**Video Script: Federal, State and Local**

As a community member engaged in community projects, you gradually become more and more aware of the different levels of government that help to shape the community.

In the United States, the main levels of government are:

the federal government – meaning the national level government –

the state government

and the local government – meaning the city, town or county government.

The United States is different from many other countries, with a history of keeping most government services and programs and most government decision-making at the local and state levels. That tradition stretches back to the American Revolution, when the 13 colonies wanted to form a loose federation, to work together, but also to maintain some of their own decision-making and some independence. The roles and responsibilities of the federal, state and local government have changed over the past centuries, from the first 13 states to the present, but still with an emphasis on keeping most government services and decisions at the state and local level.

In the United States, it is very typical for the federal government to set overall goals and plans for the country, and to provide money to state and local governments to carry out those goals.

In the story of the construction of the Southwest Corridor Park, we saw an example of this model.

In 1948, the federal government created a plan to build a network of highways all over the country.

But the federal government did not directly build the highways. The federal government offered money, from gas taxes and other taxes, to the states, so that the states could build these highways.

At first, the state government in Massachusetts agreed with these plans, and studied and planned to build a new system of highways through Boston, Cambridge and Brookline. The federal government would provide 90% of the money for the project, and the state government, through state taxes, would only have to pay 10%.
But then the people in neighborhoods of Cambridge, Brookline and Boston started to learn about the highway plans.

They saw how disruptive similar highways were in other cities.

Neighborhood groups from all the affected areas began to protest.

Eventually the mayor of Boston added his voice to this movement.

And in a dramatic turn-around, the governor of Massachusetts, Governor Francis Sargant, who had always been a supporter of highway development, listened to the protests. He announced that “we were wrong” and started the process of cancelling the highway plans.

The next event was even more amazing.

Through work in Washington D.C., the federal highway department changed the laws, and allowed federal highway money to be used for public transportation projects instead. The Southwest Corridor Park was the first project anywhere in the country to use federal highway money to create public transportation, parkland and even a bicycle path, creating a corridor for environmentally-friendly active transportation instead of highways.

The work was done by Massachusetts state agencies, and was mostly paid for with federal highway money.

Imagine being a member of one of the neighborhood groups in those days. You would have gradually worked to figure out the different layers of decision making, to find out who decides what gets built in your city.

How do community members learn about the different levels of government? Some of this information comes from reading about how the U.S. government is organized. Some comes just from experience, of figuring out who manages the different projects in your community.

Fast forward to the present. Today, the network of park volunteers who help to take care of the Southwest Corridor Park have learned to work with a mixture of local and state agencies along the park.

The Southwest Corridor Park follows the route of the MBTA orange line. The MBTA is a special division of the Massachusetts state government.

Because the MBTA owns the land along this corridor, the Southwest Corridor Park is state park, under the care and control of the state parks agency, which is called the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR).

As you look at maps of all the parks in the city of Boston, you see that most of the more than nine hundred parks are city parks,

Plus several major state parks, including the Southwest Corridor, the Charles River, and parts of the Emerald Necklace, and others,

And, along the Boston Freedom Trail, a national park.

Now let’s make the story more complicated. The state parks agency, DCR, takes care of the parkland.

But when the bike path crosses streets, it is the City of Boston that is responsible for the crosswalks, traffic signals, and curb cuts.

Who provides public safety in the park? Because it is a state park, it is the Massachusetts State Police, not the Boston Police Department, that patrols the park.

But Boston Police also help out, and in fact they sponsor police-community basketball games and special events in the park every summer. The MBTA Transit Police also help out, since there are eight orange line stations along the park. The Northeastern University police (which is a private, non-profit university, not part of the state or local government) also patrols the sections of the park near the university. Several times per year, the Northeastern University police often serve coffee and hot chocolate along the bike path as a special event to meet community members who use the bike path.

Here is another example of this complexity. When it snows, DCR shovels the bicycle paths, except for some paths that are city sidewalks, which are shoveled by the city public works department. And except for the areas around the MBTA stations, which are shoveled by the MBTA. The Northeastern University maintenance department also shovels a section of the path. Did you know, the agencies hold a snow summit every fall to meet together to review the map of who shovels snow where.

So it’s complicated, but interesting to figure out the different agencies and levels of government. Sometimes there are serious debates about what decisions should be made at the local, state or national level. Other times it is just interesting to figure out who does what in your community. Consider this one of the responsibilities of an actively engaged community member, one of the many things that you learn along the way.