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Hosting a Tournament

Larry Schnoor
Ben Stewart

There comes a time in one's tenure as a Forensic Coach when one may think of hosting a tournament for various reasons. This can be a wonderful and meaningful experience for both you and the attending coaches and students, but it carries with it many challenges and a great deal of work. In trying to deal with what needs to be considered and planned in order to host a successful tournament, there are numerous elements that need to be given consideration. This article will attempt to provide you with guidelines and conditions to consider before one makes the final decision on whether or not to host a tournament.

The authors of this article have years of experience in forensics in general and hosting and running forensic tournaments ranging from local high school tournaments, college tournament and numerous national collegiate forensic tournaments. This article focuses almost entirely on running speech competition, not debate; although some of the same principles apply, debate competition brings with it an array of other considerations and challenges for a host.

While in some cases, this article may provide information that is basically uniform throughout all levels and regions in which speech competition occurs, in many cases, the manager is advised to consult experienced managers in their area to learn local practices on the topic. Items such as this are provided to indicate to a prospective manager that they need to consider the item before they host, and part of that consideration may include consultation with other coaches.

Why Host a Tournament?

The first thing that a Director of Forensics should consider when the thought comes to host a tournament is "Why should I host a tournament?" One should have a clear understanding of what is necessary and how hosting a tournament might be a good idea – or not. Here are some elements to consider in making this decision.

1. Hosting a tournament may help in gaining publicity for the program and the school
2. It may provide a service to the forensic community (high school or college level) by offering an opportunity for an educational experience for competitors
3. The high school/college may have had a history of hosting a tournament and would like it to continue.
4. There may not be enough tournaments in your geographical area and this may fill a void.
5. Because of limited budgets resources for travel, it could provide an opportunity for students to compete at a lower cost.

When Should You Host Your Tournament?

At the high school level, calendars can be obtained from most state high school associations that list the dates and locations of tournaments for the year. A check of such a calendar would enable one to determine whether there is room for another tournament on a given date. Various college forensic organizations such as the American Forensic Association National Individual Events Tournament (AFA-NIET), National Forensic Association (NFA), Pi Kappa Delta (PKD), Phi Ro Pi (PRP) and others do the same.

Additionally, you may wish to check the website of any computerized tournament service providers that provide services to tournaments in your area. These services are used by tournament managers to let coaches/directors register their entries, and then the managers use the services to schedule the tournament and tabulate its results. A sampling of the most widely-used platforms at the time of this writing can be found in the "Operating the Tournament" section of this article. If you want to learn which platforms are commonly used in your region, you might ask an experienced tournament host in your area and they can likely advise you where to look.

Depending on the availability and extensiveness of the resources listed above, you might also want to check with other schools in your area to find out about other tournaments that are scheduled so that you can avoid conflicts. In many cases, if two tournaments are hosted in a close geographical proximity on the same day or weekend, they will divide the nearby schools and both tournaments will suffer due to the smaller attendance. In some cases, this can even force the manager of one of the tournaments to cancel their tournament, which can be disruptive and costly.

Check with your local school administration to find out about other events that may be scheduled so you can avoid any conflicts. Also, check to find out if your school will allow the building and facilities to be used for a tournament. You do not want to find out after putting significant preparation time into a tournament that there is some reason that your administration will not let you host after all.

Make sure you are aware of when the forensic season starts in your area – and when it ends. This information can be gained by contacting other coaches in your area or contacting a state high school association or perhaps a local collegiate league. Generally, high school tournaments -- and especially collegiate tournaments -- are held on a weekend, but there could be some smaller tournaments that may be scheduled for after-school hours during the week.

Types of Tournaments

There are numerous types of schedules that can be developed for a tournament. The schedule design is up to the tournament manager, and can depend on factors including availability of local facilities, schedules of special events or athletic competitions also being held at the same venue, or the expected attendance. Tournaments may be run as *invitationals*, in which the manager invites a group of teams and those teams are the only ones that are accepted to attend, or as *opens*, in which any school can choose to attend if the manager accepts them. Of course,

a tournament manager may both invite a group of schools and then accept other schools even if they were not on the initial invitation list.

Many *high school tournaments* are held on one day. The round design of tournaments varies widely, but a common high school meet often includes three preliminary rounds, and it may include a final round. Some states or regions might more frequently run two preliminary rounds, and some might run four. In some regions, final rounds are commonplace, in others, they are not. In many areas, the decision on finals depends on the size of the tournament or level of competition (mostly novices or mostly varsity). A small tournament or one with mostly newer competitors might include only three preliminary rounds and then give out awards based solely on prelims.

Larger *high school tournaments* might run additional rounds and could extend to two days, usually on a weekend. Most high school tournaments that employ a two-day schedule could be on a Friday afternoon and all day on Saturday, but there are some that may run on Saturday and Sunday. A very large and/or highly competitive tournament might include three or more preliminary rounds, a semifinal round, and a final round to determine individual placements. Semifinal rounds are less common due to the time they add to a tournament (usually 90-120 minutes), and generally they are only used in very large speech fields. In some areas, two-day tournaments are common, particularly if speech and debate events are often held at the same tournament. In other areas, two-day tournaments are extremely rare, and hosting one could mean no one will want to attend the meet, or it might even be seen as a faux pas for a new host to choose such a lengthy tournament structure when long-established meets complete in one day.

High school invitational tournaments often offer the competition events and overall rule set in which their state high school association sanctions a championship. Sometimes, events offered at a national tournament may be held as well if the state association does not sanction them but the tournament host wishes to give attending teams practice in an event they might encounter at a national qualifying meet.

College tournaments may also be held on one day, and commonly have two or three preliminary rounds of competition. The number of rounds can vary from event to event; at a single tournament, the largest events might include two prelims and then a final round, but events with seven or fewer entries simply run three single-judged rounds, or two rounds with one being double-judged, and hand out awards based on preliminary round results only.

