



Essay Guide

2024-2025

Essay 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 how you can make a difference in your 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, identify a specific problem, challenge, or opportunity in your community. What can you do to contribute to its improvement?

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:

<https://billofrightsinsstitute.org/resources/principles-and-virtues>

By upholding Founding Principles, practicing Civic Virtues, and using our unique talents, people across our 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 your solution. 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 2025 National Civics Bee®, middle school students in 6th, 7th, and 8th grades must answer the following three questions:

IDENTIFY a specific problem, challenge, or opportunity in your community. What can you do to contribute to its improvement?

200 words minimum–250 words maximum

WHAT individuals or organizations would you work with to accomplish your solution? Examples include elected officials, business leaders, and nonprofits.

200 words minimum–250 words maximum

HOW does your solution include Founding Principles and Civic Virtues?

200 words minimum–250 words maximum

Each essay answer will be evaluated based on how well the students:

- Demonstrate an understanding of civics.
- Incorporate research and references to support your ideas. While formal citations are not required, you should provide enough information to show the sources of ideas and information.
- Clearly describe an idea that is innovative or new to them.
- Acknowledge and address at least one Founding Principle and one Civic Virtue.

Essay answers will be reviewed by at least two judges, and the students with the twenty 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 in a manner that flows logically and reads 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?

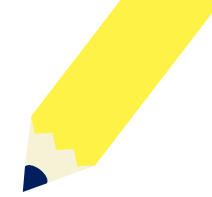


— HERE'S A TIP —

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?

Judging Rubric



QUESTION 01

Identify a specific problem, challenge, or opportunity in your community. What can you do to contribute to its improvement?

Understanding of the Community Issue: **20 Total Points**

Outstanding 20 Points	Clearly identifies and articulates a specific community problem, challenge, or opportunity with depth and insight.
Above Average 15 Points	Identifies a community issue but with less depth or detail.
Average 10 Points	Identifies an issue but lacks specificity or insight.
Below Average 5 Points	Issue is not clearly identified or is irrelevant.

Innovation and Originality of the Proposed Contribution: **25 Total Points**

Outstanding 25 Points	Proposes a highly innovative and original solution that is clearly detailed.
Above Average 19 Points	Solution is somewhat original, with some detail.
Average 13 Points	Common or general solution with little detail.
Below Average 6 Points	Lacks originality; solution is vague or undeveloped.

QUESTION 02

What individuals or organizations would you work with to accomplish your solution?

Clarity and Feasibility of Collaboration: **15 Total Points**

Outstanding 15 Points	Clearly identifies relevant individuals or organizations with a detailed and feasible plan for collaboration.
Above Average 11 Points	Identifies some individuals or organizations, but details or feasibility are lacking.
Average 7 Points	Mentions potential collaborators but without clear roles or a feasible plan.
Below Average 3 Points	Lacks identification of collaborators or presents an unrealistic plan.

QUESTION 03

How does your solution include Founding Principles and Civic Virtues?

Find more information about Founding Principles and Civic Virtues here: <https://billofrightsinstitute.org/resources/principles-and-virtues>

Integration of Civics, Founding Principles, and Civic Virtues: **30 Total Points**

Outstanding 30 Points	Uses at least one Founding Principle and one Civic Virtue in a meaningful way that clearly improves how the challenge or solution is explained.
Above Average 23 Points	Mentions Founding Principles and Civic Virtues correctly but could connect them better to the challenge or idea in the student's answer.
Average 16 Points	Mentions Founding Principles and Civic Virtues but doesn't demonstrate how they fit into the challenge or idea in the student's answer.
Below Average 8 Points	Fails to mention 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 10 Points	Uses well-researched information and references effectively to support the essay.
Above Average 7 Points	Adequate use of research with references that generally support the points.
Average 4 Points	Sparse use of research and references.
Below Average 2 Points	Minimal or no research or references used.

Helpful Definitions & Essay Organizers

To write a successful essay, 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. Private Property

Definition—The natural right of all individuals to create, obtain, and control their possessions, beliefs, faculties, and opinions as well as the fruits of their labor.

Consider This—Will your solution require individuals to part with their property (like their money), or lend their property to the community (like by offering rental space)?

Examples—People will pay you or donate for a service you plan to provide.

