THE CIVIC TRUST

CIVICS ACADEMY PILOT SUMMARY REPORT

JULY 2025

Civics @Work
by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Civics Academy is a nonpartisan initiative of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation designed to strengthen democracy and workforce readiness by equipping employees with foundational civic knowledge and essential 21st-century workplace skills. At a time of growing polarization and civic disengagement, Civics Academy offers a timely, trusted resource that leverages the unique position of employers to foster civic awareness, respectful dialogue, and community engagement.

In the spring of 2025, the Foundation launched a pilot program following a small beta test. Over 175 employees across more than 40 organizations—including chambers of commerce, nonprofits, and businesses—participated in the pilot. The program featured a five-module self-paced online course, opportunities for experiential learning through Civic Day of Action, and an optional Civics Academy Championship trivia competition. To incentivize learning and recognize achievement, digital badges were issued to participants who completed key milestones.

Key outcomes from the pilot include:

- **Over 80%** of respondents rated the content, delivery, and experience favorably.
- **Nearly half** of participants reported they were more likely to engage in respectful political dialogue with people holding opposing views.
- Among those completing the course, **63%** also participated in Civic Day of Action.
- **94%** of Civic Day participants reported feeling more connected to their community and workplace.

Feedback from the pilot affirmed the demand for accessible civic education in the workplace and informed key improvements to content, delivery, and structure. Looking ahead, the Foundation will introduce tiered course offerings (Basics, Core, and Leadership), transition to a more robust learning platform, and conduct long-term studies to measure impact.

Civics Academy is now seeking corporate partners and philanthropic support to scale this innovative program nationally and help ensure civic literacy is a workplace standard, not an exception.

What is Civics Academy?

Civics Academy is a nonpartisan initiative by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation that equips employees with essential civic knowledge and 21st-century workplace skills.

Our economic and political systems are intricately linked, and the prosperity of business depends on a stable, predictable political environment. **Seventy percent of Americans today cannot pass a basic civic literacy test** and more than one in three don't know we have three branches of government. Yet, 86% believe the country would be stronger with better civic education.

At the same time, polarization is at an all-time high. Eighty-six percent of Americans feel the country is divided, with almost half only socializing with others who share their political views. People with differing beliefs coming together to solve problems seems like an idea from a bygone era.

Businesses are uniquely positioned to bring Americans together — 84% of Americans trust them as key contributors to democracy. Americans view the workplace and local businesses as integral parts of their communities — trusted, safe places where people work and come together. By prioritizing civics education, employers can foster greater civility, reduced polarization, and deeper engagement with the American way of life. That's where Civics Academy comes in.

"I think this should be required learning for adults. Too many individuals have no basic understanding of our civic history, our civic foundations, and the role and responsibility of the individual in contributing to a shared progress."

- Microsoft Beta Test Participant

Civics Academy strengthens democracy by integrating civic learning into the workplace. The program includes:



Online Courses: Interactive modules that build civic literacy and workplace skills. We define civic literacy as the knowledge, skills, and disposition required to be effective citizens.



Experiential Learning: Real-world application through volunteerism and team-based competitions.



Credentialing: Digital badges are issued to employees and employers to showcase civic knowledge and engagement, as well as workplace skill development. Digital badges can be downloaded, shared via social media or email, and are easily verified.

"It's refreshing to see things broken down objectively, even if that's not always how the world works today. I wonder if more people took this course, we might reconnect with the basics."

- Pilot Participant

The Beta Test

In April of 2025, we conducted a small 'Friends of the Foundation' beta test with 26 employees from a statewide chamber, a local nonprofit, and a large multinational company. The goal was to identify issues with the online learning platform and course content. Participants were asked to complete at least three of the five course modules, including the final Keystone Skills module, for both the beta test and the pilot. Experiential learning opportunities were not included in the beta test.

The Pilot

In May of 2025, we launched our pilot test. Our goal for the pilot was to evaluate the ability of Civics Academy to impact civic literacy and engagement among working professionals in communities across the country.

