

Presidential 1776 Award: Rules, Regulations, and Overview

Overview

The Presidential 1776 Award competition (“Competition”) aims to enhance students' understanding of civics and knowledge of the American founding, including knowledge about the Founders, the Declaration of Independence, the Constitutional Convention, and the great soldiers and battles of the American Revolutionary War. The Competition comprises three sections: an online multiple-choice test followed by an in-person regional semifinals and an in-person national final. This document states the “Official Rules, Terms, and Conditions” of the Competition.

Authority

The Department is conducting this Competition under the America Creating Opportunities to Meaningfully Promote Excellence in Technology, Education, and Science (COMPETES) Reauthorization Act of 2010, as amended [15 U.S.C. § 3719].

The purposes, call to action, and activities related to the Competition are authorized by section 4103(a)(3) of Title IV of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, as amended (“ESEA”). Under this section, the Secretary of the Department is authorized to carry out capacity building and technical assistance.

Contest Dates

Date:	Portion of Competition:
December 15, 2025 - February 28, 2026 at 11:59 PM Eastern	Promotion and registration at presidential1776award.org
February 22 at 12:00 AM – February 28 at 11:59 PM Eastern, 2026	ROUND ONE: Multiple-Choice Online Test taken at test.presidential1776award.org
By March 30, 2026	Regional finalists and alternates identified and announced (Top 4 per state and 2 alternates)
May 2, 2026	ROUND TWO: 5 Regional Contests
May 15, 2026	Spotlight on top 20 finalists (Top 4 per region)
June 2026	FINAL ROUND: Televised competition in Washington, DC
July 4, 2026	Top 3 winners brought to A250 Semiquincentennial Celebration

The Department reserves the right to modify any dates or deadlines set forth in the Official Rules, Terms, and Conditions or otherwise governing the Competition.

Eligibility

- Competition launches December 15, 2025, at presidential1776award.org. Registration will be February 1 – February 28, 2026 at test.presidential1776award.org.
- The competition is open to all American students currently enrolled in grades 9-12, 14-19 years of age, and living in the 50 states, the District of Columbia, and the U.S. Territories at the date of registration.
 - U.S. Citizens, U.S. Nationals, and Lawful Permanent Residents are eligible.
- Participants must register by the specified deadline to be eligible.
- All participants must adhere to the competition schedule as outlined by the organizers.
- Any form of cheating or academic dishonesty will result in immediate disqualification.
- Agree to all rules.
- Regional and National finalists and parents or legal guardians must sign a standard consent and media release form.
- Not have a familial relationship or be an immediate family member of, or reside in the household of, a judge participating in any round of the competition. For the purposes of these rules, “immediate family member” means a parent, legal guardian, spouse, child, or sibling.
- Not have a financial relationship with a judge.

Round One: Multiple-Choice Test

- The multiple-choice test will consist of three 30-minute timed sections (foundational, intermediate, advanced) with an unlimited number of questions covering the documents and topics listed in the world of the test (“Study Library”).
- Students may not use notes, books, or aids to help answer online test questions.
- Parents and legal guardians will be asked to commit to ensuring their student adheres to this rule.
- Participants will sit for 90 minutes to complete the test. Participants may have up to 10 minutes of rest between sections before the section will automatically progress.
- Each question will have four answer choices, with only one correct answer.
- The 4 highest-scoring participants and 2 alternates on the multiple-choice round from each state, territory, or district will advance to the regional semifinals round.
- There will be a seven-day testing window from February 22 at 12:00 AM – February 28 at 11:59 PM Eastern, 2026 in which students may take the multiple-choice online test.
 - Each student may only take the test once in that window.
- There will be an actively monitored help email for technical issues arising during the test window at support@presidential1776award.org.

Round Two: In-person Regional Semifinal

There will be 5 regional semifinals each consisting of two rounds.