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.





Essay Organizers

Preparing for Your Essay

Directions: To participate in the National Civics Bee®, you will need to demonstrate your understanding and passion for civics. To get started, you may use this organizer to help plan and structure your answers effectively. Carefully read the essay prompts and the supporting questions. Record your thoughts and responses in the “My Notes” section of the organizer, allowing you to thoroughly consider each prompt before you start writing your essay.

	ESSAY PROMPTS	SUPPORTING QUESTIONS	MY NOTES
Identify Your Essay Topic	Identify a specific problem, challenge, or opportunity in your community.	What parts of your community do you care about the most? Have you noticed any issues or difficulties that people in your community face on a regular basis? What impact do you think this problem, challenge, or opportunity has on the people in your community?	
	What can you do to contribute to its improvement?	Are there any existing efforts or initiatives in your community aimed at addressing this issue? What resources or support might be needed to effectively address this issue? How do you envision your proposed solution making a positive impact on your community?	
	What individuals or organizations would you work with to accomplish your solution? Examples include elected officials, business leaders, and nonprofits.	How would these individuals or organizations contribute to the success of your solution? What role would you play in working with these partners? What impact would collaborating with these partners have on your local community?	
Prepare Your Evidence	What sources provide supporting evidence or examples for your writing and answers to the essay prompts?	How can you use this information to support your own ideas? How will you give credit to the sources you use in your essay? How can you smoothly incorporate quotes or information from your sources into your own writing?	

Thinking About Principles



For more information about Founding Principles visit: <https://billofrights.org/resources/principles-and-virtues>

Directions: In order to write a successful answer, you must include at least one Founding Principle. Begin by examining these principles, along with their definitions and questions, to determine how they align with your answer. Then reflect on the relevance of each principle to your idea, and write 1-2 sentences about how it relates, or doesn't relate to your idea. Next, assess the principles' relevance to your topic by assigning a rating from 1 (only relates a little bit) to 5 (relates a lot) to help choose at least one principle to include in your answer. This evaluation will assist you in selecting at least one principle to effectively integrate into your essay.

PRINCIPLE	HOW DOES THIS PRINCIPLE RELATE TO YOUR IDEA?	RANKING
<p>Consent of the Governed</p> <p>Definition—The power of government comes from the people.</p> <p>Consider This—Does your solution need approval from the community?</p>		
<p>Rule of Law</p> <p>Definition—Government and citizens all abide by the same laws regardless of political power. Those laws must be stable and justly applied.</p> <p>Consider This—Are your ideas fair and equally applied within the community? Do they follow the rule of law?</p>		
<p>Separation of Powers</p> <p>Definition—Each division of government exercises distinct powers to carry out its functions and to prevent the accumulation of power.</p> <p>Consider This—Does your solution need a branch of government to succeed? If yes, which one(s)?</p>		
<p>Equality</p> <p>Definition—All individuals have the same claim as human beings to natural rights and treatment under the law.</p> <p>Consider This—What role does your idea play in promoting equality within your community?</p>		
<p>Private Property</p> <p>Definition—The natural right of all individuals to create, obtain, and control their possessions, beliefs, faculties, and opinions as well as the fruits of their labor.</p> <p>Consider This—Did your solution require individuals to part with their property, or lend their property to the community?</p>		

Thinking About Civic Virtues



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

Directions: Repeat the process, but this time with Civic Virtues. To write a successful essay, you must include at least one Civic Virtue. Begin by examining these Civic Virtues along with their definitions and questions, to determine how they align with your essay answer. Then reflect on the relevance of each Civic Virtue to your idea, and write 1-2 sentences about how it relates, or doesn't relate to your idea. Next, assess the Civic Virtues' relevance to your topic by assigning a rating from 1 (only relates a little bit) to 5 (relates a lot) to help choose at least one Civic Virtue to include in your answer. This evaluation will assist you in selecting at least one Civic Virtue to effectively integrate into your answer.

VIRTUE	HOW DOES THIS VIRTUE RELATE TO YOUR IDEA?	RANKING
<p>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?</p>		
<p>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?</p>		
<p>Moderation Definition—The avoidance of excess or extremes. Consider This—Are your goals realistic and achievable?</p>		
<p>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?</p>		
<p>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?</p>		