett, Ed.D. and Beverly S. Morrison, Ph.D. for the Newspaper Association of America Foundation.

## **The First Amendment – Freedoms of Speech and the Press**

People make their voices known in our government directly such as in congressional hearings, and indirectly through letters to their representatives in Congress. Other indirect methods to influence change include the use of newspapers and other media. Letters to the editor, political cartoons, press releases and even newspaper advertising are all vehicles used to sway public opinion and potential voters. Select one of the newspaper methods listed and create a persuasive argument based on a local issue in the news. Be sure to use facts to strengthen their point of view.

**Follow-up:** Select an interesting editorial from the newspaper and write a new editorial expressing the opposite point of view.

## **Reporting without the Freedoms of the First Amendment**

Locate articles, editorials or political cartoons that focus on the decisions or actions of local, state or national government officials. As a class, discuss how this information would be different without the protections of in the Constitution and other Shield Laws. Rewrite or redraw this coverage as it might be reported without the First Amendment.

**Follow-up:** Briefly write how the Freedom of Speech and the Press are important to you.



**Web resources:**

Ray of Sunshine Game - an interactive game developed by Sunshine Week.org for players to have fun while they learn about why open government and freedom of information in the U.S. is to be cherished and held to high standards - <http://originalrayofsunshine.org/>

Freedom Forum's First Amendment Center - Tough Calls: How do Journalists Make Ethical Decisions? - Professional journalists must weigh the public's right to know with conflicting concerns such as an individual's right to privacy or a fair trial or the government's concern for safety. These 10 lessons ask students to review the circumstances and make their own "tough calls." - <http://www.freedomforum.org/packages/first/Curricula/EducationforFreedom/index.htm>

Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) (1966) - [http://www.justice.gov/oip/foia\\_guide07/text\\_foia.pdf](http://www.justice.gov/oip/foia_guide07/text_foia.pdf)

Electronic Freedom of Information Act amendments (1996) - <http://www.balancedscorecard.org/EFOIA/tabid/113/Default.aspx>

National Security Archive Freedom of Information Act website - <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/nsa/foia.html>

New York State Freedom of Information Law (FOIL) - <http://www.dos.state.ny.us/coog/foil2.html>

New York State Committee on Open Government - <http://www.dos.state.ny.us/coog/>

**Answers to Know the Terms on Page 9:**

Matchups: 1,G; 2,C; 3,A; 4,B; 5,F; 6,E; 7,D; 8,H; 9,J; 10,I