Region 1 – Northeast/Midatlantic: Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, Delaware, Maryland, District of Columbia

Region 2 – South: Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, Arkansas, Louisiana, Puerto Rico, U.S. Virgin Islands

Region 3 – Midwest: Pennsylvania, West Virginia, Kentucky, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Iowa

Region 4 – Frontier: Missouri, North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Kansas, Oklahoma, Texas, Wyoming, Colorado, New Mexico

Region 5 – West: Montana, Idaho, Washington, Oregon, Utah, Arizona, Nevada, California, Alaska, Hawaii, American Samoa, Guam, Northern Mariana Islands

Regional Semifinal Administration

First round:

- The regional semifinalists will be randomly divided into 4 groups of with equal numbers of students.
- Each group will compete concurrently in separate rooms with a proctor and a judge, each room will use the same set of randomized questions from the short-answer question bank.
- Contestants will be asked, one-by-one, oral questions by the proctor and will be given 30 seconds to start to answer once the question has been asked.
 - Students will give the answer in the time allotted in front of their student group, proctor, and judge.
- Questions will be in short answer format.
- Each contestant will be asked the same number of questions: between 8-10 questions.
- Judge will determine if answer is correct and award points accordingly.
- Scores will be noted and shared at the end of the round.
- In case of a tie, sudden death tiebreaker questions are asked until winner(s) emerges.
- Top 4 contestants from each group (16 total) will advance to the second round.

Second round:

- The remaining 16 contestants will be divided into 4 groups of 4, with contestants being placed with contestants that they have not competed against.
- Each group will compete concurrently in separate rooms with a proctor and a judge, each room will use the same set of randomized questions from the short-answer question bank.
- Contestants will be asked, one-by-one, oral questions by the proctor and will be given 30 seconds to start to answer once the question has been asked.
 - Students will give the answer in the time allotted in front of their student group, proctor, and judge.
- Questions will be in short answer format.
- Each contestant will be asked the same number of questions: between 8-10 questions.
- Judge will determine if answer is correct and award points accordingly.
- Top contestant from each group (20 quarterfinalists total) will advance from the regional semifinals to the national tournament in Washington, D.C.
- In case of a tie, sudden death tiebreaker questions are asked until winner(s) emerges.

Final Round: National Finals

Quarterfinal round:

- The 20 finalists will be divided into 4 groups of 5.
- Each group will compete concurrently in separate rooms with a proctor and a judge, each room will use the same set of randomized questions from the short-answer question bank.
- Contestants will be asked, one-by-one, oral questions by the proctor and will be given 30 seconds to start to answer once the question has been asked.
 - Students will give the answer in the time allotted in front of their student group, proctor, and judge.
- Questions will be in short answer format.
- Each contestant will be asked the same number of questions: between 8-10 questions.
- Judge will determine if answer is correct and award points accordingly.
- Top 2 contestants from each group (8 total) will advance to the second round.
- In case of a tie, sudden death tiebreaker questions are asked until winner(s) emerges.

Semifinal round:

- The remaining 8 contestants will be divided into 2 groups of 4, with contestants being placed with contestants that they have not competed against.
- Each group will compete concurrently in separate rooms with a proctor and a judge, each room will use the same set of randomized questions from the short-answer question bank.
- Contestants will be asked, one-by-one, oral questions by the proctor and will be given 30 seconds to start to answer once the question has been asked.
 - Students will give the answer in the time allotted in front of their student group, proctor, and judge.
- Questions will be in short answer format.
- Each contestant will be asked the same number of questions: between 8-10 questions.
- Judge will determine if answer is correct and award points accordingly.
- Only the top contestant from each group (2 total) will advance to the championship round.
- The third-place finisher will be the non-advancing contestant with the highest combined score from the quarterfinal and semifinal rounds. In the event of a tie, combined scores from the regional semifinals will be added and the contestant with the highest score will prevail. In the event there is still a tie, the score from the exam will be added. In the event there is still a tie, contestants will split the \$25,000 prize.

Championship round:

- The final two contestants will compete on stage at the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C.
- Contestants will be asked, one-by-one, oral questions by the proctor and will be given 60 seconds to start to answer once the question has been asked.
 - Students will give the answer in the time allotted in front of their student group, proctor, and judge.
- Each contestant will be asked the same number of questions: between 10-12 questions.
- Panel of the five judges will determine if answer is correct and award points accordingly.
 - Judges will reach their determinations by consensus. If consensus, is not reached - then judges determination will be made by majority vote.
- In case of a tie, sudden death tiebreaker questions are asked until a champion is crowned.