Over 175 employees from 41 organizations accessed the online course, including multiple state and local chambers of commerce, and local and national businesses. Sixty percent of participants completed at least one module, and 37% completed all modules. Of participants who completed at least one module, 82% completed at least three modules (our minimum ask) and 63% completed all five modules and the summative assessment.

After completing the online course, employees had the opportunity to put their newly gained knowledge and skills into action through "Civic Day of Action." Companies also had the option of including the Civics Academy Championship, a virtual or in-person trivia competition, as a part of the participant experience. To incentivize course completion, participants could earn digital badges by completing all five modules, scoring a minimum of 80% on a summative assessment, and participating in the Civic Day of Action.

PARTICIPANT HIGHLIGHT!





Maryland Chamber of Commerce participants volunteering as a team at a local food bank

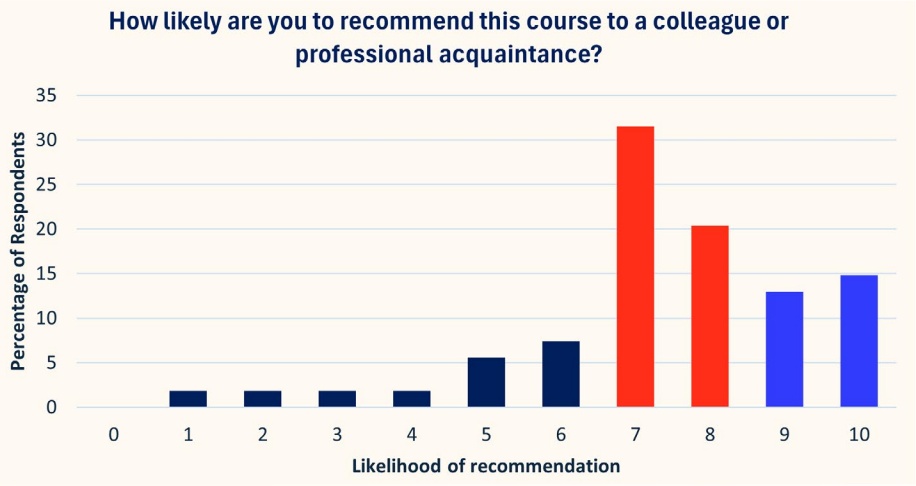
MODULE TOPICS

The online course reintroduced employees to the basics of civics and how to utilize civics skills in the workplace. Employees could navigate the five modules at their own pace, giving them the flexibility to develop their civics knowledge, skills, and disposition in a way that fit into their daily lives. For the pilot, participants had the full month of May to complete the course. The modules for the pilot phase included:

- The Blueprint of Power: How the U.S. Government is Structured
- Citizenship: What It Means and Why It Matters
- Civic Engagement: More Than Just Voting
- Navigating Your Local Civic Landscape
- Keystone Skills: Building Blocks of Success.

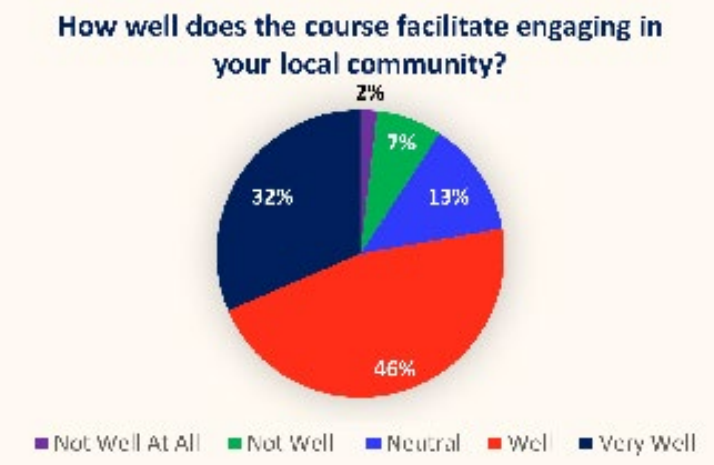
PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK

