

HOW TO GET ODYSSEY OF THE MIND STARTED IN YOUR SCHOOL

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This document has been modified to be used by the NCOM Western Region.

NOTICE: All regional tournament and state tournament team registrations must be submitted online. Therefore, all coaches and school coordinators must submit an email address that is checked on a regular basis.

School Coordinator Problem – Your problem, should you decide to accept it, is to join with our team of Odyssey of the Mind Western Region organizers to help the students at your school find coaches, organize teams, provide judges and receive pertinent information and distribute appropriately. As always, should you, or any member of our organizing team be stuck, the entire team is stuck. You may not skip your turn, nor pass, but you may repeat (and be the coordinator again next year!) Have fun, and good luck with your problem solution. The following briefing will help you get started, and will NOT self-destruct!

WHY BE A SCHOOL COORDINATOR?

- You believe every child should have the opportunity to be creative, learn to solve new problems, and have fun learning.
- You believe every child should learn to work as part of a team to foster success in today's world.
- You know that any worthwhile program needs an organizer.
- You know that by working together, adults who make Odyssey of the Mind happen for the students can make the program better.
- You are willing to work an average of an hour or two each week to help Odyssey succeed in your area.
- In short, you are willing to make a difference in the lives of all the Odyssey of the Mind participants at your school!

STEPS TO GETTING STARTED (Just Suggestions):

1. Talk to the principal about the goals and the value of Odyssey of the Mind. Get approval. Explain what might be required in terms of sending flyers home, having An Awareness Meeting one evening at the school, enlisting a faculty sponsor and perhaps soliciting teachers to be judges at the regional tournament in March.
2. Discuss who might finance the \$135 national membership fee and whether any funds might be available to pay regional tournament fees.
3. Talk to the PTA president about Odyssey of the Mind. If funds are not available from the principal but he or she approves, ask the PTA for funding.
4. Invite interested parents, students and teachers to an Awareness Meeting to tell them about Odyssey and how to form teams. (Regional Odyssey of the Mind board members can help you with this meeting if you wish.) The information about this meeting can be sent by flyer, PTA newsletter and/or announcements over the PA system.
5. Recruit coaches by explaining a team cannot be formed without a coach. (Some schools have had much success by requiring each team parents have some responsibility, either as coach, assistant, spontaneous coach, etc.)
6. Have students sign up and juggle their interests, ages, and available coaches to form teams. (Ideally, all interested students should have the opportunity to participate.)
7. Attend the Regional Coordinator's Meeting in the fall. Be sure the local Odyssey of the Mind Region has you on its mailing list.
8. Provide initial support to coaches by giving information, copies of the rules and of the problems. Information about training will come from the local region; rules and problems are sent in a packet from New Jersey when you join.

WHAT ELSE CAN I DO?

Not in the basic job description, but you could:

- Help teams with spontaneous practice
- Be an Odyssey judge or volunteer
- Organize parent resources and perhaps hold a “skills” workshop to teach students some basic skills, such as sewing or painting
- Have a “Spontaneous Night” at your school. Each coach provides a problem and runs a station. Assistant coaches bring the teams around to each station
- Help the Regional Board find sites for trainings
- Send information about teams to your local newspapers
- Start an Odyssey Resource Library for your school. Buy a few books at Coaches’ Training and/or order a video from New Jersey, and add to the collection yearly
- Try your hand at writing a few spontaneous problems for the teams at your school to practice
- Plan a “Coaches’ Recovery Party” and/or an Awards Ceremony for just your school
- Arrange for teams to rehearse at the school and perhaps give a performance to the other students

PROCEDURES SPECIFIC TO INDIVIDUAL SCHOOLS

- What funding is available and who provides it
- How teams are formed
- What flyers you want to send home
- How to best disseminate information
- How and when to put articles in the school newspaper
- Whether to have an in-school or PTA performance
- How to recognize team members after the competition

HOW TO DEAL WITH TOURNAMENT REGISTRATION!

(or, How to Make Sure Your Teams are Legal!)

1. Receive Tournament Registration information in mail in November.
2. Photocopy a copy of everything for each coach and yourself.
3. Give copy of registration to coach. Give each coach a deadline for returning the forms to you or deadline for mailing separately. Allow yourself time to receive them, check them, and mail them in.
4. Determine how meet fees will be paid. If the school is paying for all teams, make sure you start the process immediately so that you will have the check before the winter break.
5. Make sure each team has the name, address and phone number of a judge. Make sure teams are providing a volunteer, if required.
6. Mail all the completed forms with check or checks to your Regional Director at address on the form.