Judging Criteria and Scoring

- Judging panel will consist of secondary school American history, civics, and government active and retired teachers recruited by the James Madison Memorial Fellowship Foundation.
- Judges must not have personal or financial interests with a participant, nor may judges have a familial or financial relationship with a participant. Judges must disclose conflicts of interest and recuse themselves accordingly.

Presidential 1776 Award Online Multiple-Choice Test Scoring Methodology

Assumptions:

- Multiple choice questions.
 - Example in the Weighted Scoring Rubric uses 100 questions but can be extrapolated to any number of questions.
- Questions grouped into three levels of difficulty. Difficulty levels are pre-validated by James Madison Memorial Fellowship Foundation.

Test Structure:

- Three levels of thirty (30) minutes each.
- There will be an up to 10-minute break between levels before the test automatically progresses to the next level.
- Difficulty will increase in each level
 - Level 1 is Foundational, Level 2 is Intermediate, Level 3 is Advanced.
- Students will answer as many questions as they can in each 30-minute level.
- To prevent students needing to start over should their connectivity be interrupted, the clock will stop and resume at the same place they left off when they return within the contest open dates

Scoring Basis:

- Four winners and two alternates from each state, district, and territory will be identified for the regional competition.
- Test employs the Item Response Theory model to implement a weighted scoring rubric (same as SAT). More challenging questions have a greater impact on the final score.
- If there is a tie for fourth and fifth place, or for the second alternate position, the student who answered the greater number of Advanced questions correctly will win the tie. If still tied, the student who then answered the greater number of Intermediate questions correctly will win the tie. Third level of tie breaker is percentage (%) of correct answers given.

Example Weighted Scoring Rubric: 3-Level Multiple Choice Test

Each section allows a participant to answer as many questions as possible during the 30-minute time limit. The Chart below is an example of a participant who answered 40 questions in the first portion; 40 in the second portion; and 20 in the third portion. Please note the below is an example as the participant is able to answer as many question as they are able to in the 30-minute timeframe allotted to each section.

Difficulty Level	Number of Questions answered correctly (example only)	Points per Question	Total Points	Description
Foundational	40	0.5	20	Foundational Knowledge.
Intermediate	40	1.0	40	
Advanced	20	2.0	40	Complex knowledge questions. Differentiates top performers.
Total	100	—	100	—

Implementation Notes:

- **Scoring Method:** Multiply correct answers in each difficulty category by their point value, then sum for total score.
- **Guess Encouraged:** Each correct answer contributes to raw score, while incorrect answers do not deduct points. This encourages educated guessing in a non-punitive manner.
- **Laddered Difficulty Weighting Benefits:** Rewards mastery of complex material.

Presidential 1776 Award Oral Short Answer Scoring Methodology

- Regional Semifinal:
 - 1 point for every correct answer
- National Final:
 - 1 point for every correct answer

Awards

- First prize: \$150,000 scholarship
- Second prize: \$75,000 scholarship
- Third prize: \$25,000 scholarship

Rules of Conduct

All Students:

- Must complete all work independently.
- Must adhere to all time limits.
- May not bring notes into in-person rounds or use them on the closed book online test.
- Must treat all participants, judges, proctors, academics, and staff respectfully.

General Rules

These Official Rules, Terms, and Conditions cannot be modified except by the Department at its sole and absolute discretion. The invalidity or unenforceability of any provision of these Official Rules, Terms, and Conditions shall not affect the validity or enforceability of any other provision. In the event that any provision is determined to be invalid or otherwise unenforceable or illegal, these Official Rules, Terms, and Conditions shall otherwise remain in effect and shall be construed in accordance with their terms as if the invalid or illegal provision were not contained herein.

The Department reserves the right to suspend, postpone, cease, terminate, or otherwise modify the Competition including any dates or deadlines or any entrant's participation in the Competition, at any time, at the Department's sole discretion.

All entry information submitted on the competition website and all materials, including any copy of the submission, become property of the Department, and will not be acknowledged or returned by the Department, EBSCOed, or James Madison Memorial Fellowship Foundation. Proof of submission is not considered proof of delivery or receipt of such entry. Furthermore, the Department, EBSCOed, and James Madison Memorial Fellowship Foundation shall have no liability for any submission that is lost, intercepted, or not received by the registration and/or test website. The Department, EBSCOed, and James Madison Memorial Fellowship Foundation assume no liability or responsibility for any error, omission, interruption, deletion, theft, destruction, unauthorized access to, or alteration of, submissions.

