Government Mental Modeling Protocol

**Goal of Experiment:**

This activity asks students to create a word cloud of their perception of government. After learning what a word cloud is, students will work individually on creating their own analog word cloud. As they are creating, researchers will talk individually with students about what they are writing. The activity will end with a group discussion. The goal of this activity is to capture youths’ perceptions of government before discussions of credibility and trust are taught in the program.

**Approximate time:** 20 minutes

**Materials Needed:**

* Colored copy paper
* Markers
* Audio recorder (& batteries)
* Protocol (this document)

**Steps of Experiment:**

1. Begin audio recording.
2. Ask students to make a list of what words they associate with the term ‘government.’
3. Ask students to rank these words in terms of importance to their personal definition.
4. Ask students if they know what a word cloud is. Show students 3-4 examples of word clouds and tell them they are ways to demonstrate the importance of certain words in a document. For today, we’ll be using this concept to identify words that you associate with a particular term. You’ll use the idea of bigger and smaller words to represent how important the words you come up with are to your perception of this term. Show students an example of a word cloud researchers made to describe “health.”



1. Tell students: Today, you’ll be creating your own word cloud, answering the question “What does the term ‘government’ mean to you”? In other words, what words you associate with the term ‘government.’ Tell them to use the word list and rankings they created earlier and create the word cloud making the highest ranked words the biggest and the lower ranked words the smallest.
2. Ask students to work individually at first, but tell them that they’ll have time to share their work at the end if they want.
3. As students work, researchers should probe them for their thoughts on the addition of particular words and their relative size/importance.
4. After about 10 minutes, ask students to share their word clouds. Prompt them to describe the words they made biggest and smallest and why they used these particular terms to describe ‘government.’
5. Collect the word clouds at the end of the activity and log pictures into the server.