\$ \$ \$ \$ COSTS OF Odyssey of the Mind \$ \$ \$ \$

WHAT DOES ODYSSEY OF THE MIND COST?

- Membership from Creative Competitions \$135 (subject to change annually)
- Tournament fee, per team \$75 for early bird, \$100 for regular registration (subject to change annually)
- Coaches’ training in the Western Region is \$10.
- Materials and supplies, per team \$145 or less (average per team; may be more or may be less)
- {Cost for a 1st place team that advances: \$250-\$7,000
- (No charge for the NCOM State Finals; World Finals up to \$1,000 per team member)}

WHO PAYS?

- In most schools, the principal or the PTA funds the membership fee to the national organization and the PTA may fund the cost of the regional tournament fees. The individual team members and parents are usually responsible for the remaining costs. Most team members can, therefore, participate for approximately \$30-\$35 per child, even when you add in the occasional pizza!

HOW ARE LOCAL FUNDS (TOURNAMENT FEES) SPENT?

Your local fees may pay for (among other things):

- Building use fees and custodial fees at judges' and coaches' trainings, coordinators meetings, etc.
- Postage for mailings (newsletters, registrations)
- Printing (coaches' manuals, newsletters, judges' handbooks)
- Officials' T-shirts and meals for officials
- Renting walkie-talkies for the meet; building balsa testers, etc.
- Spontaneous supplies for the tournament

RESOURCES FOR YOUR TEAMS

Balsa Suppliers:

- SIG Manufacturing: 1-800-524-7805
- Balsa USA: 1-800-225-7287
- Superior Aircraft Materials: 1-310-865-3220

Books:

- Your school library, your local library, Border's Books, Amazon.com, ZANCA (1-800-397-4156) and Creative Competitions, Inc. (1-856-456-7776)

Games:

- Toys-R-Us, The Gamekeeper, Zainy Brainy, ZANCA (see above)

Internet sites:

- <http://ncom.org> (State site)
- <http://western.ncom.org> (Regional site)
- <http://odysseyofthemind.org> (Creative Competitions, Inc./Odyssey of the Mind)

Raw Materials:

- Home Depot, local hardware stores, MJ Designs, Michael's, Pearle Art Center, local hobby stores, mail-order suppliers, Zainy Brainy, Jo-Ann Fabrics, Total Crafts, etc.

Skills:

- Ask shop, drama, art, and home economics teachers, or parents who can teach how to act, sew, put on make-up, dance, wire batteries to a motor, etc. Just make sure that the person teaching a skill knows that he or she may NOT teach directly to the problem that the kids are trying to solve. Showing the kids how to operate equipment or several ways to put something together is OK, though. Consider a workshop on a Saturday for all the Odyssey teams at your school.

Teamwork:

- Some teambuilding activities are given to coaches at training. Difficulty with individual children might be addressed by meeting with the school counselor and the parents.

A Few Questions and Answers

Q: How can I be sure which division a team is in?

A: Ask students to put their birth dates and grade levels on the sign-up form when you first start organizing teams. That way, you will be certain what at which level they should compete!

Q: What if a team wants to have team members from more than one school?

A: This may happen, but only IF both schools have memberships and If both schools' principals agree. The schools can even be in different Odyssey regions, but ALL INVOLVED SCHOOLS MUST HAVE MEMBERSHIPS.

Q: How do we find enough judges to provide for the tournament, especially if we have a lot of teams?

A: Start at the very first Awareness Meeting. Inform parents that they must each have a role, whether coach, judges, volunteers, spontaneous problem provider, or whatever. Then, start in October to recruit judges. Talk to teachers, co-workers, team parents, or team parents' relatives (18 or more years old!) Ask someone who has coached before but is not coaching this year. Give coaches some ownership in this problem also: they must provide a judge in order for their team to register for the Regional Tournament!

Q: What if a team has 7 members, but then one or more quits?

A: If a team has discussed the long term problem AT ALL with 7 people, those 7 are carried on the registration for that team until this year's Odyssey season is over. They may not be replaced. The team may continue on, however, even with fewer than 5 members, if they wish.

Q: What if some parents are giving Outside Assistance, either with or without the coaches' knowledge, and I find out about it?