Entrants, or parent or legal guardian if entrant is under the age of 18 years, are responsible for ensuring proper contact information has been submitted and is maintained throughout the Competition including a valid phone number and email address for a parent or legal guardian for all entrants under the age of 18 years. If, despite reasonable efforts, an entrant does not respond within three days of the first notification attempt regarding selection for advancement in the Competition or as a Competition award recipient (or a shorter time as exigencies may require) or if the notification is returned as undeliverable to such entrant, that entrant may forfeit the entrant's selection, award and associated prizes, and an alternate award recipient may be selected.

Materially erroneous or false information provided in the entry will result in immediate disqualification of the entrant, in the Department's sole and final discretion. The Department and the Judges retain the right to disqualify any entrant for sufficient cause, in their sole and final

discretion. The Department reserves the right to disqualify any submission that the Department, in its discretion, deems to violate the Official Rules, Terms, and Conditions.

The Department reserves the right, in its sole discretion, to disqualify any entrant who is found to be tampering with the entry process or the operation of the Competition, Competition website, or other Competition-related websites/materials; to be acting in violation of the Official Rules, Terms, and Conditions; to be acting in an unsportsmanlike or disruptive manner or with the intent to disrupt or undermine the legitimate operation of the Competition; or to annoy, abuse, threaten, or harass any other person. The Department reserves the right to seek damages and other remedies from any such person to the fullest extent permitted by law.

Entrants, or parent or legal guardian if entrant is under the age of 18 years, agree that personal data, in particular name and address, may be processed, shared, and otherwise used for the purpose outlined in these Competition rules. The data may also be used by the Department to verify the entrant's First Name, Last Name, School Name, Address, Parent/Guardian's Phone Number/Email, or to otherwise verify the entrant's eligibility to participate in the competition. The entrant acknowledges that the entrant has read and accepted the **Privacy Policy** on the Competition Registration website.

Entrant, or parent or legal guardian if entrant is under the age of 18 years, warrants that the entry and all components of the entry were not generated, in whole or in part, by an artificial intelligence tool or system (including, but not limited to, large language models such as ChatGPT, Claude, or Gemini). Use of any artificial intelligence tool or system will result in immediate disqualification of the entrant, in the Department's sole and final discretion.

By creating an entry, or by being an entrant, you understand that there is no joint venture, partnership, employment, or agency relation between you and the Department (as well as its partners, including the James Madison Memorial Fellowship Foundation and EBSCOed) arising from any entry.

Entrants, or parent or legal guardian if entrant is under the age of 18 years, will indemnify, defend, and hold harmless the Department, EBSCOed, James Madison Memorial Fellowship Foundation, and agents, partners and contractors from and against all third-party claims, actions, or proceedings of any kind and from any and all damages, liabilities, costs, and expenses relating to, or arising from, entrant's submission or any breach or alleged breach of any of the representations, warranties, and covenants of entrant hereunder.

Judges shall exercise independent good faith judgement in selecting finalists and winners. By entering the Presidential 1776 Award competition, entrants and participants agree that the decision of the judges is final and binding with respect to the scoring of the test, first and second rounds, quarter and semi-finals and finals. Entrants and participants agree that the decisions of the judges and Department are final and are governed by the laws of the United States. Any dispute relating to or arising from the competition shall be resolved in United States Federal Court.

