



Guide to Team Financing and Fundraising American Parliamentary Debate Association

From year to year, many teams on APDA struggle to raise funds to support their travel, registration fees, and other costs associated with competition. First-year or newer teams in particular may struggle to overcome institutional obstacles to acquiring needed funding, such as learning to deal with university administrations or student governing bodies. This guide is meant to provide teams with a roadmap to some available fundraising options and put forward ideas about how to navigate university bodies and financing options.

First Steps

- **Learn the system:** The first thing new teams should research is how comparable or similarly situated student groups acquire their funding. This varies from school to school, as some universities provide students with funding at the administration level, others distribute funds through a student-run body, and still others require groups to fully fund themselves. Teams can learn about financing options at their schools by consulting relevant university websites, such as the Office of Student Life (or equivalent university departments) or by approaching administrators directly. An equally important step is to ask the head of an existing student group about their funding situation. Chances are they can give you a good summary of how the system works and point you in the right direction.
- **Banking and financial planning:** A crucial part of financing your team is tracking and safeguarding your money. Many schools have some infrastructure in place that gives student organizations access to banking services or a particular bank and setup that they prefer. Before you begin raising money, you should approach the Student Life or Student Services departments at your university and ask about banking options. This will help keep your money safe, give you access to financial planning tools, and allow you and your team to track your finances more efficiently. Your school may also have programs in place to streamline the receipt of donations to your team and help you plan your finances. Always consult with relevant school officials first and take advantage of the resources provided to you.

Fundraising Options

Although team financing can seem daunting, there are many options available to teams through institutional channels or through team fundraising events. Once you are familiar with the structure of student organization fundraising at your school, you can create a plan to raise the money you need to finance your travel and other team expenses. Some fundraising options you might pursue include:

- **Reaching out to your university administration:** In many cases, a substantial amount of funding can be acquired simply by speaking with university administrators and filing the necessary paperwork. If university-sponsored funding is commonplace at your school, this should be the first option you pursue as it is likely far less labor-intensive than other options. However, an important consideration when dealing with university administrators is that they will require you to keep and present financial statements. Administrators generally require that funds be used exclusively for debate-related expenses and that teams provide documentation for their expenditures. By keeping clear and consistent financial records, you can maximize your access to institutional funding.
- **Petitioning student government:** Many student governments, especially those at universities without administrator-level funding options, control a substantial amount of money for the purpose of funding student activities. You can position your team to take advantage of student government funding by filing your petition as early as possible and paying special attention to the process of petition at your school. Student governments are often bureaucratic and inflexible, so make sure you understand the exact process by which your request will be evaluated and the deadline by which you need to file your petition. In addition, be prepared to regularly follow up on your request throughout the semester or year, as student governments can easily get bogged down in other activities or simply neglect you. A great way to minimize these problems is to find a connection on student government (a member of the financial committee is usually best) and ask for special attention or updates on your request. With a lot of effort and attention, student government funding can be a great way to get your team up and running.
- **Apply for grants:** There are likely dozens of grants available to student organizations for “organized competition,” “academic pursuits,” or other activities that include APDA competition. You can likely find out about these grants by contacting your school’s Office of Student Life or equivalent department. These grants may be a simple form or may require a

comprehensive grant proposal. If a proposal is required, be sure it is written in a professional manner and clearly articulates how your team's activities achieve the purpose of the grant in question.

- **Hosting a high school speech and debate tournament.** Hosting a high school tournament is a great way to raise money due to the low overhead costs of running one and the ability to charge registration fees to a large base of competitors. However, hosting a high school tournament can be time-intensive and logistically difficult. Before deciding to host a high school tournament, please consult with your university administration and other relevant officials. In addition, you may want to reach out to local high school coaches or members of your team or university with significant high school debate experience. If you do decide to pursue this option, you can maximize your revenue by selling concessions and/or merchandise to the students throughout your tournament.
- **Coaching high school debaters:** If hosting a tournament seems daunting, a simpler way to take advantage of the high school debate community in your area is to provide coaching services to local high school students. As both college students and experienced debaters, the services of APDA members are often seen as invaluable in the high school debate community. If you are interested in coaching for a high school team, you should reach out to local high school programs and coaches. A typical arrangement might include a few hours of coaching each week at on a nearby high school campus and attending a weekend tournament every month or two.
- **Hosting 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
- **Finding corporate sponsors:** Sponsorships generally come in two varieties, team sponsors and tournament sponsors. A team sponsorship, or a direct

sponsorship in support of your individual team, is most likely to come from a local business that might benefit from its association with you. These businesses may be willing to sponsor your team in exchange for some sort of public acknowledgement (on your website, for example). You should think about which local businesses might like to be associated with an intercollegiate debate team (academic-type businesses are great options) and reach out to them directly. A tournament sponsorship, or a sponsorship in support of your tournament, is most likely to come from a business that is reaching out to debaters as potential clients or employees. While these businesses are sponsoring your tournament and not your team, this money can be used to defray overhead expenses and will ultimately serve as team funding. Ideal tournament sponsors include test prep companies seeking debaters as clients and professional firms (such as financial or consulting firms) that tend to hire debaters upon graduation. Again, once you have identified these companies you should reach out to them directly by contacting their Public Relations departments.

- **Soliciting team alumni:** While this is only a viable option for older teams, soliciting alumni for donations can be a great way to quickly raise money for your team. You can ask your school's alumni office for information on which alumni to contact if your university keeps records or consult your team archives for past members. Bluntly asking for donations is not your best tactic; instead, try sending out an alumni newsletter that mentions your financial needs and provides information about how to make a donation to your team.
- **Miscellaneous fundraising:** Beyond the options outlined above, there are many fundraisers without debate-related content that can help your team meet its funding needs. Everything from a student event with an entry fee to a car wash can be a valuable source of funding and should be treated as a viable option. If your team truly needs money, there are certainly ways to get it.

Financial Planning

- **Keep precise financial records:** For teams applying for university support, keeping accurate and up-to-date financial records is a necessity. For all teams, though, keeping financial records can ensure your money is used effectively and help ensure the long-term financial viability of your team. At a minimum, your team should maintain a precise budget and expense report, record all team expenditures, require receipts and proof of payment for reimbursement, and regularly monitor your bank account and assets.

- **Save, save, save!** While it may be tempting to assume that your funding will renew itself every year, there is no guarantee that your revenue will be constant from one year to the next. When possible, save your team money in a bank account and set aside funds for the next season. This minimizes the chance of a team bankruptcy or financial difficulty and will help ensure your team's fiscal viability in the long-term.
- **Do not have a team credit/debit card:** Many studies have documented the effect of credit and debit cards on spending: when cards are available, spending skyrockets. Even if you believe your current leadership is responsible enough to handle a credit card, avoid acquiring one because future group leadership may not be so responsible. Instead, use a checkbook and reimburse team members for debate related expenses.