



Guide to Team Financial Planning American Parliamentary Debate Association

One of the most persistent problems schools face when trying to stay active on the circuit or create a debate team is finding the financial resources to travel every weekend. There are limits to what APDA can do to mitigate these problems as a league and this guide will be of little help if some base amount of financial support isn't there. The intention of this guide, however, is to assist teams in maximizing their revenue, tracking expenses accurately, and reducing costs.

Expenses

At a bare minimum, teams need to budget for:

- **APDA dues:** In order to be a voting member of The American Parliamentary Debate Association and to attend the APDA National Championship, the by-laws stipulate teams must attend at least three tournaments and pay dues of \$100 each year. Waivers are available for teams that cannot afford to pay dues, so e-mail vpfinance@apdaweb.org if you believe that this applies to you. Most teams will want to budget for this expense, though.
- **Tournament registration fees:** Perhaps the most obvious expense associated with competition is registration. Most teams offer reg breaks to teams that are new to the circuit or otherwise demonstrate financial need if you are up front with them about your financial circumstances. If you are writing up a budget, check the forums at apdaweb.org/forum and look at tournament invitations from the previous year. This will give you a good idea of what registration costs will be for each tournament on the schedule.
- **Transportation costs:** Transportation is a costly expense that is difficult to cut back on. Some tips for teams that are trying to address high transportation costs:
 - Talk to the teams closest to you geographically and find out how they travel. They may have tips for getting to tournaments more cheaply, and you might be able to carpool to some tournaments and split the costs of a car rental.
 - See if you can negotiate a good deal with a rental car company and check if your university has negotiated any discounts. Many car rental companies will waive the under-25 fee if they recognize that you will be a regular customer.
 - Think carefully about the cheapest way to get to tournaments without inconveniencing yourself too much. For example, travel from Boston to New York is often cheaper by bus than by rental car.

Additional (and optional) budget considerations include:

- **Tournament hosting expenses:** If you are hosting an APDA tournament, you will need to be prepared for the up-front costs. Tournaments usually provide dinner on Friday night and breakfast and lunch on Saturday. You will also need to buy trophies and pay to print ballots and tournament packets.
- **Coaching:** Many teams, particularly those that are new to the league and don't have a lot of experienced debaters to teach novices, will hire a coach. If you plan to do this, be sure to account for it in your budget.

- **Non-APDA tournaments:** Many APDA teams will participate in title tournaments that are not conducted in American-style parliamentary debate. Examples include the North American Debating Championships (which is hosted in the United States and Canada in alternating years) and the World Universities Debating Championships, held around the world. These types of tournaments tend to be more expensive, so plan for them carefully.
- **Team social activities:** Though it is not necessary for teams to pay for expenses beyond tournaments, many schools find that funding parties and other get-togethers aids recruitment efforts and builds stronger friendships on their teams.

Revenue Sources

Teams should consider the following potential sources of revenue:

- **Consult your school administration:** This is the first and most obvious step for teams that are trying to secure funding. Some administrations will provide a significant amount of support as long as you can document your expenses as proof that the money is going towards debate-related activities. At a bare minimum, you can ask administrators about any university grants, potential deals between the university and car rental companies, and strategies that other campus organizations have used to raise money. It is usually the case that the university wants to be in the know about what is going on, so the more helpful and upfront you are, the better.
- **Host an APDA tournament:** This is the primary revenue source for most teams on the circuit. As the number of teams competing on APDA has increased, it has become increasingly difficult to find space on the schedule to add new tournaments. Schools that are looking to break into the league in this respect should:
 - Try to compete fairly regularly on the circuit to show commitment to the league
 - Do their homework on tournament preparation—consulting the school administration for clearance, talking to other teams about tournament planning logistics, etc.
 - Check the forums at apdaweb.org/forum regularly, since it is difficult to make it onto the schedule if you submit your tournament bid late
- **Petition student government:** When school administrations are not directly supportive, it is usually because funding to student groups is allocated by the student government. When dealing with these bodies:
 - Be prepared for the bureaucracy. Student governments are inflexible about deadlines and paperwork to the point of absurdity. Figure out the precise mechanism
 - Petition for funds as early in the term as possible while there is plenty of money to go around and not too much backlog
 - Stress the importance of debate, the campus interest, and the expensiveness of the activity. Prepare budget projections and detailed break-downs to demonstrate need
 - Follow up regularly until your request is heard. These groups often will ignore you if they think they can; the squeaky wheel gets the oil
- **Corporate sponsorship:** Local businesses are used to sponsorship requests from student groups and may be willing to help, particularly if you can acknowledge them in a public way (on your website, in a tournament packet, etc.). Financial services firms, test prep companies, and other organizations that

frequently hire (or in the case of test prep companies, sell their services to) debaters also take an interest in sponsorship opportunities that give recruiters access to large groups of debaters, and will pay better.

- **Solicit team alumni:** If your school has had a debate team for many years, consider reaching out to those alumni for donations to support the team's activities. Your university's alumni office may be able to help you find the contact information for these individuals if it maintains records of which extracurricular activities students participated in while in college.
- **Host on-campus events with an admission fee:** It is unlikely that any team will raise a significant amount of money through these events, but some teams have offset smaller costs by hosting events on campus (movie nights are one example) and charging students a small admission fee.
- **Host a high school speech and/or debate tournament:** This is not an easy task, but it is an equally good way to raise money as hosting an APDA tournament. If you are interested in hosting a high school speech or debate tournament, see if this is ok with your administration first and contact experienced coaches for advice with tabbing and logistics.

Miscellaneous Tips

- **Keep precise financial records:** Maintaining a precise budget and expense report is necessary for teams that want university support. These records will also help you plan which tournaments to send teams to and how many teams can attend; accidentally bankrupting yourself before the tournament you all really wanted to go to is a bad idea.
- **Set clear policies about team expenses.** Require receipts for reimbursements to team members and be very clear about what costs the team does and does not cover (e.g., registration fees and travel, but not team dinners after tournaments).
- **Create a team bank account, but do not have a team debit card:** Where possible, teams should maintain checking and savings accounts for obvious reasons. Many teams also have debit cards, but I advise against this. Individuals can be reimbursed by check for debate-related expenses, but having a debit card encourages people to spend significantly more and reduces accountability. Even if you believe that the current board is responsible enough to handle a debit card, it's bad policy for future team administrations.