Many *college tournaments* follow two-day schedules. This could be either the traditional format of one tournament held over two days, be that Friday/Saturday or Saturday/Sunday, or the Swing Tournament/Double-up Tournament design, which is a relatively new development at the college level. A Swing Tournament is one in which two colleges choose to work together and host two separate tournaments on the same campus, or within a close driving distance, on the same weekend, usually on Saturday and Sunday. If you feel another school near you might be willing to co-host a swing tournament with you, you could contact

that school's forensics program director. Often, swing tournaments alternate between the co-hosts' campuses from year to year.

College tournaments usually offer the same events and overall governing rules for those events as one of the collegiate national tournaments, e.g. the AFA-NIET, NFA Nationals, etc. A prospective tournament host could check the website of one of those organizations to see what events this generally involves.

Support and Preparation Needed to Host a Tournament

If the decision is made to host, one needs to make sure various elements of support have been investigated and confirmed.

Financial Considerations: It is important to find out what policies your school may have regarding expenses for a tournament – as well as how any income that is generated by the tournament will be handled. It is also important that a careful analysis of just what funds will be needed to cover the costs of hosting a tournament. As a Director/Coach of the Forensic Program, you will need to know all of these details.

Facilities: In order to hold a tournament, there need to be enough rooms that can be used for the competition. You need to find out from the proper source at your school just how many rooms would be available on the date or dates which you may want to host a tournament. Generally there is an office or individual that has that information. You also need to find out if there is a fee for the use of the school facilities. Each school will have their own policy regarding the use of any facility.

In using the facilities, a prospective host should pay attention to the custodial staff of the school. A good working relationship with the staff is very important. They are the ones that will enable you to have clean rooms for the tournament. It is also important that you have clean rooms when the tournament is over. Being on a good relationship with the custodial staff will pay dividends in any future tournaments or other events you might host. You should make sure to thank them for their work. Because of contractual factors, there may be an extra charge for having custodial help on the dates of the tournament so this will have to be considered in the overall fees necessary for the tournament.

Requirements for Security and Custodial Staff: Your school may have set requirements for events regarding how many security and custodial personnel must be at an event. You should check with your administration to see what rules may apply to you so that you do not inadvertently violate them. Safety of attendees at any event must of course be regarded as a high, if not the highest, priority for a prospective host.

Competition Rooms: Classrooms are used most often for competition. There may be other rooms such as board rooms, various lounges, and possibly even some offices, that might be available and would work as competition space as well. It is a good idea to make sure that a check of the rooms is made to make sure they will work for competition. Once that has been determined, be sure to make reservations to hold the space for the tournament. A bit of good advice: make sure

you get a confirmed reservation, signed by the appropriate person, so you have proof that the space has been reserved for your use.

In planning the use of the rooms, it is best to keep things as close together as possible. Consider where you will have the registration area, the tabulation room and the distribution and return of ballots as this will help keep the tournament running on schedule. It will also make it easier for both the contestants and the judges. Ballots are used by judges to record the scores they are assigning to competitors; these ballots must be created, either by you or a computer tournament service provider, given to judges via a ballot table, taken by judges to competition rooms, returned to a ballot intake table, and then taken to the tabulation room and entered into tabulation computers or other materials. Keep this workflow in mind as you plan your rooms and logistics.

Some competition events in some formats may involve movement -- or even furniture -- and rooms should be selected so that there will be plenty of space given the requirements of the event.

It is important to consider that there may need to be seating available for an audience (if observers are permitted in your community), especially for final rounds. While preliminary rounds at a regular-season tournament usually do not attract more than a few non-competitor observers, by final rounds, many competitors have been eliminated and may wish to observe the finalists' performances. Final rounds at larger events or championship-level events may draw friends and family observers, as well.

Public Relations: It is a good idea to make sure that you have talked with faculty that normally hold classes or other meetings in the rooms you will be using. Let them know you will be holding a tournament and check with them to make sure they have not planned on using their room on the date(s) you have scheduled for the tournament. There are times when they may have forgotten to let the central scheduling office know and this will help to avoid a conflict on the dates of the tournament.

Nothing creates strife after a tournament between you and the other staff at your school like them walking into their rooms on Monday (or whatever the first school day after the tournament is) and finding them in disarray. You should plan to have your own team members check each room after a tournament and clean and return it to the layout it was in before the tournament. Some ways of keeping track of this include drawing how it was laid out on a whiteboard (not a smart-board!) or taking photographs on cell phones and storing them. You could have the same students check the same rooms; they can easily photograph the room before the tournament and then return it to that layout afterward.

Planning your Room Needs: The size of the tournament will determine just how many rooms will be needed to host. If this tournament has not been held before, then you will have make a judgment call based on how many schools may attend and the size of their entries. You can start to plan this at the beginning of the invitation and response process, and adapt your plans as schools decide they will or will not attend and respond with their entries. If you are likely to be a small tournament, then you may need only 15 to 25 rooms. A larger tournament may

need as many as 40 or more rooms - some very large high school invitationals use over 100 rooms.

If you are running all of your events at once, keep in mind that each room will only hold six to seven competitors in a speech round. Thus, if you are not splitting your events into two "flights" to conserve rooms, the maximum number of entries you can likely host will be seven times the number of rooms you have. You should try not to get too close to this number. If you are "flighting" your events, you will be able to host additional entries. For instance, if you split each round over two flights, you can support twice as many entries. "Flighting" refers to holding one set of events at one time, and another set of events at another time. For instance, if you are offering 14 total competition events, you might hold Round 1 of seven of them at 8:30 a.m., and then Round 1 of the other seven at 9:45 a.m. This effectively halves the number of rooms and judges you will need, since rooms and judges can be assigned in both flights.

