



OPEN TO 7TH & 8TH GRADERS

LOCAL GOVERNMENTS DELIVER SOLUTIONS

Virginia Municipal League If I Were Mayor 2026 ESSAY CONTEST

Deadline to enter: Monday, March 23, 2026

The Virginia Municipal League (VML) invites all eligible* Virginia 7th and 8th Graders to join its "If I were Mayor" essay contest.

Regional winners selected from around the state will each receive a \$150 gift card and a plaque. One statewide winner chosen from the regional winners will receive a \$250 gift card and a plaque. The runner-up from the region that receives the statewide award will become that region's winner.

Winning essays will be featured in the May issue of VML's magazine *Virginia Town & City*.

*See first item under "Rules & Regulations" below for eligibility requirements.

2026 Essay Contest

Being a mayor or community leader is a challenging but rewarding job. It's challenging because you must balance the needs and requests of different people in your community who don't always agree with each other. It's rewarding because, along with your city or town council or county board, you get to be one of the people who ensures that the best solutions are used to address the problems that affect everyone.

VML wants to give you a chance to show what you would do to solve a problem in your community.

Here's how it works:

What's the problem? If you were a community leader like a mayor, what's a problem in your locality you would want to solve? It could be something big that affects the whole community or something small that affects only a few people. If you are having trouble thinking of something, ask an adult (teacher, parent, guardian, relative, friend) for ideas.

What's a solution? Ask a community member (teacher, parent, relative, classmate, friend, etc.) about the problem and find out what they think should be done to solve it. Feel free to ask more than one person to gather more answers..

Choose your solution. Does the community member's solution sound like it would work? Or do you think there is a better way to solve the problem? It's up to you!

Put it all together: Write a brief (300-500 words) essay in which you:

1. Identify the problem.
2. Summarize the community member's idea to solve the problem.
3. Propose the best solution. If you agreed with community member, explain why. If you think your idea will work better, explain why.

How to enter

All entries must be received by end of day on Monday, March 23. There are two ways to submit your entry:

Fill out and submit our online form:

- The form is available at www.vml.org/Opportunities/Essay-Contest.
- Copy and paste your essay into the "Essay" box in the form.
- You can do this yourself or you can have your teacher or someone else help you.
- After VML receives your entry, a confirmation email will be sent to the email address entered on the form.
- At the top of the form, you will need to provide your full name, the name and location of your school, and your teacher's full name and email address.

OR

Mail your essay with a filled-out entry form (visit www.vml.org/Opportunities/Essay-Contest) attached and mail to:

**VML, Attn: 7th & 8th Grade Essay Contest
P.O. Box 12164
Richmond, VA 23241**

Rules & Regulations

The contest is open to all Virginia students from VML member municipalities enrolled in the 7th or 8th Grade during the 2025-2026 school year. If you were a regional or statewide winner in 2025 you are not eligible to win this year (but congrats on your 2025 win!).

If you are not sure if you live or go to school in a member municipality, check the list at www.vml.org/organization/local-government-members.

All essays should be typed. Handwritten essays must be legible to be eligible for review.

Only one essay may be submitted per student.

Entries will be judged based on content and style.

Essays must be submitted by the end of the day on Monday, March 23. Winners will be notified in early April. VML will present the awards to the winners at one of their local council or school board meetings.

VML retains the right to publish essays along with the names and photos of each winning student.



Enter on-line at www.vml.org/Opportunities/Essay-Contest



OPEN TO 7TH & 8TH GRADERS

2026 Entry Form



Student's Name: _____

School Name: _____

School Address: _____

School Phone: _____

Teacher's Name: _____ Teacher's email: _____



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2026 Entry Form



Student's Name: _____

School Name: _____

School Address: _____

School Phone: _____

Teacher's Name: _____ Teacher's email: _____



OPEN TO 7TH & 8TH GRADERS

2026 Entry Form



Student's Name: _____

School Name: _____

School Address: _____

School Phone: _____

Teacher's Name: _____ Teacher's email: _____



If submitting your essay by mail, please fill out one of the above forms completely and attach to your printed* essay.

**Handwritten essays will be accepted but must be legible to be considered.*

Mail to: VML, Attn: 7th & 8th Grade Essay Contest, P.O. Box 12164, Richmond, VA 23241

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