We asked participants to evaluate the online course, here is what they had to say:



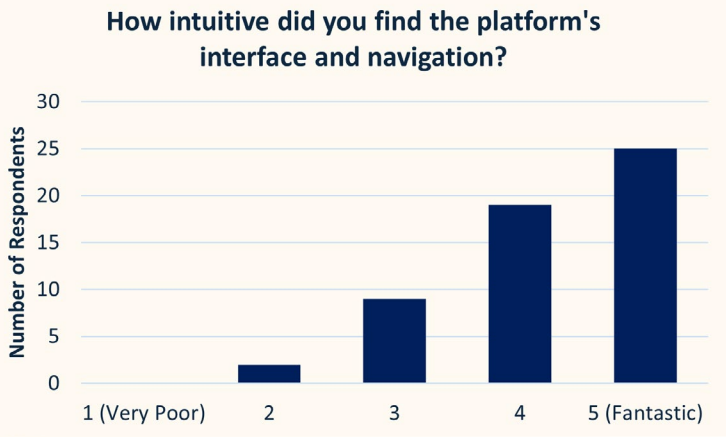
Over 80% of pilot respondents chose seven or higher when asked how likely they would be to recommend the course on a scale of zero to ten.

Seventy-eight percent of pilot respondents chose "well or very well" when asked how well the course faciliates engagement in their local communities.

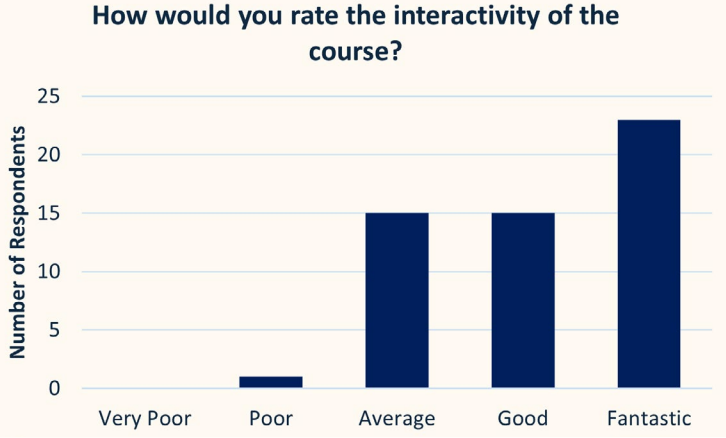


ONLINE PLATFORM EXPERIENCE

We asked participants to evaluate the online course platform. When asked how well the platform met expectations, **80%** stated that it met or exceeded expectations.



Eighty percent of respondents chose four or five when asked to evaluate the inituitiveness of the platform on a scale from one to five.



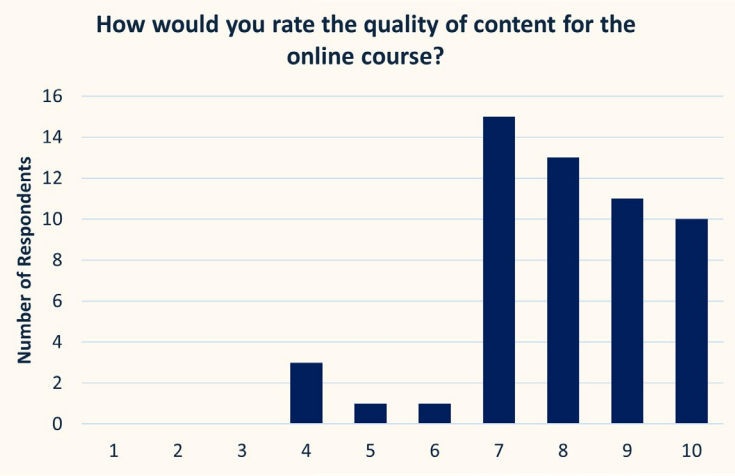
While **70%** of pilot respondents chose good or fantastic, **85%** of beta test respondents chose good or fantastic when asked to rate the interactivity of the course.