Securing and Choosing Rooms: The best practice is to reserve as many rooms as possible and once the size of the tournament is known, rooms not needed can be released. Below, you will find descriptions of some of the special use rooms you will likely need to designate for the event.

Extemp Draw and Preparation ("Prep"): This will be a larger room and it should contain tables to accommodate the speakers and their materials as they prepare their speeches. Given how many extemp speakers are now using computers, it is best to make sure this space has outlets and possibly even internet service over public wi-fi, which is becoming more common every year. You would need to check with your facility's internet technology staff to determine if any access codes are needed for students to access it. This room should be as close as possible to the rooms which will be used for the rounds of extemp speaking; this will help the tournament to stay on time as well as make it easier for the competitors. There may be other events that require drawing topics. A room should be scheduled in these cases as well. In some cases, you may be able to use the same room for all preps if they do not conflict and there is sufficient space.

Tabulation Room ("Tab"): The tournament staff will need to have a room for the tabulation of the ballots as well as handling the general administrative duties of the tournament. This room should generally be as close as possible to the area(s) where ballots are distributed and collected, as this will make it easier stay on time as well as handle any problems that may occur. The room would need to be large enough to have space for the individuals that will be doing the tabulation. In most cases today, computers are used in the tabulation process, so the room should be equipped to handle them.

In planning tournament tabulation, you will need to select the tournament staff for your tab room. Experienced tournament managers and coaches/directors serving as tabulation staff can be a real boon for a new tournament manager. Should issues, be they protests, logistical issues, or otherwise, arise during the tournament, an experienced tabulation room staff can advise you on how best to handle the situations.

Perhaps the main responsibility of the tab room is to tabulate the results of the tournament. Increasingly, this is done on computers, whether they are running or accessing a tournament service provider, or being used to calculate results on a spreadsheet designed for use at speech tournaments. In general, two people are assigned to each computer; one reads the scores off of ballots to the other, who types the scores into the computer. The person on the computer then often will read the scores back to the person holding the ballot. It is wise to check not only the scores, but also the codes and names of the competitors on the ballot and in the computer so that any inconsistencies may be quickly identified and resolved.

In planning your tabulation room, you need to identify how many computers you will need, if you are going to use computers to tabulate, as tournaments increasingly (even predominantly) do. Some approaches may permit you to use only one computer for all tabulation activities, while most tournament service providers permit you to use more than one -- perhaps even unlimited -- computers to tabulate. Check your approach and determine how many computers you can use. A computer lab, department office, or library can make a good modern tab room if it has sufficient space to work and also sufficient computers. Keep in mind that if you are using a web-based service provider, your tab room must have internet connectivity at all times! If you are going to be using the internet, you may wish to contact your school or district I.T. staff to ensure that no maintenance or outages are planned for the duration of your tournament.

Lounges: If possible, it is good to have spaces for both competitors and coaches to gather when they are not involved in rounds. This lounge space will make it easier to get a message out to the coaches and/or students if needed. If any refreshments are to be served, the room should be equipped to handle them. A separate lounge is often provided for judges with refreshments so as to keep them in good spirits and to ensure that they can easily be found if needed by tournament staff. Keeping judges separate ensures that if you need a judge, you do not have to scream over students to find one, and it also provides a more relaxing area for judges between rounds. These people are often being paid modest amounts to work, so treating them well bears dividends.

On-site registration: You will need a table or room at which coaches will check in and complete their registration. You can provide them with a list of their registered entries, upon which they can mark any late drops or changes. This might also be where you give them their students' schematics and ballots, depending on whether you have already scheduled the tournament. Some managers comfortable with tournament service providers might actually run the schedules *after* closing on-site registration, but most will run the schedules at least one day before and then make any adjustments to balance sections for drops as needed.

Auditorium: A large space for any opening assembly and/or closing awards presentation will be needed. It should be large enough to hold all of the individuals that will be attending the tournament. This includes coaches, not just students! An overly small awards space can leave a nasty impression after an otherwise successful tournament. If this space can be located close to the tabulation room, it will enable the tournament to begin and conclude on time.

Food: You will need to make arrangements for food service during the tournament for attending students and coaches, as well as for your tournament workers and judges. Running out of food can lead to extreme unhappiness among tournament attendees; having too much food can leave the tournament in the red financially. Make your decisions on how much food to have as late as is feasible so that you have some idea of how much food to order.

You may wish to check with local caterers or restaurants to see if they can provide food for the tournament at a competitive rate. If your program is strapped for cash, you can see if parents of students might be able to prepare food, if not for the students, then at least for the judges and/or the tabulation room. Some of the most memorable spreads of food at tournaments were prepared by parents or individuals connected to the program; if individuals are willing, this indicates a level of care and attention put into the tournament that judges and tab staff will not forget.

Providing food at a tournament does not have to cripple your program financially, and you can charge students and coaches in the student/coach lounge a fair price for these meals. You should probably not charge judges and tab workers, since they are already contributing their efforts to the tournament and this can leave them feeling unappreciated. The food need not be cuisine one might expect to find at a Michelin-starred restaurant; no one comes to a tournament expecting fine dining. Pizza will do just fine in many cases. Anything above the baseline will probably be viewed as special and thoughtful and will reflect positively on your tournament.

Oh, and don't forget about coffee (and soda) for judges and for the tab room. A tournament without coffee (and soda) can be a crabby, crabby tournament indeed. If you end up with extra food or coffee after the tournament, you can always donate it to a local food pantry or charity (assuming your school is OK with this arrangement, especially if they paid for the items).

Tabulation room supplies: The entities that most frequently bog down tournaments are not students; they are not (usually) judges; they are *printers*. If you are relying on a single printer and it turns out to be slow, your tournament will turn out to be slow. If it runs out of toner and you do not have any extra toner on hand, your tournament may well grind to a halt right when you need to print ballots for finals. Be sure to have one - preferably two or three - fast printers on hand if you will need them, along with toner and paper for them, and pens for tab as well.

