

# So You Want To Host A Tournament

## A CHECKLIST

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by Steve Meadows

### WHY TO DO IT

There are three reasons to host a speech and debate tournament. They are a combination of benevolence and profit, and they're worth it! While tournament dates, methods, and norms vary state to state, this guide should help you prepare. And those three reasons?

- a. You want to be of **service** to your fellow teams and have a place where they can compete. If your tournament is attended by ten or more schools, don't forget to claim your [NSDA service citations](#). You deserve it! And established teams should do this—it's just part of the compact of cooperation that makes the activity work.
- b. You want to make some **money** to support your team's season.
- c. Your own **students need a contest** to attend. Some states ban students from competing in their own schools' contests (fearing bias), but some don't.

## TIMELINE

To do as far ahead of time as you can:

- ❑ Contact your NSDA **district chair** or director of your **state organization** and **work out a good tournament date**. Each state has its own process, but some rules of thumb:
    - You'll want to be in the prime "season" of when contests are in your state—some states go all year, some have specific months when invitational tournaments (or "locals") happen.
    - You won't want to go up against another established tournament near yours as you'll dilute both contests' attendance.
    - There may be dates when your region of the state really needs to host a meet, and you may be able to help out your local schools.
  - ❑ If it's your first time working with tabulation software, ask a friend or your NSDA District Committee if they would be willing to tab your tournament and let you **shadow the process**.
  - ❑ Once you have your state date set, make sure that one works with your school. Talk to your principal or whoever in administration okays events at the school and get hosting the meet approved. Then **reserve the school for your date**. **You'll need every inch of it you can get** except the gym—and if you don't have a good place for an awards assembly, you'll need that, too. Be sure you have the following places reserved—**all classrooms and workrooms** (for contest rounds), the **library** (for Extemp prep), the **cafeteria** (for food throughout the day), the **theater** (for awards and any other assemblies, can also be for contest rounds), any **consumer science rooms or other rooms with kitchens** for the judges' lounge, **the office** for registration (can also be done at a table in the lobby).
  - ❑ **Spread the word**. Again, your state organization can help with this by posting your tournament date on the **state calendar**. You can also go ahead and create a tournament site on [Tabroom.com](http://Tabroom.com) or whichever online tournament software you are using for the meet; this will autopost your tournament date onto the **software's online calendar**. Buddy up with someone who already hosts in your state and have that coach assist you in creating your tournament site by copying their settings to your new one. This will give you a great head start on getting your tournament set up online, and then you can tweak it to match what you're offering based on the schedule you choose.
  - ❑ You can also **email individual coaches** with a copy of your tournament invitation. Again, your state league will have email addresses for you or a directory you can use, and you can supplement the mailing list with any pals from out of state as needed. Be sure to communicate to attendees who they contact with accessibility questions.
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### A couple of notes as you plan far ahead of time:

- You need to **decide what events you're offering**. Do you have room to offer both speech and debate? Some of one and not all? Just one type of event? What's the norm in your area? What events do your students compete in? Again, your state director or your NSDA District Committee can be helpful deciding what to offer. Just be sure to count up how many possible rooms you can hold rounds in before you have the conversation. Walk the halls and look for rooms you didn't know about—Extemp in a bookroom or a small office is hardly unusual, for example.
  - **Get parent help established early**. If you don't have a parent group for your team, you at least need to have a "Parent in Charge." My team never had a boosters group, but we had a proud tradition of a Tournament Parent/Guardian who was THE PERSON who ran the hospitality room when we hosted and who organized it beforehand. That person nearly always received our Supporter Award at the end of the year. When that student graduates, that parent will know who to pass it on to. Get this person set up early to organize the food for sale to the students that day, to organize supporters to serve lunch, to assign each team member what to bring or to plan the menu if purchasing food, to organize parents to work the lounge, and to organize when food is to be brought in and where and who will set it up.
  - Make a plan for the **physical and emotional safety of your attendees**.
    - The NSDA encourages tournaments to adopt a [Harassment and Discrimination Policy](#) to ensure an atmosphere of mutual respect.
    - Consider offering an equity office where attendees can go for help and support if they have a concern about how they are being treated or witness something in violation of the harassment and discrimination policy. Check with your local leadership about any norms or established equity officers in your area.
    - Identify your [gender neutral restrooms](#) and plan to communicate their location(s).
    - You and your students should also know the answers to the questions on the [NSDA's accessible tournament checklist](#).
    - **Make sure you and your students know how to use the school elevator.** Investigate this if you don't and make sure you can obtain a key for the day. And if your school will give you a **master key** to use on tournament day, life will be easier all around.
  - **Food plan.** My team members were assigned particular items to bring on tournament day. These could be "three 12-packs of Sprite" or "two dozen nut-free cookies." My Food Parent always had certain people take care of big items—a giant sub cut into small sections for the lounge, pots of soup or chili from parents she knew would make a good batch, large salads, etc. Be mindful of food allergies and dietary restrictions and aim to have something for everyone! Have a plan to indicate allergens and gluten-free, vegan, vegetarian, or other options. We also took care to assign food to everyone but to give
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very little for our free-and-reduced lunch kids to bring—that way they weren’t burdened but still participated. These items included food we sold in the cafeteria—everything but pizza. Many students were assigned to bring water or candy bars. But this made it easy.

