

Preparing for In-Person Speech Contests: *Finance, Venue and Equipment*

Prepared by Teresa Cooper, DTM, District 64

Budgeting and Finance for In-Person Speech Contests

In-person speech contests, whether at the club, Area or Division level, are organized by a club (called the *host club*) with the assistance of typically the Area/Division Director. An important part of being the host club is that the club is responsible for the finances of the event. They oversee the income as well as paying the expenses. Fortunately, at the Area and Division levels, clubs are encouraged – and allowed - to charge an admission fee to cover expenses, so this doesn't need to be a drain on your club finances. Contests aren't intended to be fundraisers either, but rather run as break-even events. At the club level, if the contest is held during a regular meeting and in your regular venue, you may have no expenses and so you would not need to charge admission.

Examples of typical expenses:

- **Venue:** potential rent for a meeting space that is larger, suitable for contests; many clubs are able to use their normal space but sometimes it will be necessary to rent an alternative.
- **Food & Beverage:** costs for coffee/tea/soft drinks, easy to serve and eat light snacks/food.
- Food related: cups, plates, cutlery, napkins.
- **Printing:** agendas, judging forms, colour printed participant and winner certificates (using only Toastmasters-provided official certificates); coordinate printing with the Area/Division Director so that nothing is missed or unnecessarily duplicated.
- **Miscellaneous:** tickets for door prize draw and tickets for 50-50 sales* if being held (see *Income* below).
- **Less common:** sound system costs (see *Venue Considerations* for more details).

Examples of typical income sources:

- **Admission fees:** your primary source of income will be admission fees. Audience members and officials can be charged admission to attend and this is expected at Area and Division levels as there are typically venue and food costs to cover.
- **Contestants are not charged to compete in the contest** and their clubs are not charged to send their contestants to contests. This is a Toastmasters International rule.
- If you can afford to, it is a nice gesture of thanks to charge the judges and the Area or Division Director a reduced or free admission.
- ***50-50 raffle sales:** For clubs in Manitoba, if you are planning a 50-50 raffle at your contest, apply for a free social occasion raffle licence at <https://www.mylgca.ca/> at least 4 weeks in advance. You must display the licence at the event.

Venues for In-Person Speech Contests

Venue considerations:

Is the venue available for the time/dates required?

- You will want at least an hour prior to the start time to have access to the space for setup and to allow guests in well in advance of the start time. The contest itself will take approximately 2 hours if you are running both the International Speech Contest and the alternate contest (eg Table Topics, Tall Tales, Humour or Evaluation). This will vary somewhat depending on the number of contestants. Allow at least 30 minutes for cleanup afterwards as well.
- For club level contests, your normal meeting location may work with just a few adjustments. There are some additional considerations for the Table Topics and Evaluation contests, however (see below). At the club level, you might choose to split up the two contests to run over two meetings, particularly if your club has a short meeting length (hour or less).

Is the space easily found and accessible for those with disabilities or mobility limits?

- This includes washrooms and all spaces that are used by contestants, including the speaking area and other contest-required spaces. All speakers use the same speaking area.

Is the space quiet, with little chance of interruptions during the contest?

- For Table Topics and Evaluation contests, it is required that you have a place where you can sequester the contestants away from the main room so that they cannot overhear the other contestants.
- If audience members must leave the space during the contest, they are not allowed to re-enter until that contest is completed. Ensure there is a place for them to comfortably wait outside until allowed to reenter.

If a sound system is needed, does the venue have one available for use or rent or is there a place to set up your own?

- If you offer amplification, there must be **both** a lectern/podium fixed-mounted microphone AND a portable microphone available for the speaker to use. It is the speaker's choice which microphone they will use. This is a Toastmasters International rule.
- Allow time for the contestants to become familiar with the microphone during the briefing.
- Ensure you have a person assigned to help contestants get lapel/portable microphones set up between speakers.
- Be prepared with backups in the event a microphone fails so that contestants are not negatively affected.

Equipment for In-Person Speech Contests

Timing lights and shield

- **Timing lights** or coloured timing cards are required for contests. If using battery or electric lights, there must be a backup system in case something fails. This is a requirement of the official Toastmasters contest rules. The lights or signals are silent unless the speaker requires an audible signal due to visual limitations.
- **Light shield:** The lights/cards must be shielded from the view of everyone in the audience except the speaker. A simple shield can be a folded piece of cardboard or an empty binder. Test the positioning of the lights and shield with the speakers prior to the start of the contest, when doing the contestant briefing.

Timing Devices

- **Each of the two contest timers must have their own timing device.** This can be a stopwatch or a digital timer/phone app. The devices are silent unless the speaker requires an audible signal due to visual limitations.

Agendas

- **Speech contest agenda lists the contestants**, however, there cannot be any club or biographical information or Toastmasters designations for the speakers. Listing them alphabetically is a neutral way to present the names.
- **Judges are not listed**, anywhere.
- The agenda also lists the Emcee, the events leading up to the actual contest, Contest Chair, Chief Judge, Timers, Ballot Counters, Sergeant at Arms.

Additional Equipment

- **Current Speech Contest Rule book.** Toastmasters International issues an updated *Speech Contest Rule Book* each year, so make sure you have the correct edition. It can be found at [Toastmasters.org](https://www.toastmasters.org) (item 1171).
- **“Speech Contest in Progress – Do Not Enter” sign** for the door to the contest room.
- **Lectern** for use by the Contest Chair in particular, but also for any speaker who requires/requests it (otherwise it is set up to one side, out of the way of the speaking area).
- **Chair for the Contest Chair** set off to the side of the speaking area for the Chair to use during the speeches.
- **Spares** of batteries, pens, markers, tape, blank paper, extension cords, etc. Be prepared for anything!