Elimination round postings: If you are planning to host elimination rounds, it is customary to post them in the students' lounge area once the tabulation staff has identified the participants. This is usually done with posters. Thus, you should obtain posters and markers to write the names of the finalists. These posters can be pre-prepared before the tournament with the names of the events (one per poster), space for six (or more) speakers' names, a space for the time, the room, and the judges for the round. You should also identify who will be writing the posters, and who will be posting them.

Housing Arrangements

If your tournament is going to require teams staying overnight in order to attend the tournament, arrangements need to be made regarding hotels or motels. The number of days for the tournament, the distance schools may have to travel to attend, and the time schedule of each day will determine the number of nights for which hotel/motel rooms may be needed.

If you will need to help teams locate housing, contact the hotels/motels in your area to find out if they have any space available on the date(s) you are considering for the tournament. If they have space, work with them to secure a block of rooms at reasonable rate for the nights upon which rooms will be needed. If a sizable number rooms are reserved and taken, hotels/motels may give you credit for a comp room(s). Make sure there is a clear cut-off date by which reservations from schools attending will need to be made. It is best to have that date as close to the dates of tournament as possible. Include this information clearly in the invitation for the tournament, along with other information such as rates, phone numbers, names and location of the hotels/motels.

Planning Tournament Operations

The two main ways to operate the tournament are either using traditional methods of hand-scheduling and tabulating the tournament, or the use of a tournament services provider, which is generally now at least partly web-based. The use of tournament services providers has increased dramatically across regions and tournament formats in the past 10-20 years.

Tournament services providers: A tournament service provider operates services used by managers to automate or simplify a variety of tournament operations, including registration of entries and judges, scheduling competition (determining which students will compete against each other in competition sections, and which judges will adjudicate those sections), tabulating the results of the competition, and posting tournament results online following a competition. Different service providers may have their own strengths and weaknesses, and in many areas, one or two providers may be used predominantly and coaches or directors in those areas may have become accustomed to the operation of those services.

Different service providers may also have different levels of customer service provided before and during tournaments. All bear differing levels of cost to use their services -- ranging from free, to an amount of money based on entries at the tournament, as that often determines the level of service needed. It may be beneficial to learn what those resources are, and also ask an experienced tournament manager or two in your area to find out if coaches in the area are used to one system or another. While you can certainly use any provider that you are comfortable with, using one that others in your area have a comfort level with can enable them to be another resource to you, especially in running the tournament itself.

At the time of this writing, four of the most widely-used tournament service providers, in alphabetical order, are www.forensicstournament.net, www.joyoftournaments.com, www.speechwire.com, and www.tabroom.com. Other tournament service platforms exist as well, and there may be a platform that

is widely used by managers in your area that has been designed with the needs of tournaments in the area in mind.

(In the interest of full disclosure, one of the authors of this article is the creator of www.speechwire.com - but to his knowledge, all four are powerful tools with a history of running tournaments successfully).

Hand-scheduling and tabulating: Hand-scheduling refers to the fact that if you do not use one of these providers, you will likely end up creating much of the tournament schedule and documents yourself, often using your hands. Some of the most general guidelines for tournament operations are listed below, and perhaps the most common method of creating schedules traditionally has been through the use of index cards - one for each entry in an event - and moving them around in an effort to create the fairest schedule possible. This card schedule is then translated onto some sort of paper schematic that is reproduced and distributed to attending coaches and students. In terms of tabulation, it can be completed using a spreadsheet such as Microsoft Excel, or with pen/pencil and paper.

This requires a solid understanding of determining the winners, which at its most basic form involves totaling the ranks earned by students. A nearly innumerable array of tiebreaking methods have been developed and used in various tournament formats and locations. This may include things like speaker/rating points, reciprocal fractions of ranks, judges' preference or head-to-head competition, etc. You and/or your tab room will need to have a firm command of these tiebreaking protocols prior to running the tournament if you will not be using a tournament services provider that builds in these criteria.

General priorities for scheduling and tabulating: Some common practices exist throughout speech activities for scheduling competitors into a competition schematic. To the extent that is possible, teammates should not compete against one another in preliminary rounds of competition. Additionally, an effort should be made to not have the same speakers compete against one another multiple times in preliminary rounds of the same event. Obviously, this will not always be possible, but it should be minimized so that individuals may compete against a varied field.

Judges should not judge students from their own school. In some cases, a judge may be "clean" or "neutral" and not affiliated with a school -- these judges may judge any student, regardless of affiliation. Judges should not judge the same student in the same event more than once in a tournament, and oftentimes, it is customary for a judge to see an event only one time during a tournament. Judge assignments should be reasonably divided among both judges and attending schools if possible, so no one judge or school feels they have been relatively over-worked.

In semifinal rounds, if you are holding them, the speakers are generally "snaked" so that the "power" of the sections is balanced based on preliminary round seeds or ranks. Thus, if you have two sections, the first seed will be in one section, the second and third seeds in the other section, the fourth and fifth seeds in the first section, and so on. This seeding pattern may be broken at the discretion of the tabulation staff to separate teammates. In a final round, of course, the top

speakers (usually six) compete against one another regardless of school affiliation. While preliminary rounds are typically evaluated by a single judge, elimination rounds are typically evaluated by a three-judge panel.

Some tournaments run each level of competition independently, meaning that while preliminary round ranks are used to determine which competitors advance to elimination rounds, the three-judge panel in an elimination round alone determines advancement to the next level of elimination rounds or placement in the final round. At other tournaments, ranks may carry through the entire tournament, so that placement in finals might be determined using criteria involving ranks from throughout the tournament. A breakdown of all the approaches is beyond the scope of this article; you should check with experienced local managers or documentation from a state or national group (or even other tournament invitations/materials) to learn the common approaches in your area.

