DEBATING FOR DEMOCRACY (D4D)™
2024 LETTERS TO AN ELECTED OFFICIAL
REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS (RFP)

OVERVIEW: Debating for Democracy (D4D)™ inspires students to become successful advocates in their communities. To encourage engaged citizenship, Project Pericles requests original letters to elected officials from teams (two or more students) at Periclean colleges and universities.

Five teams from five different colleges will win $500 to work on their issue.

ELIGIBILITY: A student must a) be a full-time undergraduate at a Periclean campus; b) be a first, second, or third year student as defined by their college or university during Spring 2024; c) be returning to campus for the 2024-2025 academic year to ensure that winning teams can work on their issues; d) write and mail a letter to an elected official, and e) provide a project proposal.

SELECTION PROCESS: Students must submit their letter and project proposal to their Project Pericles Program Director by Friday, March 15, 2024 (you are welcome to set internal deadlines that are earlier). The Program Director will review each letter and select up to four letters and accompanying project proposals to forward to Project Pericles. By Thursday, March 21, 2024, 5 PM ET all letters should be submitted (in Microsoft Word) by Program Directors to letters@projectpericles.org. A copy of the letter must also be mailed by March 21 from the students to the appropriate U.S. Senator, U.S. Representative, State Senator, or State Representative. The names of all the students who worked on each letter must be clearly identified.

A committee consisting of evaluators, with significant experience in public policy will review the submitted letters and project proposals. Using the criteria below, and they will select the winning teams for the 2024 D4D competition. We will announce the five winning teams in April 2024.

IMPORTANT DATES:

March 15, 2024 — All letters due to the Project Pericles Program Director or campus representative.

March 21, 2024, by 5 PM ET — All letters must be submitted (in Microsoft Word or a Google Doc) by Program Directors to letters@projectpericles.org. Program Directors may copy Project Pericles staff on submission e-mails. Each college or university may submit up to four letters to an elected official. A copy of the letter must also be mailed to the appropriate U.S. Senator, U.S. Representative, State Senator, or State Representative.

April 2024 — Five winning teams announced.

AWARD:

- Project Pericles will provide a $500 award to each of the five winning teams.

- Students can use this money to fund advocacy and educational activities including advocacy trips and workshops. Project Pericles staff will work with the winning teams to develop their advocacy and education activities. Teams that have won this award in the past have organized mobilizing campaigns on their campuses, led trainings, and offered informative events including documentary screenings, election debates, panel discussions, etc. Teams have also traveled to Washington, D.C. or to their state capital to meet with members of Congress or their legislators and their staffs to discuss the issues raised in their letters

JUDGING CRITERIA: The evaluation of each submission will rest on the students' success at conducting high quality policy analysis and research; clarity of presentation; and adherence to the guidelines detailed on pages 3. All submissions should include a project proposal that describes how the team would use an award to advance their issue.

1)   **Policy Analysis and Research:** The most important aspect of the letter is the quality of the analysis and research (55% of the evaluation). The evaluation will rest on each team's success at identifying a federal or state policy issue in their letter, proposing a solution to the problem they identified, and conducting and interpreting research to bolster their letter.
- Does the letter present a public policy issue in a convincing manner?
- Does the letter focus on a federal or state public policy issue that impacts the student and their community and explain how this issue impacts them?
- Does the letter contain logical judgment and analysis?
- Does the letter demonstrate the use of primary (personal experience, community experts) and secondary resources (journal articles, books) to bolster their argument?
- Does the letter demonstrate an understanding of the historical context of the problem and solution being discussed?

2)   **Clarity of Presentation:** The ability to write a clear and compelling letter will be considered. In addition to a logical argument, persuasive letters include a narrative about how the issue impacts the authors or other constituents (30% of the evaluation).
- Is the letter effective in communicating the significance of the problem and the solution?
- Do the authors offer a compelling narrative? Do the authors make a compelling case as constituents? Is there a tie-in to either the authors or other constituents from the elected official district?
- Are the letter and proposal clear and grammatically correct?