A: As in all volunteer activities, a certain amount of tact is called for. However, it does not teach the ethics that Odyssey of the Mind wishes to promote if you allow this to continue. If the coach is not aware, let him or her know and suggest a letter home to ALL the team parents stressing the importance of allowing the team to "own" their own solution. If the coach is aware, and is allowing this to happen, have a meeting of all your coaches and go over the detrimental aspects of Outside Assistance (and not just penalties, though those are important.) If it continues, discuss the situation with your Regional Director.

Q: How do we handle a student who is a discipline problem?

A: Always inform the parents of the problem first. Enlist their help. You may want to find out if the child really wants to do Odyssey or if his parent pressured him or her to join. If he/she really does want to do Odyssey, find out why he or she is having difficulty getting along. Have a meeting with the coach, parent, and child and set conditions for continuing on the team. If those conditions are not met, inform the parent, perhaps employing the "three strikes, you're out" philosophy. Odyssey always wants every child to succeed, but one student should never be allowed to submarine the efforts of the rest of the team. Remember the school counselor might also be a valuable resource.

Q: How do schools determine who can participate?

A: Each membership operates as an individual entity in making these decisions, so...it's up to you and your members. Factors which influence the decision are: number of students who want to participate, amount of funds available, support by parents and the administration, and how many coaches you can recruit. Ideally, all students who wish to participate should be given the opportunity to be on a team. However, you may have too

few coaches, students that simply cannot work in a small team environment, or such a wide variety of ages that forming teams is difficult. If you should choose to limit participation, you might: have auditions; have students do mini-projects to demonstrate interest and commitment; or even simply make this a first-come, first-served activity.

Q: What ages can I put together?

A: You may consider mixing grade levels, but be certain you know the birth dates of the students so that you can be sure in which division they must compete. You might mix 4th and 3rd graders, for example, and still have a Division I team. But if you add a 6th grader, you might end up with a Division II team, depending on his or her age on May 1. Caution is advised in mixing students two grades or more apart (e.g. 3rd with 6th.) Different ages can get along just fine, but in verbal spontaneous their exposure to information will be very different and in the Long Term problem their skill levels may be very different. It is also difficult to have an elementary child on a middle school team, as the daily environments are so different and some level of communication/shared experiences is lost. See the Program Guide for the Division criteria (mailed in the packet with long term problems).

Q: How do we find enough coaches?

A: TELL PARENTS AT THE VERY FIRST MEETING THAT THEY MUST ALL PARTICIPATE IN SOME WAY, whether as coach, judge, or volunteer. Suggest that they co-coach or be spontaneous coach. Emphasize that they will have lots of help, training, and support.

Q: Who can answer any questions I have later?

A: Your Regional Director can usually answer any questions you may have. Questions about Long Term problem interpretations, however, should be directed to New Jersey by a team via a clarification form or by e-mail. Any questions your Regional Director cannot answer, you may refer to the State Association Director by e-mailing adamsbets@hotmail.com.

IT'S TOURNAMENT DAY!!

What does a coordinator do at the Tournament??

- Enjoy the day!
- Come to the meet if you can and watch as many different problems and teams as you can find time to watch.
- Bring a lunch or plan to buy lunch and eat with a friend or a team.
- If possible, check on your school's judges and volunteers and make sure all is going smoothly.
- Enjoy the students, parents and other coordinators!
- Talk to people about their experiences. Help students or parents who are lost or confused. Listen to compliments or complaints and let the Regional or State Board know later how we're all doing.
- Enjoy your school's teams!
- Watch as many of your school's teams as possible. We try to schedule them so you can get to their performances ... this will depend upon how many teams your schools has.
- Enjoy the other schools' teams!
- If you have time, go cheer for other teams, also.
- Enjoy the awards ceremony!
- Pat yourself on the back for a job well done and enjoy the excitement of the closing ceremony. If your school has a team that places first or second, you are welcome to come to the meeting for winning teams after the awards to hear details about the State Tournament.

It is the school coordinators that make *Odyssey of the Mind* possible for all the students in your region. Without you, teams would not be organized, coaches would not be informed, the Regional Board would not be aware of teams' and coaches' needs, and creativity would not be flourishing through *Odyssey of the Mind*. You make it all happen, and have the thanks of all our team members, who believe that together we truly can make the world a better place in which to live.