If you use a tournament services provider, many or most of these priorities will be built into the system already, so you will not need to worry about taking care of them yourself. In these cases, you simply need to configure the system to your needs and specifications. Customer service with the provider may also be available to answer your questions and assist you in configuring the service to your specific requirements.

Tournament Invitations

Once the decision has been made to have a tournament, attention must be paid to developing the invitation for the event. The invitation must contain all of the necessary information related to the tournament so those receiving it will have the details they need for them to make their decision whether to attend. If your school has hosted a tournament in the past, there may be a copy in the files that could be used to help in the creation of a new invitation or making necessary revisions. If a tournament services provider has been used to run the tournament in the past, you might contact them to see if they still have the previous invitation in their records, or if it can be imported directly into your new tournament, assuming you use the same service provider.

The following elements are guidelines for what to include in your tournament invitation. This might be an email sent out to everyone you wish to invite, or it might be one or more pages posted on a tournament service provider's website for your tournament. Many tournaments run as *open* tournaments, meaning that anyone can sign up to attend. In this case, the invitation message takes on more of the purpose of a general information page so that people can decide if they wish to attend before they sign themselves up using the service provider's site.

Opening Letter: This should announce the tournament, with the location, dates, and any restrictions on size of entry made clear. These restrictions might be the number of entries a school may have per event, as well as the number of entries a school may have overall for the tournament. Limits like this help to ensure that one large school does not overwhelm your facility. Tournaments dominated by one school become harder to schedule, because their judges ought not to judge their own students, but their students might be in every room, since they should

not compete against each other. Thus, it can be sensible to limit entries - at many high school tournaments, for instance, entries are limited to two or three entries per event per school. Any other personal notes that would encourage those receiving the invitation to attend should also be included.

Tournament Schedule: Depending upon the length of the tournament (one day or two days), this would be the time schedule for the tournament and the pattern of the events for the competition. The schedule will depend on the time length of the events that you are offering. A round length of 90 minutes will allow plenty of time for six (or seven) speakers in a section to complete their presentations, the judges to complete their ballots, and time enough for all to make it to the next round of competition. However, many tournaments run rounds every 75 minutes, as this still provides time for six to seven speakers and generally permits speakers to handle double-entries. Keep in mind that if you permit triple-entry in a single timeslot, as many college tournaments do, you might need a longer time length for each flight. The shorter the length, the more likely a room might run behind, and since that room may be needed in the next round, this can cascade.

High school and collegiate standard practices vary for tournament time schedules, and sometimes geographical areas or league affiliations might have customary schedules that they observe at most invitational meets. Checking any publicly available schedule information for nearby tournaments or asking a local experienced manager for advice on how local tournaments run could help.

Number of rounds: As noted previously, tournaments most commonly hold two or three preliminary rounds of competition. The decision of having quarterfinal, semifinal, and final rounds may be linked to how many total entries in an event and should be stated in the invitation. Semifinals, and especially quarterfinals, should be reserved for the largest competition fields, and it is unlikely that a first-time host would go beyond a single final round when hosting a new speech tournament.

Judge Requirements: Clearly state the number of judges required for entries. This will vary from region to region, but norms are 1 judge for every 6 or 7 entries. As noted below, however, some regions, especially at the high school level, do not adhere to these practices and the tournament host will have to provide nearly all judges. This, however, is *not* a common practice nationwide. Generally, the judging pool is largely provided by attending schools.

Hired Judge Fees: If a school cannot provide enough judges to cover their entry, then arrangements for hired judges need to be indicated. This might include charging a fee to a school for each judge they do not provide. This fee can then be used by the host to hire an independent judge to cover that slot.

Number of Judges Needed: There must be enough judges to cover the total number of entries in the tournament. The calculation for this number is much the same as the calculation for rooms - if you are single-flying all of your events, the number of judges needed will usually be the number of competitors divided by 6 (or 6.5, or 7, depending on how big you want your sections to be). If you are flying, you may be able to get away with requiring fewer judges, but it is always best to have more judges than minimally needed, as the unexpected can and will

occur at tournaments. Judges might need to leave during the tournament, or might otherwise need to be replaced (an unforeseen conflict of interest with a student, etc.)

Volunteer judges: In some areas, paying judges is *not* customary, and judges are expected to serve as volunteers. If this is the practice in your area, you should most likely adhere to it. This may reduce the pool of judges available, but if it is the community practice, individuals in the area are likely used to it.

Tournament staff: In many areas, your tabulation room will be staffed by experienced head coaches of attending teams. When planning your tab room staff, consider that you may want to have two people staffing each station (usually a computer) at which results are being entered. You may also need someone to run ballots between ballot intake and the tabulation room, and depending on local practices, others may be needed to coordinate judge assignments or perform other duties. Generally, you are welcome to invite whomever you choose to be part of your tabulation staff, although if you are part of a league, league officers might by default be part of the staff. Judge requirements are often forgiven for members of tab staff (a tabber counts as a judge for fees). In some areas, student members of the host school comprise the tab room staff, so it is again helpful to ask for advice to see if this is what is generally expected.

Tournament Fees: Schools attending will need to know what the cost would be per entry, fees for any uncovered entries or judge slots, any drop fees for canceling entries or dropping out of the tournament after a stated deadline, and any other fees that might be related to the tournament.

Fees vary greatly from one area to another, so it is best to check to see what has been or is the norm for your area. If no information is available in the records the school may have, check with other schools in your area to learn the normal practice. Fees need to be high enough to cover the costs of the tournament, and generally provide a small amount of profit for the team. At the collegiate level, many organizations have followed a norm of only 10 percent income over the cost of the tournament is reasonable. Again, learning the norms in your community will be valuable. Deviating widely from accepted norms can cause discord between the host and attending coaches or directors and/or reduce attendance.