A new Kentucky tournament used my checklist this year, but the Parent in Charge decided it would simply be easier if a few volunteers cooked and shopped for it all, so that team just charged each student \$20 for food for the tournament date, and those three supporters did it all. Whatever works.

***Additional Hospitality Tips from Hall of Fame Coach Jay Rye:***

*I have found the best way to approach vendors for an ask when dealing with a local tournament is to **do it in person**. First, approach a Costco or Sam’s Club—they frequently have food items that are not "moving" but they need space for incoming inventory. You would be surprised how much you can get at either a reduced price or for free, especially when it is for an educational cause. They will ask for some acknowledgement at the tournament so be prepared to answer how you will let the tournament know that they are helping—this applies to every potential vendor.*

*Next you want to think about bottled water and other drinks. Talk to the local bottling company and see if they could either donate product or give you a reduced rate—both are a tax deduction for them.*

*If you can get product from a local coffee company, that is awesome! As a non-coffee drinker, I am always shocked at how much coffee is consumed at tournaments.*

*Whatever you do, coordinate with your athletic department and their concession stand for football, basketball, whatever sport and see if they will “buy” any product you have leftover. That way you aren't stuck with 25 bags of chips or something. Also, they will probably be willing to let you use their same distributors that have already been negotiated to a reduced rate.*

**To do before, NOT the week of, your tournament.**

***Don’t put these items off until the week of your tournament. Get help.***

- ❑ **Get tournament supplies** including poster board and markers, blue tape, pens, master copies of the ballots for each event if using paper ballots, large envelopes or file folders to put school packets into for registration, large envelopes or paper grocery bags to put ballots in for schools to take home, and cash boxes and/or zip bags.
  - ❑ **Get a trophy sponsor** (\$1,000 covered trophies and custodians for my contest, but it will vary based on what you order plus labor costs). Some schools have also had great success getting trophies paid for by individual sponsors if you can’t find one big corporate sponsor.
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- ❑ **Look at each of the rooms you have reserved** for contest rooms and **note rooms too small** for anything but Extemp or other similar events. Debate rooms can be smaller than speech rooms. Note large rooms for popular finals like Humorous and Duo. **Are any rooms not accessible for persons with disabilities?** Input this information into the Rooms section of your software so you're prepped to assign rooms after you pair rounds.
- ❑ **Get commitments from as many judges as you can (local judges) for tournament day.** Keep reminding them via email or text message. Don't forget to solicit judges via social media, school email/announcements to faculty/staff, and parent notes. Establish your tournament as your yearly homecoming for your alumni and promote it as such.
- ❑ Note which rooms will be used for **Extemp prep and any other special draw rounds** you might need (in Kentucky, we have a Broadcasting event that requires a third round and finals prep room, for example). The library is commonly used. Take these rooms OUT of use for Room Assignments by your tournament software.
- ❑ Decide on a **tab room and a judges' lounge**. Take these rooms OUT of use for Room Assignments by your tournament software.
- ❑ Decide on a place to hold **awards** and arrange for **sound** if needed.
- ❑ **Order trophies** and any other awards you are giving out (gavels for Congress!). The NSDA Trophy Shop has thousands of trophies, medals, and plaques to choose from. Or, you can work with the Trophy Shop to create something new! Learn more at [www.speechanddebate.org/tournament-services](http://www.speechanddebate.org/tournament-services).
- ❑ Arrange for **custodial help**. You'll need someone to open the school and all the classrooms, someone to be there throughout the day to keep the trash flowing out of the cafeteria as well as handle bathroom stocking, spills, and other needs. You'll also need someone to clean the school afterward. Some teams do this themselves if allowed.