3)   **Quality of Related Project Proposal:** The project proposal should present the authors' strategy to have a meaningful impact on the topic they tackle in the letter. As such, the proposal should clearly outline how students would use the $500 award to instigate positive change. This section is worth 15% of the total evaluation. **It should not exceed two pages.**
- Is the project proposal creative and effective in addressing the problem presented in the letter?
- Is it feasible given time and financial constraints?

In all cases, the goal of your project should be to advance your issue. Campus events should have a tie-in to an "ask" in which you request that your fellow students or community members take an action (example: contacting their elected officials) that will advance your issue.
The award should be used for activities and/or educational events to move your issue forward. You are encouraged to think outside the box and come up with creative ideas.

Typical uses of funds include:
- Travel (lodging, meals, and transportation) costs to meet with your elected officials.
- Costs associated with campus or community activities that educate, inform, or raise awareness about your issue.
- Travel to another Periclean campus to educate their students about your issue.
- Costs associated with developing materials that educate people about your issue.
- Other (pre-approved) activities to move your issue forward.
- **Awards may not be used to pay honoraria to speakers.**

Letter and Project Proposal Writing Guidelines:
- The letter must be on a state or federal issue. Letters on local issues will not be eligible. The majority of local issues are also important federal and state issues.
- The body of the letter may not exceed **1200 words** (excluding footnotes and project proposal).
- Students must identify their elected official and their address. Since the authors will be urging their elected official to support or oppose a legislative solution, they will want to select the official who will be most responsive to their letter.
- A copy of the letter must be mailed to the elected official by March 21, 2024.
- The letter must begin with the phrase "Dear Representative (last name)" or Dear Senator (last name)" and be addressed correctly.
- The letter should begin with a sentence that tells the elected official exactly what the student wants them to do. The first sentence in the letter on page 5 provides an example.
- The letter should contain the student's mailing address so that the elected official can confirm them as a constituent and the elected official can write back.
- The students must sign and date their letter.
- All primary and secondary sources used in preparing the proposal must be cited.
- The project proposal should not exceed two pages.

Eligibility (additional guidelines):
- Two or more students **must** work on the letter and project proposal.
- Students who were finalists (meaning they received an award) in a previous year are not eligible to participate.
- No student can co-author more than one submitted letter.

ADDITIONAL TIPS, GUIDELINES, AND RESOURCES

"Letters are an extremely effective way of communicating with your elected officials. Many legislators believe that a letter represents not only the position of the writer but also many other constituents who did not take the time to write." **American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU)**

Many federal and state policy issues are suitable for this letter. Possible issues include:
*Campaign Finance * Climate Change * Economic Justice * Education Access*
*Gun Control * Health Care * Immigration * LGBTQ+ Advocacy * Mass Incarceration*
*Public Health * Race and Inequality * Reproductive Health * Voter Engagement*

In the letter, students must identify one federal or state public policy issue to be addressed and analyze how this issue impacts them personally, people in their community, people in their state, and, if a federal issue, people across the United States. In the letter, students must recommend at least one legislative solution. The students may recommend an original legislative solution (fund a NASA mission to Jupiter) or they can support or oppose a portion of a bill that is currently pending before Congress or their state legislature. In both cases, the students must support their solution with data and examples from at least two outside sources (books, journals, reliable internet sources) and discuss whytheir solution is better than other options. ***All outside research must be properly cited.***

SUGGESTED RESOURCES:

- An excellent model of a D4D Letter Submission: **Whitman College Winning Letter in 2019**.
- Five Finalist Letters from 2019 can be viewed here.
  Background: When Project Pericles hosts a D4D National Conference in New York City, the student teams who wrote the top five letters present their issues at a Legislative Hearing. This was a winning letter at the 2019 D4D National Conference. (Due to covid, the last conference was in 2019.) Congress.gov provides detailed federal legislative information to the Members of Congress, legislative. https://www.congress.gov
- C-SPAN is a private, non-profit company, created by the cable television industry as a public service. Its mission is to provide public access to the political process. The C-SPAN website contains a wealth of information including videos of Congressional hearings related to a number of federal policy issues. http://www.c-span.org
- The National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) is a bipartisan organization that serves
  the legislators and staff of the nation's 50 states, its commonwealths and territories. The NCSL website provides research and opportunities for policymakers to exchange ideas on the most pressing state issues. http://www.ncsl.org/