National Civics Bee®
by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation

Essay Application Guide

2026–2027

Sponsors

PRESENTED BY

U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation

THE CIVIC TRUST®

CONTENT & RESEARCH PARTNERS

BILL of RIGHTS INSTITUTE

JOHNS HOPKINS SCHOOL of EDUCATION
Institute for Education Policy

Khan Academy

This material is provided for general informational purposes only. It offers an overview of the National Civics Bee process and expectations but does not constitute the official Competition Rules. All competition procedures, requirements, and advancement criteria are governed by the applicable Competition Rules and may be modified as necessary. In the event of any inconsistency, the Competition Rules control.

Essay Application Guide

At the U.S. Chamber Foundation, we define civics as the knowledge, skills, and disposition every person needs to exercise their rights and fulfill their responsibilities in our democracy. Every day, citizens contribute in different ways—through volunteering, voting, serving on juries, entrepreneurship, or simply by sharing their community experiences—all of which strengthen our civil society.

For this year's National Civics Bee®, we want to know your idea that could strengthen your school or community!

Think about the communities you might belong to: schools, religious organizations, charitable groups, towns, states, or neighborhoods. All these groups require the contributions of individuals to support them so that they can do their essential work.

In your answer, imagine one change—big or small—that would make life better for people in your school or community in the future. Share your idea and how it could make a positive impact on your community.

Be sure to include how your solution includes a Founding Principle or demonstrates a Civic Virtue through your actions.

Founding Principles are an important starting point for solutions to community needs. They provide us with a framework for understanding how we can best work together in a free society. We call them Founding Principles because they form the foundation of our communities and government. These core ideas of the Declaration of Independence and U.S. Constitution help guide us today.

Examples include natural/inalienable rights, consent of the governed, equality, rule of law, and private property.

Civic Virtues go hand in hand with Founding Principles. They are habits that help us ensure we are acting in the best interest of the community. They also help guide us because the more we practice Civic Virtues, the more we uphold individual freedom and the common good. Examples include: humility, integrity, moderation, respect, and responsibility.

More information about Founding Principles and Civic Virtues can be found here: billofrightsinstitute.org/resources/principles-and-virtues

By upholding Founding Principles, practicing Civic Virtues, and using our unique talents, people across the nation can support each other. Working together is essential in a democratic society. When thinking about your solution, remember to consider the individuals and organizations you would work with to accomplish it. By collaborating with diverse partners in your community, including elected officials and leaders from businesses and nonprofits, you can harness the collective power necessary to create meaningful change in our democracy.

Essay Prompt

For the 2027 National Civics Bee®, middle school students in 6th, 7th, and 8th grades must answer the following four questions:

QUESTION 01

IMAGINE one change—big or small—that would make life better for people in your school or community in the future. Share your idea and how it could make a positive impact on your community.

Strong responses are typically between 150 and 200 words.

QUESTION 02

DESCRIBE how you would bring your idea to life. Explain how you would build trust, understand different viewpoints, and collaborate with people who care about the idea.

Strong responses are typically between 150 and 200 words.

QUESTION 03

FIND support to help you bring your idea to life. Who could help you, and how would they contribute?

Strong responses are typically between 150 and 200 words.

QUESTION 04

CONNECT your idea to the values that shaped our country. How does your idea reflect the Founding Principles and Civic Virtues?

Strong responses are typically between 150 and 200 words.

Each of the four responses will be evaluated based on how well the student:

- Demonstrates an understanding of civics.
- Incorporates research and references to support their ideas. While formal citations are not required, they should provide enough information to show the sources of ideas and information.
- Clearly describes an idea that is innovative or new to them.
- Acknowledges and addresses at least one Founding Principle and one Civic Virtue.

Each essay answer will be reviewed by at least two judges, and the students with the highest scores will be invited to participate in a live competition of the National Civics Bee®, including quiz rounds and Q&A with judges about your essay.

Ideal responses:

- Address the questions asked in a thoughtful and meaningful manner.
- Use referenced facts and arguments when appropriate to support your answers.
- Organize your answers so they flow logically and read clearly.

