Cooperative Federalism

Activity # GV143

Activity Introduction

Howdy! How’s it going? I’m Kimberly. I bet you know that the U.S. started out when the thirteen colonies won their independence from Great Britain. Today, there are fifty states in the U.S. How did we grow from thirteen to fifty?

Reading Passage 1 Introduction-

Being one of the fifty states is kind of like being in a special club.

First, each state has to go through a process to join the club. Then, each state gets to enjoy the benefits of being part of the club called “The United States.”

Read this passage to learn how states get admitted to the club, and what the benefits are.

Reading Passage 1 Outro-

Pretty interesting, huh?
Video 1 – Introduction

In the U.S. system of government, federalism, power is shared between the federal government and the state governments.

Don’t forget that the federal government is also called the national government.

And, when you hear talk of state governments, that includes local governments as well.

With all these different levels of government all over the country, it is really important for them to work together, or cooperate, in some areas.

That’s called cooperative federalism. This video will show you more!

Video 1

As you already know, federalism divides power between the federal and state governments, but it also allows them to work together in some areas. This is known as cooperative federalism.

The federal government sends funds, or money, to the states for various purposes, such as education and roads, and the states help the federal government in ways like holding elections. This monetary aid comes in several forms. The first form is grants-in-aid. This is an early form of federal aid to the states. In the 1930s, grants-in-aid became one of the main ways the federal government helped boost the country out of
the Great Depression, since the money they provided helped state and local
governments pay for their day-to-day functions.

Grants-in-aid are given for large public projects, like highway construction or areas of
basic governmental activity, like public schools or law enforcement. Through the
conditions placed on grants-in-aid, the federal government has power that would
normally be off-limits to it. For example, in "no child left behind," this is a federal policy
mandating education, which previously had been only a state issue. Another form is
block grants. This is grants-in-aid, large grants, that are given for broad areas of policy,
like education. State and local government have a great deal of freedom in deciding
how to use these block grants.

Since the 1980s, many smaller, piecemeal grant programs have been consolidated into
block grants. Another form is revenue sharing. This was a program in place from 1972
to 1987. The federal government sent money to the states, and the states could spend
it any way they liked. They could not, however, spend it on programs that violated anti-
discrimination laws. Governors and mayors loved revenue sharing, because they could
use it however they wanted. The Reagan Administration, in the face of large budget
deficits, meaning they were running out of money, did away with the program.
There are other forms of federal aid. The federal government does not pay property taxes; however, it does have buildings in each state, such as the federal buildings in your state. Since your state is not able to collect taxes on that property, the federal government will send money to make up for that. Help from the federal government does not have to directly involve money though. For example, federal law enforcement agencies sometimes help local police to solve crimes.

Another example is that the federal government provides census information to the states, that's when they count everybody in the country every 10 years. This way, the states know whether they need to build more schools. State aid to the federal government involves providing services, not money. Sometimes state police help catch fugitives for the FBI, and all elections, even those for federal office, are overseen and paid for by the states and often held in public schools.

The federal and state governments usually guard their areas of control and power from each other; however, when the federal government offers to help the states with grants of money, states rarely say no. In this way, cooperative federalism has gone from being a small area of overlap between federal and state governments to being a large and growing part of federalism's mix of powers.
Video 1 – Recap

Alright, I'll break it down for you again…

Having trouble remembering what “cooperative federalism” means? It’s all in the name.

Cooperative federalism means that the federal and state governments cooperate, or work together.

The federal government sends money to the states for certain purposes, like block grants for education.

And, the states perform services for the federal government, like when towns hold elections for national offices, such as the presidential elections.

Reading Passage 2 Introduction-

Not only do federal and state governments need to work together, but state governments also need to work with other state governments.

Laws and policies can vary from state to state.

One way that states can cooperate with each other is by helping people move or travel from state to state with ease.

Sometimes it’s really complicated to travel to another country. Traveling from state to state should be a lot easier, don’t you agree?

Read here to learn more about how states cooperate with each other.
Reading Passage 2 Outro-

And you're back.

What the Class Thinks-

Now, let’s check in and see what the class thinks!

**Teacher**

So, how do you guys feel about the way the federal government and the state
governments depend on each other and help each other out?

**Student 1**

It’s all so complicated… Couldn’t the federal government just take care of everything so
the states can focus on issues closer to home, like local elections and fixing potholes
and stuff?

**Teacher**

What do you think, class? Why don’t the states just let the federal government handle
everything?

**Student 2**

Isn’t that what we were trying to avoid when we fought the Revolutionary War?

**Teacher**

Good point, (Student 2), tell me a little more about what you’re thinking.
Student 2

Well, I mean, the Founding Fathers wanted to live in a country where they had more control over lawmaking and stuff. And they wanted each state to be able to set their own rules about things like marriage and divorce.

Student 1

Oh, hey, that’s right! They didn’t like being told what to do by the king, so they broke away from England and voila, today we now live in the United States of America!

Teacher

That’s right! The Founding Fathers wrote it into the U.S. Constitution that each state would be allowed to hold on to certain powers. But the states also have certain responsibilities to the federal government.

Student 2

Yeah, but the states also get stuff in return. It’s a pretty good balance, I think. The states do stuff like hold the elections that decide who will be president, and the nation promises to protect the states from invasion.

Student 1

AND, if there’s ever any sort of disaster or major disturbance, like a hurricane or a riot or something, the federal government will step in to help control the situation or help with recovery efforts.
Student 1

You know, the more we talk about it, the more it seems to me that the states and the federal government cooperate pretty nicely.

General Activity Exit-

Well, that’s all for now… Good work, and I’ll see you later!