"Including a civics course as part of a work initiative is a great idea—it helps me feel more connected to my country."

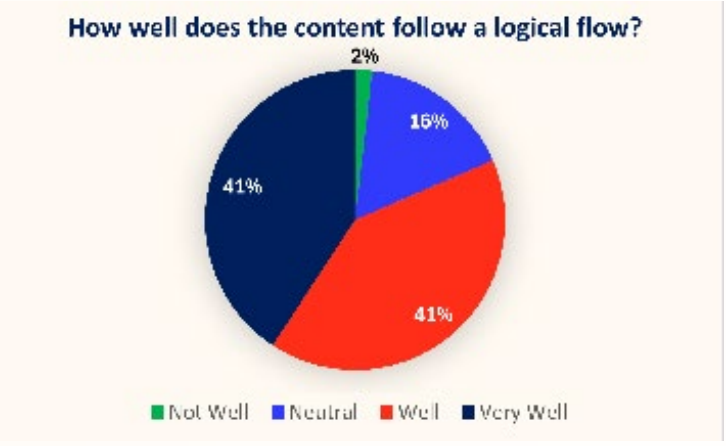
- Pilot Participant

COURSE CONTENT

We asked participants to evaluate the course content, here is what they had to say:



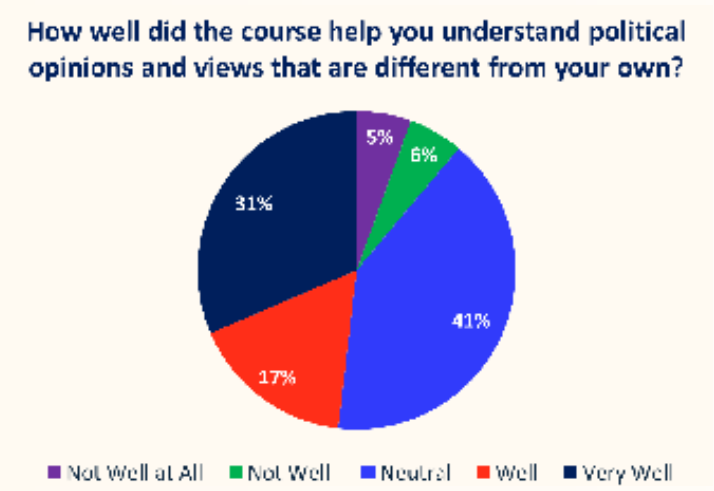
Ninety percent of pilot respondents chose seven or higher when asked to rate the quality of content in the online course.



While **82%** of pilot respondents and **92%** of beta test respondents chose "well or very well", when asked to evaluate how well the content followed a logical flow. No respondents chose not well at all.

UNDERSTANDING THE COURSE'S POTENTIAL TO IMPACT PARTISANSHIP & POLITICAL DISCOURSE

During the pilot, we wanted to evaluate if Civics Academy has the potential to decrease partisanship and foster respectful political discourse. We asked three questions to determine how well the course presents opposing views and if it impacts the likelihood of engagement with and the perception of people who hold opposing views. Our hypothesis that increased understanding leads to an increased likelihood of engagement with people who hold opposing views appears to be supported. However, changing perceptions requires regular and consistent positive interactions and is less likely to be affected in the short term. When asked:



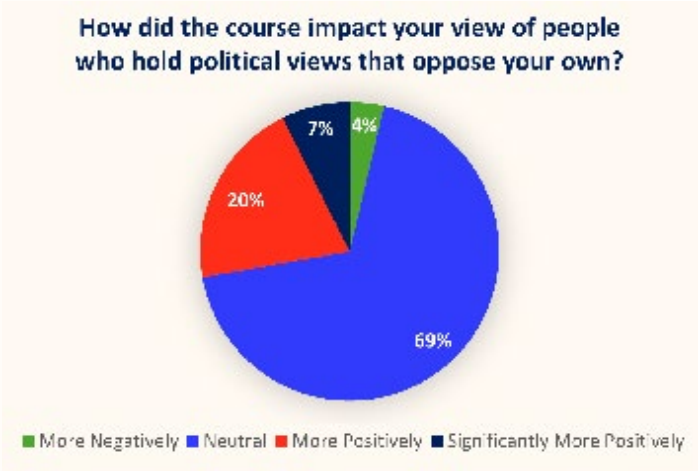
Almost half (48%) of participants stated that the course helped them understand different political opinions.