Other ideas:

- Try reading your essay aloud to a family member. Does it sound like it flows easily? Can your audience member summarize your essay back to you in one or two sentences? (If they can't, try going back and clarifying your ideas)
- Try putting your essay down for a day or two and coming back to it and re-reading it. Do you notice anything you'd like to change or add?

HERE'S A TIP—AFTER YOU WRITE, ASK YOURSELF:

Have I answered all the questions?

- Have I provided examples where asked?
- Have I said what I wanted to say?

Is my essay well-written?

- Is it clear what I am discussing?
- Is my writing well-organized with a clear introduction, supporting details, and conclusion?

Is my writing correct?

- Have I checked for spelling errors myself, without relying on spell-check?
- Have I checked for grammar errors myself, without relying on a grammar checker?

Essay Judging Rubric

QUESTION 01

IMAGINE a specific opportunity, problem, or challenge.

20 Total Points	
Outstanding 16–20 Points	Clearly imagines and articulates a forward-looking idea that could improve life in the school or community.
Above Average 11–15 Points	Presents a clear idea for future improvement with some thoughtful explanation.
Average 6–10 Points	States an idea for improvement but with limited detail, unclear impact, or minimal forward-looking reasoning.
Below Average 0–5 Points	Idea is vague, unrealistic, or not clearly connected to community improvement.

QUESTION 02

DESCRIBE the steps you would take to make this change.

20 Total Points	
Outstanding 16–20 Points	Provides clear, logical, and realistic plan to bring idea to life. Explains how to build trust, understand different viewpoints, and collaborate effectively with others.
Above Average 11–15 Points	Describes sensible steps with some attention to collaboration or understanding different perspectives.
Average 6–10 Points	Describes steps with limited detail, missing logic or clarity in places.
Below Average 0–5 Points	Provides unclear or incomplete steps with little logical structure.

QUESTION 03

FIND support to help bring the idea to life.

20 Total Points	
Outstanding 16–20 Points	Identifies meaningful civic resources, people, and groups, opposing viewpoints, and clearly connects them to the plan.
Above Average 11–15 Points	Identifies relevant civic resources, people, or groups; and explains their role in the plan.
Average 6–10 Points	Identifies some resources, people, or groups with limited explanation or relevance.
Below Average 0–5 Points	Few or no resources, people, or groups identified.

QUESTION 04

CONNECT to Founding Principles and Civic Virtues.

30 Total Points	
Outstanding 23–30 Points	Clearly connects the solution to specific Founding Principles and Civic Virtues with strong reasoning.
Above Average 16–22 Points	Connects the solution to relevant principles and virtues with some explanation.
Average 8–15 Points	Makes general or limited connections to Founding Principles and Virtues.
Below Average 0–7 Points	Makes weak or no connection to Founding Principles or Civic Virtues.

General Criteria for All Questions

Responses should incorporate research and references to support student ideas. While formal citations are not required, students must provide enough information to show the sources of their ideas and information.

Research and Reference Use: 10 Total Points	
Outstanding 8–10 Points	Uses well-researched information and references effectively to support the essay.
Above Average 5–7 Points	Adequate use of research with references that generally support the points.
Average 3–4 Points	Sparse use of research and references.
Below Average 0–2 Points	Minimal or no research or references used.

Helpful Definitions & Essay Organizers

To submit a strong set of responses to the four essay questions, you must include at least one of the outlined Founding Principles and one Civic Virtue. To help you get started, we've included definitions and Essay Organizers.

I. FOUNDING PRINCIPLES

1. Natural/Inalienable Rights

Definition—Rights which belong to humans by nature and cannot be taken away. Examples are life, liberty, and property.

Consider This—Does your solution relate to injustices in your community?

Examples—This could be a project that secures or recognizes the fundamental rights of others in your community.

2. Equality

Definition—All individuals have the same claim as human beings to natural rights and treatment under the law.

Consider This—Does your idea promote equality within your community?

Examples—Initiatives that focus on various aspects of social justice, including race, gender, economic status, and more.