The fee for individual event entries should be established to cover the costs of any awards that will be presented and also help to cover any additional expenses for the tournament that may be required. There is no real standard set as this fee varies greatly from tournament to tournament. However, it is best to base the fee on a general norm as to what other tournaments have established as the fee.

The fee for hired judges needs to be based on how much will be paid for the rounds they will judge during the tournament. If the judging fee for an uncovered entry is \$10, then the hired judge might get \$10 for each round judged; this may depend on the number of rounds in the tournament. Many tournaments charge schools a flat fee for an uncovered judge requirement (not each uncovered entry), and that fee could then be paid directly to the hired judge by the host. Some hosts only pay hired judges for rounds judged. Others may contract with the hired judges to be available for the entire tournament and pay them a flat stated fee.

Thus, the fee necessary to cover the cost of hired judges must be handled very carefully so the tournament does not run in the red. Again, learning what other local managers pay their hired judges can be valuable.

Entry Form: You may need an entry form, but you also may not if you are running your tournament on an online tournament service provider, as is becoming very common nationwide.

Entries via an online tournament service provider: If you are using an online service provider to manage your tournament, attending schools will use the interface developed by that provider to register their entries and judges, generate their invoice, etc.

Entries via paper or email: If you will only accept paper or email entries, an entry form needs to be developed and included with the invitation, as it will provide you with the necessary information you will need in order to put the tournament together. The normal items include the following:

1. Name of the School and the Director of Forensics. It is also wise to have the address, phone number and e-mail address in case you need to contact someone for additional information.
2. Name of each contestant and event entered. It is suggested that should any contestant having a disability be noted.
3. Name of judges coming with entry: If a judge has a conflict (cannot judge certain contestants from any other school due to having worked with them at camp, etc., or an event that they would prefer not to judge, or a disability), this should be noted.
4. In the event that a school cannot provide enough judges to cover their entries, they may be responsible for paying hired judge fees to the host as determined in sections iii. and iv. above.

Restrictions on Cross-Entry: Cross-entering means the same student entering more than one event at the tournament. You should be clear about whether you will permit students to double-enter, triple-enter, etc. It is uncommon for high school tournaments in many areas to permit more than double-entry; rarer still to go beyond triple-entry. College tournaments often permit quadruple- or even sextuple-entry, but typically restrict students to two or three events in a single flight of events. If you permit cross-entry, students may need to perform in one room, then ask to be excused and compete in their other room in the same flight or round. You should instruct judges to permit this, and in most cases, to permit students to speak out of the printed speaking order to facilitate competing in all of their events.

Event Descriptions: You may also wish to include a listing of the events you will offer at your tournament along with the rules and procedures for those events. See the section below on judge training for more information.

End Date for Registration: You must set a date and time at which registration closes. This will mean not accepting new entries into the tournament, and it could involve charging fees for late drops of entries. If you are hand-scheduling, you will likely need to close registration earlier than if you are using a tournament services provider. Some tournaments with a high comfort level with tournament

services providers can close registration the day before a tournament, or even the morning of the tournament! They then run the schematics with the provider's platform, print and publish the schematics, and print out the ballots. Make sure to allow yourself enough time to be comfortable, but know that the earlier you close registration, the more likely there will be late drops of entries. This can cause you to have to reschedule or move around competitors to balance sections. Keep in mind that hand-scheduling can be laborious and very time-consuming!

Sending the Invitations: If you are using a tournament services provider, you will use their interface to send your invitations out by email, and/or to publish them online so that schools can find them. If you are sending the invitations yourself, you will need to find the email addresses or physical addresses of the directors that you wish to invite and then send them out.

Tournament Judges

Practices for finding and scheduling tournament judges vary widely from region to region. Below, you will find some common practices, but it is always wise to consult with an experienced manager in your region to learn which of the practices below local managers adhere to customarily, and what unique practices might be commonplace in your area.

High school: Most high school tournaments will be judged primarily by judges provided by attending schools. These generally include coaches of attending schools, and further judge requirements are often filled by former competitors who may now be in college or are recent graduates, parents of competitors, or friends of the program, particularly those with communication expertise. However, in some regions, it is not customary for attending schools to provide more than one or two judges. The tournament host is responsible for locating all other judges for the contest, often on a volunteer basis. This can be a considerable burden on a tournament host, and consulting local experienced managers for advice on how they locate judges could be helpful. In *most* areas, however, judges are predominantly (or wholly) provided by attending coaches, so the burden on the host is very minimal.

Collegiate: Judges coming with a school usually will include the Director of Forensics/Speech Coach, possibly an Assistant Director, and in many cases, others who may be former forensic competitors from the school. At collegiate tournaments, some judges may be graduate assistants or former competitors from that program, or in some cases undergraduate students who are no longer able to compete. It is assumed that any judges coming with a school will have been trained as to how to judge and know the various rules and requirements of the events they may judge. This is the responsibility of the Director of Forensics/Coach of the school bringing the judges.

Locating hired judges: If your program has any local alumni, they can prove to be valuable hired judges, particularly if they are at least one year out from competition so as to reduce the number of possible conflicts with current competitors. Other options could be people in the local area with experience in communication,

or possibly people who have at some point been involved in the forensics activity, whether they be previous competitors or coaches at your school or another.

Paying hired judges: You need to find out how to go about paying your hired judges, unless they are volunteers. This may involve discussions with your administration or payroll. They may need to complete a required form in order to be paid. You need to know if you will need to pay these individuals with a check or if it is acceptable to pay them in cash. Also, you will need to determine if any sort of screening is required by your school for an individual to serve in this capacity.

Judge training and judge operations: In order to ensure that all judges at the tournament know requirements and methods of judging, you might want to consider having either a formal training session or at the very least, a detailed sheet for all volunteer and/or hired judges containing information on the events, how to provide comments, how to determine ranks (and rating points if needed), and how to keep time in each event (if judges will be doing this).