We asked respondents what content would help them understand views that differ from their own. Here are some examples of what they said:

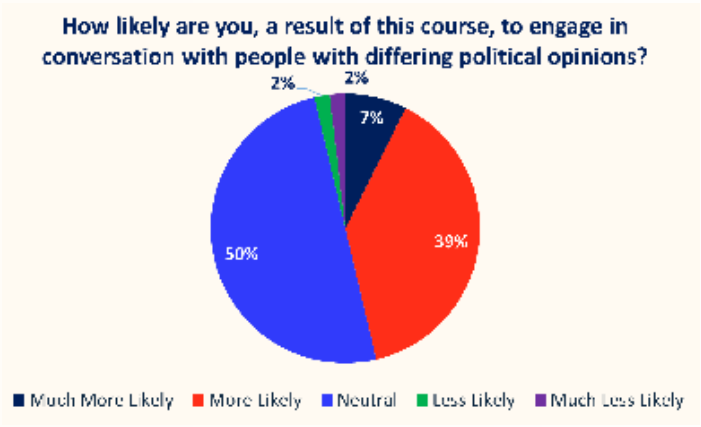
> "Being asked to write summaries from the perspective of another point of view."

> "I think what would help is how the different parties have changed through the years."

> "Provide context to how to combat misinformation."



Over a quarter (27% of participants stated they viewed people who hold opposing views (significantly) more positively than they did prior to the course.



Almost half (46%) of participants stated they were (much) more likely to engage in conversation with people who have differing political opinions after taking this course.

"I normally shy away from political conversations because I don't feel prepared, this course has helped me feel more confident."

- Pilot Participant

CIVIC DAY OF ACTION

Civic Day of Action is an employee engagement opportunity where employees practice the skills they learned from the Civics Academy online course. Through in-person volunteer projects, employees spend time taking action that directly improves their communities. **Ninety-four percent** of Civic Day of Action participants reported feeling more connected to their workplace and community.

We asked participants to describe their experience in one word – here are some of the most common responses:

FULFILLING *IMPACTFUL* *HOPEFUL* *SATISFYING* *REWARDING* *INSPIRING*

PARTICIPANT HIGHLIGHT!



Odessa Chamber of Commerce community cleanup event: Odessa Cares Day

CIVICS ACADEMY CHAMPIONSHIP

The Civics Academy Championship is an optional trivia competition where employees compete to see who can demonstrate the most civics knowledge and be crowned champion. During the pilot phase, five organizations hosted a Championship with their employees. **Eighty-nine percent** of participants rated it four or five out of five. When asked how well the course prepared them to compete in the Championship, **85%** said well or extremely well.

"Most of the information covered in the Championship was also in the course. I think I would've done really poorly had I not already seen a lot of the questions/answers in the Civics Academy!"

- Pilot Participant

KEY LESSONS LEARNED & PROPOSED SOLUTIONS



Rightsizing Time Requirements: The time necessary to complete all the modules was greater than anticipated for some participants which impacted their ability to complete the modules or led them to be less likely to recommend the course to a colleague.

- Transition from a fully self-paced format to a structured schedule with course deadlines. Participants will be expected to complete one module per week, with the final week dedicated to a Civic Day of Action and the Civics Academy Championship.
- Reconfigure module structure by breaking up longer modules and consolidating shorter ones, while maintaining a total of five modules in the Basics course. The time necessary to complete each module should be under 90 minutes, including knowledge checks. This expectation should be clear to participants prior to starting the course.