3. Consent of the Governed

Definition—The power of government comes from the people.

Consider This—Will your solution need to get approval from your community?

Examples—Seeking input from the local chamber of commerce to incorporate views from the business sector, engaging with neighborhood groups to gain their support.

4. Rule of Law

Definition—Government and citizens all abide by the same laws regardless of political power. Those laws must be stable and justly applied.

Consider This—Are there government processes you will need to follow?

Examples—Engaging with a local town council to amend a city ordinance or collaborating with a local parks department to modify a policy.

5. Separation of Powers

Definition—Each division of government exercises distinct powers to carry out its functions and to prevent the accumulation of power.

Consider This—If you think the government can help you, which branch should you work with?

Examples—An initiative that requires action from the mayor, legislation passed by your town council, or your idea will require you to work with a law enforcement.

6. Bill of Rights

Definition—The Bill of Rights is a list of freedoms and rights that protect people and maintenance of their constitutional governing structure.

Consider This—Does your idea protect people's rights or freedoms? Does it respect personal choices, safety, or fair treatment in the community?

II. CIVIC VIRTUES

1. Humility

Definition—A recognition that one's ignorance is far greater than one's knowledge. Putting others ahead of ourselves in thought, word, and deed.

Consider This—Will you need to listen to community members to find a solution?

Examples—Hold a listening session to hear from members of the community you are working with. Learn a skill or the history of the community that your solution will impact.

2. Integrity

Definition—To tell the truth, expose untruths, and keep one's promises.

Consider This—How will you make sure to follow through on the solution you commit to?

Examples—Create a realistic schedule for completing your solution. Make a public statement or message that acts as a commitment for others to hold you accountable.

3. Moderation

Definition—The avoidance of excess or extremes.

Consider This—How can you ensure your goals are realistic and achievable?

Examples—Starting with a small solution that addresses a single problem while leaving room for it to grow. Make a set of goals you think you can reach within three to six months.

4. Respect

Definition—Regard for and defending the equal rights and inherent dignity of all human beings, including oneself.

Consider This—How will your solution support individuals and work well with other people in the community?

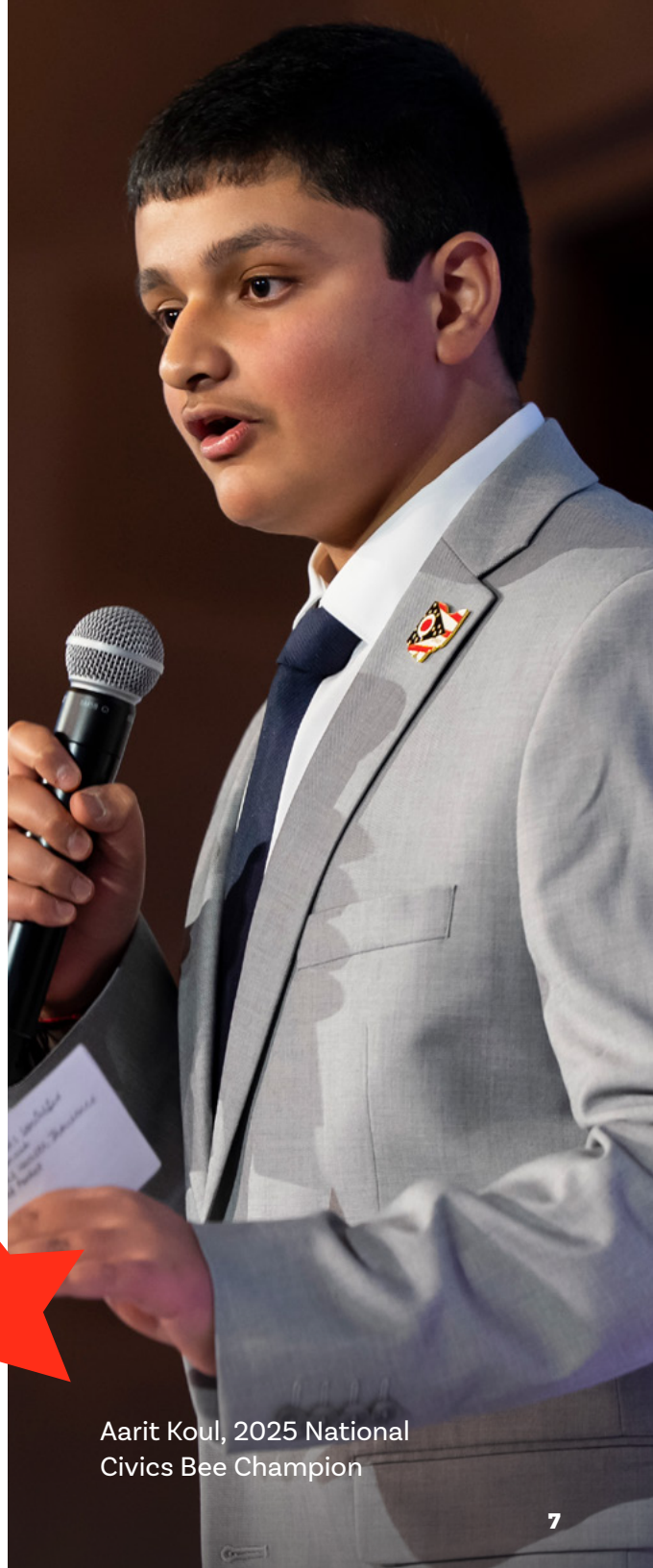
Examples—Telling the stories of your community members with your project. Highlight how your contribution is part of a longer history of contributions by others. Be grateful for the help others give you or the knowledge they share.