## Tournament Week (a week you and the students stay after school daily to work)

### Tournament Week Monday/Tuesday:

- ❑ **Announce tournament to faculty** and note their rooms will be used. Be sure to remind teachers who object (and some will) that the administrator approved of use of the public property known as their classroom for support of the school's activity, and that it will be used. Reassure teachers that you will make sure it will be taken care of and then make sure you have very responsible students who look out for those rooms in particular!
  - ❑ Get \$500 in **starting change**: \$400 in singles, \$50 in fives, and \$50 in quarters. Many, many students will arrive at the meet with a \$20 bill.
  - ❑ Make **finals posters**. We often did themes (movies in the zeitgeist, etc.).
  - ❑ Obtain a copy of **school maps** to post, print on backs of schematics, etc.
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- ❑ **Make copies of ballots** for the guesstimated number of sections and rounds you'll have for each event if using paper ballots. Add three sections (three judges) per event for finals and an extra set to have on hand as needed.

#### Tournament Week Wednesday:

- ❑ **Close registration** at noon. Just do it then. You need to know who's coming by then to prepare many things. You can edit entries with folks as needed afterward.
- ❑ Create (or have due if you have others making these) Extemp topics and any other **limited prep topics** (Impromptu topics, World Schools impromptu motions, etc.). Get them prepped and on cards/envelopes and ready to use.
- ❑ By now you should know which of your students can be at the meet. My tournaments always had specific jobs for my students who did not compete. Basically, the newbies served as timers for Extemp and other limited prep events as our tournament was early in the season—this also gave the newbies a chance to observe events. Experienced students got duties like working ballot collection, photographing rooms, helping with morale, and selling food. **Assign your team members to various jobs** (see example job list). Make sure each student understands their duties at some point this week or that they will be given a list of duties to do.
- ❑ With your tournament software, **pair the rounds, assign judges, assign rooms to specific events/sections.**
- ❑ Assign **rooms for finals** using software if possible; make a list to use to do so at the tournament if not. Hint: Try to put them all in one section of the building, and the custodians can start working on the rest of the building during finals.
- ❑ **Print out all Congress forms/scoresheets/etc.** if running Congress.

#### Tournament Week Thursday:

- ❑ This is a good day for **trophies** to be picked up and doublechecked.
  - ❑ **Make a schedule** to post, send out, put on the back of dance cards, and communicate to the populace attending. These usually include the round schedule including awards and lunch, maps and directional instructions, information about food and snacks and judges' lounge, accessibility details, and anything else everyone needs to know.
  - ❑ **Contact each local judge** to remind them.
  - ❑ **Print dance cards** for students and judges if using paper ballots.
  - ❑ **Attach impromptu topics** to proper ballot packets plus any other limited prep topics that need such pre-assignments.
  - ❑ **Order food** for Saturday delivery.
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**Tournament Friday:**

- ❑ **Stuff packets** for each school with dance cards, schedules, etc.
- ❑ Run two copies of each school's **invoice and registration**. One is for you to keep records of payment (and to keep with that school's money for recordkeeping at registration); one is their receipt. For the registration, one is for the coach and one is for you to write changes on to make drops, etc.
- ❑ **Remind faculty** about room usage the next day so they can prepare.
- ❑ Complete anything else that has come up or hasn't been done yet. Your goal is to get out early this day after staying late Thursday. You'll need the rest.

Hosting is a lot of work, but an incredibly valuable service to the community. Thank you for providing this opportunity for students. Best of luck!

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