Enhance Checks for Learning: The quiz checks at the end of each module were helpful for most participants but need to be reviewed to ensure that they hit the sweet spot of intellectually stimulating and sufficiently challenging.

- Expand the types of questions utilized in the knowledge checks to include more than multiple choice, and ensure a mixture of easy to hard questions to test learning.



User Experience Enhancements: The basic functionality of the learning management system (LMS) would be significantly enhanced by transitioning to an alternative platform with improved capabilities, supporting better user experience and navigation in preparation for a national launch.

- Update LMS platform.
- Integrate credentialing into the LMS platform so that participants immediately receive their credential upon completion.

"Going back to the basics with a refresher on why our government is set up the way it is made me feel much better about the current state of affairs. I wish many more people would participate in the course."

- Pilot Participant

Tiered Civic Knowledge Content: There is an appetite for adult civics education that goes beyond basic civic literacy – participants with a base level understanding wanted additional content that met them at their current civic literacy levels.

Creation of three courses: Basics, Core, Leaders

- **Basics:** This course features five foundational modules, a curriculum focused on civic literacy and workplace relevance, includes Civic Day of Action volunteer requirement. This course is designed for anyone looking to refresh or build a basic understanding of civics.

- **Core:** This course will feature advanced civics topics (e.g., media literacy, economic & financial literacy) and AI-driven learning tools. This course is aimed at participants who want to dive deeper into civic concepts, understand how they overlap with other parts of society, and further develop their workplace skills. Participants create:

  - **A Civic Engagement Map** – a tool to identify the civic landscape of your local community and opportunities for engagement that matter most to you.

  - **A Civic Engagement Plan** – a tool to make the map actionable. The plan focuses on how a participant expects to get involved in their local community and maintain their involvement.

- **Leaders:** This course will feature a leadership-focused curriculum, in-person cohort-based learning to kickoff and close the course, and participants will be expected to undertake community leadership roles. This course is for participants looking to take on civic and workplace leadership roles.

Long Term Impact Study: To gauge the impact of Civics Academy's on employee performance in the workplace and involvement in local community, longitudinal surveys need to be conducted.

- Partner with an academic or professional organization to develop a five-year (2026 - 2030) quantitative and qualitative impact study strategy.

"I really liked the tone of the training. It did not prescribe how people should think and it was intentional on encouraging participants to actively engage those with varying beliefs. The art of listening and respecting differing opinions seems lost these days, and I really appreciated the phrasing."

- Pilot Employer

What's Next?

CIVICS ACADEMY NATIONAL EXPANSION

Now that the pilot phase is complete, we are looking to expand civics academy nationally in 2026 to coincide with America's 250th birthday. This national expansion will involve implementing proposed solutions based on key lessons learned, including curriculum expansion, platform updates, and content adjustments. We will be leveraging our large network of state and local chambers of commerce to recruit participants from organizations in their networks. This approach will allow us to bring Civics Academy to small businesses, non-profits, and community groups nationwide. We also plan to engage and partner with large companies, adult education groups, and other organizations to reach additional communities. You can find our timeline for the national expansion below.

JANUARY - APRIL
Initial pilot course creation, beta test & pilot recruitment

MAY - JUNE
Pilot execution and survey capture

JUNE - JULY
Survey results analysis & program planning

JULY - DECEMBER
Curriculum expansion, course updates & fundraising, chamber & employer recruitment

2026 NATIONAL LAUNCH

"Our decision to join the Civics Academy pilot was driven by our goal to foster an informed and engaged community. Civics education is crucial for strong communities as it equips individuals with knowledge of their civic responsibilities, enabling them to contribute effectively."

- Pilot Employer



Want to partner with us?

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation is seeking corporate partners and philanthropic contributions to invest in prioritizing adult civic literacy nationwide by funding the curriculum expansion and national launch of Civics Academy.

To learn more about Civics Academy or partnerships please reach out to Pamela Sharma (psharma@uschamber.com).