

2026 John A. Garner, Jr. Civic Engagement Scholarship Essay

Civics encompasses more than community involvement; it is fundamentally about supporting when needed. Many young people assume civic engagement is only for adults, but this is not the case. Students are also capable of making meaningful contributions. Through active participation, individuals can address community issues, organize events, and foster unity. My own experiences have demonstrated the significance of involvement. By volunteering, attending meetings, and supporting others, I have witnessed the impact civic engagement can have on individuals and the community as a whole.

One of the ways I stay involved in the civic life of my community is by attending the school board meetings as a part of the student council. One of my duties is to attend the monthly school board meetings to give the Student Body Report. The report includes a detailed description of what happened at the high school that month. It includes different activities, sports schedules, awards and recognitions, etc. While I get to notify the community of what is going on within the school, I also get to hear their feedback. It is inspiring to hear how the school board responds to issues and how their involvement benefits our community. They represent the local government and authority. They often face criticism, which fosters innovative ideas and growth, which leads to success for the school district.

Serving as the Student Council Treasurer has also given me another perspective on civic responsibility. This role requires organization, accountability, and responsibility. I manage the funds for our entire student council and assist in making decisions on how expenditures will benefit the students the most. My role requires working with others and making responsible

choices. Being in this position has helped me recognize how leadership roles involve balancing priorities and making positive, impactful choices. My involvement in the student council is a form of civic engagement because of its focus on improving the community from within.

One of the most empowering ways I stay involved in the civic life of my community is through my volunteerism for the Northern Tier Food Pantry. This has shown me how common food insecurity and scarcity are. Growing up in a rural, low-income community, many of the residents rely on the local food bank, especially during difficult times, like the holidays. Helping sort the boxes, distribute food to families, and provide support and resources has given me a better understanding of the needs in my community. It has also shown me how important volunteers are in keeping these programs running. Participating in this organization makes me aware of how I am helping individuals and making a difference in a practical way.

Involvement in my school committees and activities is very important to me. I am a member of multiple honor societies and the Student-Wellness Committee, which focuses on promoting wellness and mental health for the students of my community. I meet with members of the administration to discuss concerns within the student body and how I feel as a student regarding the issues. It allows me to have mentorship opportunities and influences the administration to make decisions with the students' perspective in mind. This is a very active way to stay involved and informed, which I believe is an important civic duty. Paying close attention to prominent issues within the school and community, influence positive changes to be made.

In addition to the Student-Wellness Committee, I also volunteer with my school's Raider Closet. The Raider Closet provides clothing and hygiene supplies for students who need them,

and is incredibly beneficial for students who may not have access to necessities. This resource is especially important in my rural community, where students are often facing challenges. By helping organize the items and making them accessible, I get to support and be a part of a program that promotes dignity and inclusion. Through the Raider Closet, I can directly address the needs within my school and community in a meaningful and respectful way.

The Cameron County Christmas Gift Program is another group I am a part of that promotes civic engagement and supports those in need. The program provides presents for families who may not otherwise be able to afford them. During the holidays, this brings the community together to support one another. The group hangs tags around local businesses and raises money for the program. Being a part of this program has shown me how civic engagement can create meaningful experiences and memories for families. The impact of this program is extremely heartwarming, and I am grateful to be a part of it.

Civics is about so much more than just understanding community function, but choosing to take an active role in it. Through attending school board meetings, serving in student leadership roles, and helping with local programs for those in need, I have seen how involvement can have a positive impact on others. Civic engagement builds awareness, compassion, and leadership, and encourages communities to change for the better. Through volunteering, staying informed, and being involved, I will continue to do my part in ensuring my community remains supportive, inclusive, and, most importantly, civically engaged.