



## **Nationals Finals and Semifinal Round Judge Selection**

We strive to make the National Tournament the best speech and debate tournament possible. Speech and debate allows students to unleash their potential and change their world. We believe that the National Tournament can provide an opportunity for students to hone their skills and experiences to lead in our diverse and multicultural world. One step to ensuring that is possible is by supporting a judging experience that reflects the diversity of our student population and our world. We appreciate the working group of diverse stakeholders and coach representatives that shared their time and expertise to help us craft these goals.

### **Background**

Selecting judges for the semifinals and final rounds to meet this end is one of the most challenging parts of the National Tournament. In the past few years, we have asked every judge at Nationals to fill out a demographics questionnaire that includes questions about age, role, ethnicity, gender, whether they identify as LGBTQ+, and whether they identify as a person with a disability. We also give every judge the option to select that they are a judge who enhances the diversity of the pool. Last year, close to 75% of judges completed this form.

Every judge can self-nominate themselves to judge semifinals or final rounds, and district chairs can nominate judges from their district. We rely on nominations as a self-reported measure of who is qualified, willing, and available to judge late elimination rounds.

We had 3,000 total judges at the 2021 National Tournament. With 25 events that each have a final round panel between 9-15 people, we pool close to 500 judges for final rounds alone, not including semifinals. About 450 judges are nominated for semifinals and finals. Of those nominations, 200 are judges that consider themselves diversity-enhancing.

We believe in the importance of setting a standard for what great panels look like, and we are excited about the work that can be done. We also think it's important to be honest about the current challenges we face in order to set ourselves up to grow as we gather information and learn more. All of these goals are a starting point, and we look forward to working with our communities to continue to make the National Tournament a positive experience for students and coaches.

### **Goals for 2022 Final and Semifinal Round Panels**

These are the goals we will strive to meet for our main event final round panels:

- Gender balance
- Minimum 2-3 judges who identify as LGBTQ+

- Minimum four persons of color, including two Black individuals and one Black woman
- One judge who identifies as a person with a disability, if possible
- Half of the judges have one or more diamonds
- One to two judges are either in the Hall of Fame or have five or more diamonds (if their addition does not make it impossible to meet other required standards)
- All judges, except sponsors/celebrity judges, have at least two years of experience coaching, judging, and/or competing in the category in question

These are the goals we will strive to meet for our supplemental event final round panels and main event semifinal round panels:

- Gender balance
- At least one judge who identifies as LGBTQ+
- At least two persons of color
- At least one judge with one or more diamonds
- All judges, except sponsor/celebrity judges, have at least two years of experience coaching, judging, and/or competing in the category in question

### **How will we collect this information?**

- We will add a question to the nomination forms saying: “I confirm this person has at least two years of experience coaching, judging, and/or competing in the specific event they are being nominated for.”
- We will split up events on the nomination form so that instead of asking if the nominee can judge Interpretation generally, it asks which Interpretation events they have two or more years experience in. We will do our best to use judges with experience in the specific event on the panel.
- Since we may also have to pull judges who do not self-nominate to enhance the diversity of our pools, we will add these questions to the demographics questionnaire to ensure all pooled judges have at least two years of experience judging that category:
  - How many years of experience do you have coaching, judging, and/or competing in debate? 0-1, 2-3, 4-5, 6+
  - How many years of experience do you have coaching, judging, and/or competing in interpretation events? 0-1, 2-3, 4-5, 6+
  - How many years of experience do you have coaching, judging, and/or competing in public address events? 0-1, 2-3, 4-5, 6+

### **Is two years enough experience to judge finals?**

This standard helps us to ensure that judges on final round panels have experience with the nuance of the category they are judging while also providing students with judging panels and pools that reflect the diversity of our student population and our world. The two years experience standard is not so strict of an experience goal that newer alumni will be excluded, nor is it so strict of a requirement that we will be excluding coaches without the financial means to have a diamond or the community reach to be in the Hall of Fame. It allows us to gather data

about the experience levels of our overall judging pool so we can interrogate what it means to be an “expert” in our activities down the line, because we know that experience does not always equal expertise. Gathering information in this first year while not making too strict of standards allows us to critically reflect on the role of the young successful alum, the “lay judge” who can prevent our activities from becoming too insular, the long-time coach who hasn’t judged in several years, and so on.

In our experience with judge pooling, there is a trade-off between having diverse panels and having experience measures that our system tracks, such as Hall of Fame membership, NSDA diamonds, years of membership, etc. That is for a number of reasons, including financial and structural barriers to reaching those levels. We know that limiting judging to people who meet a definition of expertise by those measures means we would be creating panels with limited representation from historically and traditionally disenfranchised communities. In 2021, of the judges that self-nominated and considered themselves diversity-enhancing, 50 had one or more diamonds. Fifteen of those people represented racial diversity. Knowing that trade-off is what we’re working with, we have erred on the side of diversifying our panels over requiring expertise to reflect our core value of equity and our equity statement.

### **Why are these the diversity standards you chose?**

These standards are not limiting; however, we have a limited ability to create minimum standards surrounding any group when we’re working with 15 or fewer people. Individuals do not have flat identities. No one is only “one” thing, even if in our questionnaire they are only “checking one box.” Being mindful of intersectionality and the way that multiple identities create unique perspectives is part of why this system does not try to prescribe exact numbers for each panel. We focused on these standards as a starting point for representation of historically underrepresented groups, but we know there is additional work to be done with representation from other racial categories, gender minorities, school types, and more. We plan to use the data gathered in this first year to analyze groups that are systematically underrepresented to determine if there is bias in our system that should be addressed with representation on panels and in pools.