5. Responsibility

Definition—Acting on good judgment about what is right or wrong, even when it is not popular. Individuals must take care of themselves, their families, and their fellow community members.

Consider This—Why do you think your solution is necessary? Why is it important that YOU are the one that works towards this solution?

Examples—Make clear how you have benefited from your community and why you wish to give back. Highlight what inspired you to act and why.



Aarit Koul, 2025 National Civics Bee Champion

Essay Organizers

Preparing for Your Essay

Directions: To participate in the National Civics Bee®, you will need to write and submit an essay by responding to the four short-answer prompts. To get started, you may use this worksheet to help plan and structure your answers.

Note: The essay is in four parts. You will write answers to each prompt in its own response box and submit each answer separately. Aim for 150–200 words in each box. This is the best length to fully explain your ideas.

STEP 1 IMAGINE

Directions: Before you write, take a minute to read the prompts and think about your school or community. Use the chart below to help you turn an idea you notice into a clear change you care about.

Prompt: IMAGINE one change—big or small—that would make life better for people in your school or community in the future. Share your idea and how it could make a positive impact on your community.

SEE IT	FEEL IT	FIX IT
What is an opportunity problem, or issue you notice?	**How does this affect people or make them feel?**	**What is one change—big or small—that could help?**
Litter around bus stops.	It looks messy and makes the neighborhood feel less welcoming.	A student-led cleanup and signage campaign.

Write: Use your idea from the chart to write your response to Prompt 1. Explain what the change is and why it matters to people in your school or community. This idea will be your answer to Prompt 1.

STEP 2 DESCRIBE

Directions: Now think about how your idea could actually happen. Use the steps below to plan a realistic path from idea to action. Your steps should make sense for someone your age. You do not need a long or complicated plan. Focus on what you would do first, next, and then.

Prompt: DESCRIBE how you would bring your idea to life. Explain how you would build trust, understand different viewpoints, and collaborate with people who care about the idea.

Example: Make it more about the litter idea.

	DESCRIBE WHAT YOU WOULD DO	EXPLAIN HOW THIS STEP BUILDS TRUST, UNDERSTANDING, AND COLLABORATION
First, I would...	Contact the public transit office.	This builds trust by showing respect for the people in charge and helps me understand their viewpoint before taking action.
Next, I would...	Gather student and community support.	This builds understanding and collaboration because I am listening to others' experiences and inviting them to be part of the solution.
Then, I would ...	Try the idea at one bus stop first.	Starting small builds trust by showing responsibility and helps everyone work together to improve the space before expanding the idea.