Publicity Release

Each entrant, or parent or legal guardian if the entrant is under the age of 18 years, hereby grants the Department, the James Madison Memorial Fellowship Foundation, any Regional, State, Statewide, or National Competition Hosts, and any corporate or individual benefactors of Regional, State, Statewide, and National Competitions (collectively, the “Licensees”), a non-exclusive, perpetual, worldwide, transferable license to edit, telecast, exhibit, display, rerun, reproduce, use, syndicate, license, print, distribute, and otherwise exploit any items (including any photos, videos, audio, or written material) submitted as part of the applicable minor’s (i.e., the entrant’s) entry, or any portion thereof, or recorded or otherwise provided at any point during the Competition, including any round thereof, in any manner, and in any and all formats and media now known or hereafter devised, without payment to you or any third party. Each entrant, or parent or legal guardian of the entrant if the entrant is under the age of 18 years, represents and warrants that you provide your express consent for the entrant and information about the entrant to appear in any materials submitted in the Competition or related event or ceremony, and you have the full legal right, power, and authority to grant to the Licensees this license. Information about the entrant may include the entrant’s name, address (city and state), image, likeness, photograph, voice, biographical information, and/or any statements made by the entrant regarding the Competition, the Department, the James Madison Memorial Fellowship Foundation, or any other person or entity related to the Presidential 1776 Award.

Disclaimer

The Competition website may contain information and resources from public and private organizations. Inclusion of this information does not constitute an endorsement by the Department and the James Madison Memorial Fellowship Foundation, of any products, services, curriculum, pedagogy, or view expressed.

The Competition website may contain hyperlinks and URLs created and maintained by outside organizations, which are provided for the reader’s convenience. The Department is not responsible for the accuracy of the information contained therein.

Accessibility

This document and all registration materials will be made available in an accessible format. For further information regarding accessibility, refer to the **Accessibility Policy** on the Competition Registration website. For further questions regarding accessibility, individuals may contact help@presidential1776award.org.

Compliance with Federal Law

This Department is committed to a policy of non-discrimination and equal opportunity, complying with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Title IX of the Education Amendments

of 1972, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), and all other applicable federal laws.

Limitation of Liability

Participation in the Presidential 1776 Award competition is voluntary and is intended to enhance students' understanding of civics and “knowledge of the American founding, including knowledge about the Founders, the Declaration of Independence, the Constitutional Convention, and the great soldiers and battles of the American Revolutionary War.” By entering, each participant (and his or her parent or legal guardian for children under the age of 18 years) warrant that the participant meets all eligibility requirements for the competition. In consideration for the participation in the competition and its associated activities, participants (and their parent or legal guardian for children under the age of 18 years) release, discharge, indemnify and agree to hold harmless the U.S. Government, its employees, officers, directors, agents, contractors, and partners from all claims, damages, demands, obligations, or losses of any kind related to the competition. Nothing in these terms and conditions or any competition materials shall be understood to expand the scope of the U.S. Government’s existing waiver of sovereign immunity.

By participating in the Competition, each entrant hereby agrees that:

- The Department, EBSCOed, and James Madison Memorial Fellowship Foundation (and agents, partners, and contractors) shall not be responsible or liable for any losses, damages, or injuries of any kind (including death) resulting from participation in the Competition or any Competition-related activity, or from entrants’ acceptance, receipt, possession, use, or misuse of any prize; and
- The entrant will indemnify, defend, and hold harmless the Department, EBSCOed, and James Madison Memorial Fellowship Foundation (and contractors) from and against all third-party claims, actions, or proceedings of any kind and from any and all damages, liabilities, costs, and expenses relating to, or arising from, the entrant’s participation in the Competition.

Without limiting the generality of the foregoing, the Department, EBSCOed, and James Madison Memorial Fellowship Foundation are not responsible for incomplete, illegible, misdirected, misprinted, late, lost, postage-due, damaged, or stolen entries or prize notifications; or for lost, interrupted, inaccessible, or unavailable networks, servers, satellites, internet service providers, websites, or other connections; or for miscommunications, failed, jumbled, scrambled, delayed, or misdirected computer, telephone, cable transmissions or other communications; or for any technical malfunctions, failures, difficulties, or other errors of any kind or nature; or for the incorrect or inaccurate capture of information, or the failure to capture any information.

Exercise

The failure of the Department or the James Madison Memorial Fellowship Foundation to exercise or enforce any right or provision of the Official Rules, Terms, and Conditions shall not constitute a waiver of such right or provision.

Governing Law

All issues and questions concerning the construction, validity, interpretation, and enforceability of the Official Rules, Terms, and Conditions shall be governed by and construed in accordance with U.S. Federal law as applied in the Federal courts of the District of Columbia if a complaint is filed by any party against the Department.