Event Descriptions: Each judge should receive a description of each event. These descriptions for a high school tournament will generally be in agreement with whatever has been established by the high school league within the state. If it is a collegiate tournament then the description should be in agreement with the general rules of the state/national speech/forensic organization you have indicated you will model the tournament after. Oftentimes, you can base this information - or copy it wholesale -- from the website of the state association, organization, etc. that creates these rules. This will ensure complete adherence to them and save you time.

Ballots: You might be using ballots that come from a computerized tournament management service provider, or you might use ballots taken from a state or national organization website, or you might be creating your own. This will depend on how you are running the tournament. The ballot should have a clear structure that provides a space to write the name of the event, section number or letter, name of the student, code for the student, rank and rating/speaker points (if you are using them at your tournament - again, check if they are the common practice in your area). If you are using a computerized service, this information will generally print automatically on the ballot that is printed from the service. You should make clear to any hired judges how to complete this ballot. Some ballots may ask the judge to indicate a clear reason for the decision, and a space for the judge to sign the ballot.

Terminology varies from region to region. Usually, there are two different documents being used -- one being a critique sheet (sometimes called a ballot) for each student upon which comments are written for the student, along with their rank (and rating points if being used). The other is a cover sheet (again, sometimes called a ballot, or master ballot) which shows the speaking order for the room and provides a place to write the rank (and rating points if being used) for each student. The individual critique sheets are distributed into exit packets for the schools after they are received by the ballot table, and the master ballots/cover sheets are usually used by the tab room to enter the ranks into the system being used to score

the meet. Most, but not all, areas make use of master ballots/cover sheets - some tab directly from critique sheets.

Comments on Critique Sheets: The comments should be positive, helpful and educational as possible for the student competitor and the coach. The remarks make it clear as to why the student received the rank and rating given by the judge.

Rank and Rating Points on Ballots: The ranking and rating practices will vary for different tournaments depending upon the rules that the tournament is following. Some tournaments use ranks only, while some (including most college tournaments) use ranks and rating points. The rating point scale varies from place to place, but you should decide on what scale you will use, possibly after consulting with an experienced manager in your area, and make this scale very clear to judges prior to the beginning of competition.

Time Keeping: Judges—especially hired judges who may not have complete familiarity with forensics—need to know and understand the various methods for time keeping in every event. This can be particularly important in limited-prep events like Extemporaneous Speaking and Impromptu Speaking. At the collegiate level, the judge not only needs to write comments, but is generally responsible for keeping time and giving finger signals indicating time used/remaining as well. At the high school level, some tournaments provide a time keeper to keep track of time requirements, but this can be a strain on personnel.

Oftentimes, at invitational tournaments at the high school level, the time is kept by the judge and provided solely so that students know how long their performance was. Time violations are not used to penalize ranking officially, although in many cases a judge can consider it as part of the overall criteria for ranking. This is important for students to know, as it could become a major issue for them in state qualifying or championship contests where time violations can result in not being allowed to place first in a round or being automatically ranked last in the round, depending on the rules in the specific state association.

Awards

Most forensic tournaments will offer some type of awards for those students that advance to elimination rounds, or the top students in preliminary rounds if elimination rounds are not held. The following guidelines are provided to give you some help and information concerning the awards to be presented.

Types of Awards: Awards may be trophies, medals, certificates, books, plaques, or other items. The type of awards offered may depend upon what is the normal practice in your area and on the funds available for the purchase of the awards. There are tournaments that may give something that is directly related to the location of the tournament, the school, or the type of tournament if it is a special event. Some tournaments may even present trophies that were previously won by a program in an effort to recycle awards and lower expenses for the tournament. This is not recommended as a standard practice but could be done when all the schools participating are in agreement. You might check with other programs in your area to find the local customs.

Vendor: There are numerous vendors that specialize in awards and most may have items directly related to forensic competition. As a new program, hosting a tournament, it is recommended to check with your school administration to find out the school policy in obtaining awards. Bids may have to be obtained from vendors before any purchase of awards. This is especially true if school funds are to be used to pay for the awards. It may be possible, in some cases, to pay for the awards with the funds that obtained from the entry fees for the tournament. It is a good practice to make sure that the entry fees for the events at the tournament will be sufficient to cover the cost of the awards. You could also try to find a company, business, or a person such as an alumnus, etc. to donate the funds to cover the cost.

What to order: This is dependent upon what events and the number of events at the tournament. There is no magic number. It is all dependent upon the common practice of tournaments in your area or if this is a special tournament such as a district, regional or qualification tournament. It is best to check with other programs in your area or observe what happens at the tournaments that you attend. There will be some tournaments that may grant awards for 1st, 2nd, and 3rd place in an event. Others may give 1st thru 6th in all final rounds. At some tournaments there may be quarter finals and semi-finals dependent upon the number in an event. It is actually your choice to give recognition to the students in these rounds that do not advance to the final rounds. If your tournament has duo or group events, you can decide whether to give an award to each member of the duo or group. Generally, duo events do receive two awards, one for each student.

Generally, you will also need to acquire trophies for team sweepstakes competition, and especially at the collegiate level, for individual sweepstakes competition. In sweepstakes, entries can score points for their school based on their placement in the tournament or on the ranks they receive in rounds, or (as is commonplace in collegiate competition in some areas), a combination of the two. Sweepstakes practices vary widely and are sometimes largely up to the discretion of the manager. Consultation of the practices of local tournaments can be valuable. However, most tournaments will at least need to give trophies to the top three schools for team sweepstakes.

Receiving and Inspecting Awards: You generally have to make your order for the awards far enough in advance to make sure they arrive in time for the tournament. Check with your vendor to make sure when they must have the order and details so you receive the awards in time. As soon as the awards arrive, make sure they are inspected and checked for any mistakes, and that you have received everything you ordered. If there are problems, get in touch with the vendor immediately so that corrections and replacements can be made.

