

Student Speaker Contest

The Invisible Engine: The Forces We Forget

TEDxHuntingValley · Gund Auditorium, University School · August 22, 2026

ABOUT THE EVENT

TEDxHuntingValley is an independently organized TED event hosted at University School's Gund Auditorium in Hunting Valley, Ohio. Our theme — The Invisible Engine: The Forces We Forget — explores the hidden systems, forces, and dynamics that shape our lives, decisions, and world without us ever realizing it.

We are selecting 5 student speakers to share the stage with adult speakers from across Cleveland and beyond. This is not a youth event or a school showcase. It is a full TEDx standard event, open to 100 members of the Cleveland community, filmed and uploaded to TED.com.

On this stage, there is no distinction between student and adult speakers. You will be introduced simply as a TEDxHuntingValley speaker.

WHAT MAKES A GREAT TED TALK

Before you apply, watch at least two TED talks. The best talks share a few things in common:

- One idea, stated clearly. Not a topic — an idea. Not 'climate change' — 'the invisible carbon cost embedded in every purchase you make.'
- A story or experience at the center. Data alone doesn't move people. The moment it becomes personal is the moment it becomes powerful.
- No slides, no PowerPoint. Just you, the stage, and the idea.
- 12 minutes or less. The constraint is the point — it forces clarity.
- The audience leaves believing something they didn't believe walking in. That's the test.

The Theme: What Does 'Invisible Engine' Mean?

Think about the forces that shape your life without announcing themselves. The bias baked into a hiring decision. The bacteria in your gut influencing your mood. The algorithm quietly narrowing your worldview. The compound interest running silently behind every financial choice you make. The trauma stored in a body that never healed. The trophic cascade that rewires an entire ecosystem when one species disappears. These are invisible engines — forces we depend on, are shaped by, or are harmed by, that almost nobody talks about.

WHO SHOULD APPLY

This contest is open to students at high schools in the greater Cleveland area. You do not need to be a straight-A student, a debate captain, or a natural performer. Give us an idea you genuinely cannot stop thinking about.

Key Dates & The Process

TIMELINE

| MILESTONE | DATE | DETAIL |
|--------------------------------|------------------------|---|
| Application Opens | March 31, 2026 | Packet distributed to area schools. Start writing now. |
| Round 1 Deadline | May 11th, 2026 | All written materials due by 11:59 PM. No exceptions. |
| TEDxHuntingValley Event | August 22, 2026 | You take the stage at Gund Auditorium, University School. |

Round 1 Deadline: May 11th, 2026 at 11:59 PM

You have exactly one month. We believe you can do this!

Late applications will not be reviewed under any circumstances.

THE SELECTION PROCESS

| | | |
|------------------|----------------------------|---|
| ROUND 1 | Written Application | Submit all 4 application components by May 11th. Reviewed by the organizing team. Strong applications advance to Round 2. |
| ROUND 2 | In-Person Interview | 20 minutes at University School in May. You will be questioned on your idea, your evidence, and your ability to deliver it. |
| SELECTION | Final 5 Chosen | Selected in early June. PhD-level coaching and talk development runs through June and July. Event: August 22, 2026. |

The Application

ROUND 1 — FOUR COMPONENTS

Submit all four parts as a single PDF or Word document, in order, to tedxhuntingvalley@gmail.com by May 11th, 2026.

1. **Talk Title.** One line. Specific, not generic. 'The Invisible Hand' is too vague. 'The Bacteria in Your Gut That Is Deciding If You're Anxious Right Now' is a title.
2. **Core Idea + Structure — 200 words max.** Answer two questions in one tight paragraph: What is the invisible force, system, or dynamic you want to talk about? Why does it matter that people understand this? Then add 2–3 sentences at the end describing how you plan to structure the talk.
3. **A Window Into Your Talk — 400 to 600 words.** Write one section of your talk in full. This could be your opening two minutes, a key story, the moment the idea clicks, or your close. Your choice. A real idea at the center.
4. **Non-Related Adult Recommendation Letter — 1 page max.** From one adult only. You can ask this person to speak specifically to your intellectual curiosity, depth of thinking, and ability to communicate an idea. Not your GPA. How you think.

On the 'Window Into Your Talk':

You do not need to show us the beginning of your talk. You do not need to show us the most impressive section. We would love to see what excites — the part that made you realize you had something. That energy is visible on the page.

QUESTIONS & SUBMISSION

Submit all four components as a single document (PDF or Word) to:

tedxhuntingvalley@gmail.com

Deadline:

May 11th, 2026 at 11:59 PM

Questions:

Email tedxhuntingvalley@gmail.com — we will respond within 48 hours.