	DESCRIBE WHAT YOU WOULD DO	EXPLAIN HOW THIS STEP BUILDS TRUST, UNDERSTANDING, AND COLLABORATION
First, I would...		
Next, I would...		
Then, I would ...		

Write: Take each step and write 1–2 sentences explaining how it helps your idea move forward. This plan will be your answer to Prompt 2.

STEP 3 FIND

Directions: Changes don't happen alone. Think about the people involved in your idea, including both people who might support it and people who might have questions or concerns.

Prompt: FIND support to help you bring your idea to life. Who could help you, and how would they contribute?

Use the sentence starters below to explain:

Select 2–3 stems and complete them.

"To work with others, I would start by listening to…"	"Some people might disagree because…, so I would…"
"Building trust would matter because…"	"Working together is important since no one person can…"

Write: Use 2–3 of the sentence starters above to help you write your response. You may add your own sentences to explain your thinking more clearly. These ideas will be your answer to Prompt 3.

STEP 4 CONNECT

CONNECT your idea to the values that shaped our country.
How does your idea reflect the Founding Principles and Civic Virtues?

For more information about Civic Virtues visit:
billofrightsinstitute.org/resources/principles-and-virtues

STEP 4A CONNECT TO FOUNDING PRINCIPLES

Directions: You must include at least one Founding Principle in your answer. Review the principles and their definitions, then rate how closely each principle relates to your idea by assigning a number from 1 (only relates a little) to 5 (relates a lot).

PRINCIPLE	RATING (1-5)
Consent of the Governed **Definition**—The power of government comes from the people. **Consider This**—Does your solution need approval from the community?	
Rule of Law **Definition**—Government and citizens all abide by the same laws regardless of political power. Those laws must be stable and justly applied. **Consider This**—Are your ideas fair and equally applied within the community? Do they follow the rule of law?	
Separation of Powers **Definition**—Each division of government exercises distinct powers to carry out its functions and to prevent the accumulation of power. **Consider This**—Does your solution need a branch of government to succeed? If yes, which one(s)?	
Equality **Definition**—All individuals have the same claim as human beings to natural rights and treatment under the law. **Consider This**—What role does your idea play in promoting equality within your community?	
Bill of Rights **Definition**—The Bill of Rights is a list of freedoms and rights that protect people and maintenance of their constitutional governing structure. **Consider This**—Does your idea protect people's rights or freedoms? Does it respect personal choices, safety, or fair treatment in the community?	

Write: Choose the Founding Principle with the highest rating. Explain what the principle means in your own words and describe how your idea shows or supports this principle. This explanation will be part of your answer to Prompt 4.

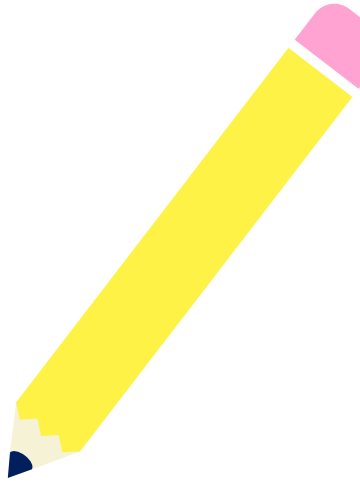
STEP 4B CONNECT TO CIVIC VIRTUES

Directions: You must include at least one Civic Virtue in your answer. Repeat the process you did for Founding Principles. Review the Civic Virtues and their definitions, then rate how closely each principle relates to your idea by assigning a number from 1 (only relates a little) to 5 (relates a lot).