Awards Ceremony: In order to make sure the Awards Ceremony is handled effectively, do not wait until the day of the tournament to formulate your plan.

1. Where will it be held? Is the room large enough for everyone at the tournament? Decide on how the awards will be displayed. This may require special arrangements for tables for the awards etc. In addition, make sure

- access for those that may have physical handicaps are able to receive their awards.
2. Make sure you have decided upon who will be announcing the various awards and that they are prepared to do so. You will also need to identify who will hand the awards to the students.
 3. Make sure that all announcement sheets are in order and are correct. Tournament service providers often provide printable awards scripts that presenters can read from at awards. The awards may be presented in the order in which the trophies etc. are arranged.
 4. Generally, the total results of the tournament – ballots/critique sheets, etc. are presented to the schools attending the tournament after the Awards Ceremony. This may be dependent upon the system used for the tournament. If it has been handled by a tournament services provider, the results may sometimes be obtained by the school by accessing the program used. If everything was handled locally, then printed copies, along with the ballots should be available immediately following the Awards Ceremony.

Running the Tournament

Obviously, you also have to run the tournament! If you have done the necessary preparation, the tournament might largely seem to run itself. The day before the tournament, it can be beneficial to complete a final walkthrough of the competition rooms to ensure they are ready to go. Your team members can be valuable for this -- divide them up among the rooms and have them make sure they are in good condition. You may want to prepare and post signage pointing people to the student and/or coach lounge, the judge lounge/hospitality, the ballot in and ballot out tables, and the tabulation room.

On-site registration: Teams will need to check in before the tournament, and will often be given an entrance packet that includes an entry verification sheet, and possibly schematics and ballots for their judges. Invoices should also be prepared for the attending schools. Ideally, these will be communicated to them prior to arrival so that they may request payment and provide it to you at the tournament. You should prepare a check-in sheet so that whoever is working the on-site registration area can check off the schools as they arrive and indicate which have paid in full.

It is a good idea to collect head coaches' cell phone numbers before the tournament so that you can reach them in case they are running late or if there is an emergency. If you are using a tournament service provider, they may provide a mechanism to collect this information.

Unlocking rooms: You need to plan that someone -- you, other school staff, and/or custodians -- will need to unlock rooms before competition. Make sure that the rooms will get unlocked. A very common source of delays at tournaments is rooms that are for one reason or another left locked, leaving students and judges in the hallway, calling the tab room or wandering across the school or campus to

find the tab room and request that the room be unlocked. This can immediately set a tournament back.

Emergency numbers: If possible have the cell phone numbers of an administrator at the school, the head custodian, and someone in the I.T. department. This will help prepare you for the unforeseen -- you might need to reach an administrator (or even police) if, goodness forbid, someone commits a crime at the tournament. You might need to reach the I.T. department if the network goes down and you are unable to continue tabulating the results of the tournament (assuming you are operating the tournament using a web-based platform). Finally, you *will likely* need to contact the custodians, as doors commonly become accidentally locked

Keep your cool: Running a tournament is stressful. You are inviting hundreds of people into your school to spend the day, and you are using dozens of rooms in the building. Things will probably go wrong. Your plans will not always turn out. Stay calm, and stay flexible. Try to get enough sleep the night before the tournament. Make sure you eat during the day. No one will be well-served if the tournament manager collapses due to exhaustion or deprivation! If possible, surround yourself with experienced, cool-headed people who can help to advise you when the unexpected happens.

Cleaning up: Once the tournament has ended, as previously mentioned, you and your team should make plans to check the rooms that were used and return them to their pre-tournament layout.

Every tournament has one thing in common - it will end. Students will compete and awards will be given out. An educational experience will be had and memories will be created. There is only so much that you as the manager can do, but the more preparation that is put into the tournament, the more pleasant your day -- and the day of the attendees -- will be. This article will help you prepare, but there is no teacher like experience. If you feel you are ready to host a tournament, then the best of luck to you as you undertake a meaningful task and give your own unique contribution to the forensics community.

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Tournament Preparation Checklist

This checklist follows the overall structure of this article, and can help ensure you have considered many of the elements needed for a tournament. Just checking off all these items does not mean you are 100 percent ready to host, though! Make sure you have thought everything through. You personally are responsible for the preparation and success of your event!

Before you decide to host

- Thought through why you are hosting
- Checked date to ensure it's not over-booked
- Selected a general timeframe and structure for the tournament
- Chosen the general governing rule set

Support and planning for hosting

- Learned about school financial policies
- Learned the room availability at the site
- Made contact with custodial staff
- Learned school rules for security, custodians
- Decided rooms to use for competition
- Set tab room, student/coach lounge, judge lounge/hospitality, prep rooms for prep events, space for on-site registration
- Determined number of computers for tab room and if the internet is required
- Secured sufficiently-large awards venue
- Made arrangements for food for students
- Made arrangements for food for judges/staff
- Identified hotels/motels if necessary
- Chosen manual scheduling or a tournament services provider to run the tournament

Preparing and running registration

- Wrote a letter inviting schools to attend
- Finalized and set round time schedule
- Set a close date and time for registration
- Planned and set judge requirements
- Entry fees determined and communicated
- Hired judge fees set (if applicable)
- Identified and invited tab room staff
- Cross-entry rules determined

Preparing for the tournament day(s)

- Awards purchased
- Judge training materials prepared
- Secured printers, toner, and paper
- Posters, markers, and tape for postings (if you are running elimination rounds)

- ___ Awards received
- ___ Walked and checked competition rooms
- ___ Created and posted necessary signage
- ___ Emergency numbers acquired for administrators, I.T. staff, and custodians
- ___ Plans made for unlocking rooms
- ___ Entrance packets/invoices prepared
- ___ Awards venue prepared ahead of ceremony

After the tournament

- ___ Distributed or posted tournament results
- ___ Returned competition rooms to their pre-tournament layout