CIVIC VIRTUE	RATING (1–5)
Humility **Definition**—A recognition that one's ignorance is far greater than one's knowledge. Putting others ahead of ourselves in thought, word, and deed. **Consider This**—Is listening to community members necessary to identify a solution? What could you learn from them?	
Integrity **Definition**—To tell the truth, expose untruths, and keep one's promises. **Consider This**—How will you follow-through on your commitment to the community?	
Moderation **Definition**—The avoidance of excess or extremes. **Consider This**—Are your goals realistic and achievable?	
Respect **Definition**—Regard for and defending the equal rights and inherent dignity of all human beings, including oneself. **Consider This**—How will you achieve effective collaboration with others in the community?	
Responsibility **Definition**—Acting on good judgment about what is right or wrong, even when it is not popular. Individuals must take care of themselves, their families, and their fellow community members. **Consider This**—What makes the work necessary? Why is it crucial for this task to be undertaken by you?	

Write: Choose the Civic Virtue with the highest rating. Explain what the principle means in your own words and describe how your idea shows or supports this principle. This explanation will be part of your answer to Prompt 4.

STEP 5 WRITE AND SUBMIT



Now you have all your ideas organized. Before you finish your essay, follow these rules:

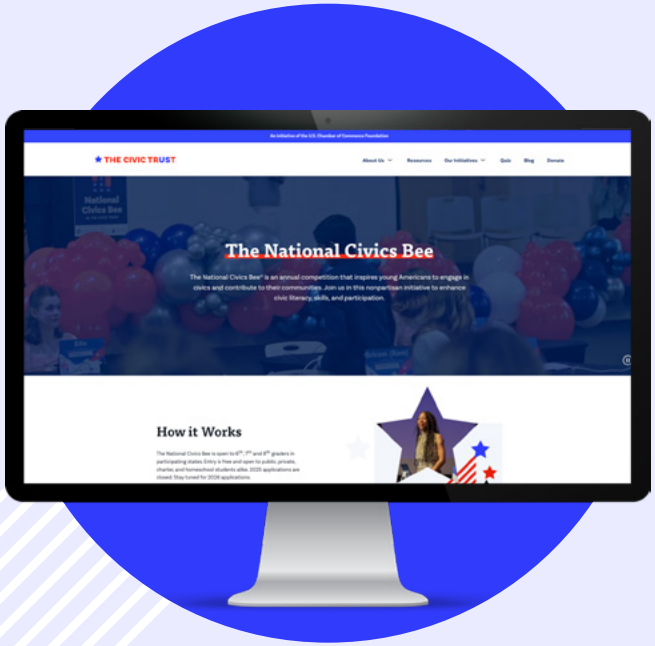
- ☐ Read the Essay Round Contest Rules. You'll need permission from a guardian to apply.
- ☐ The online application has four text boxes, one for each question.
- ☐ Type your responses directly into the boxes—do not upload a file.
- ☐ Aim for **150–200 words in each box**. This is the best length to fully explain your ideas.
- ☐ Ideal Responses:
  - Address the questions asked in a thoughtful and meaningful manner.
  - Use referenced facts and arguments when appropriate to support your answers. While formal citations are not required, you should provide enough information to show the sources of ideas and information.
  - Answers flow logically and read clearly.
- ☐ Other Ideas:
  - Try reading your essay answers aloud to a family member. Does it sound like it flows easily? Can your audience member summarize your essay back to you in one or two sentences? (If they can't, try going back and clarifying your ideas).
  - Try putting your essay down for a day or two and coming back to it and re-reading it. Do you notice anything you'd like to change or add?

How to Enter

Online Application

All students are encouraged to apply online

Deadline: February 2, 2027 at 11:59pm Hawaii Standard Time



nationalcivicsbee.org

SIGN UP NOW

Backup Method: Mail-in Application

(by request only)

If you cannot submit online, you may request a mail-in application form. Please email NationalCivicsBee@USChamber.com using the subject line: [Mail-in Application Request]. No explanation or documentation is required.

Please mail your application to:

National Civics Bee
1750 Pennsylvania Avenue NW, #27720
Washington, DC 20038

- ☐ All required information in the Mail-In Application Form must be completed.
- ☐ Handwriting must be legible.
- ☐ Applications must be postmarked by February 2, 2027.
- ☐ Applications must be received by February 13, 2027.

TIP: Mail applications as early as possible to ensure they arrive by the deadline!

Applications that are incomplete, received by email or any other means, postmarked after the deadline or received after the deadline, will not be considered.