

# Vermont Odyssey of the Mind Membership Coordinator Guide

(based upon the Maine Odyssey of the Mind Guide)

## School Membership Coordinator

Your mission is to help the students at your school participate in the Vermont Odyssey of the Mind program. This may involve organizing teams, finding Coaches and Judges, and passing on pertinent information to the Coaches and Teams. Have fun, and good luck.

## Why be a school membership 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.

In short, you are willing to make a difference in the lives of Odyssey of the Mind participants at your school!

## Steps to getting started: (Suggestions)

1. Talk to the Principal about the goals and the value of the Odyssey of the Mind program. Explain what might be required in terms of sending flyers home, having an Awareness Meeting one evening at the school, and perhaps soliciting teachers to be judges or volunteers at the Tournament.
2. Discuss who might finance the \$135 membership fee and whether any school funds might be available to pay tournament fees.
3. Talk to the PTA/PTO 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 (Vermont Odyssey of the Mind Board Members may be able to help you with this meeting if you wish.) Information about this meeting can be sent by flyer, school newsletter and/or announcements.
5. Recruit coaches by explaining a team cannot be formed without a coach (some schools have had success by requiring team parents to have some responsibility, such as coach, assistant, spontaneous coach, etc.)
6. Have students sign-up indicating their interests, grade, date of birth and telephone number (ideally, all interested students should have the opportunity to participate.) Group students according to their Long-Term Problem interest and division. Assign the teams and help them arrange an initial meeting with their Coach or Coaches.

7. Sign up Coaches for Coaches Training in the fall (you are welcome to attend as well). Be sure Vermont Odyssey of the Mind has you on its mailing list.
8. Provide initial support to coaches by giving them information, copies of the Program Guide and Long-Term Problems. Information about training will come from the state; the Program Guide and Long-Term Problems are sent in a packet from Creative Competitions to the address on the membership application when you join.
9. Keep all coaches and teams within your school up to date with the latest information from your region or state association.
10. Be sure Coaches register their teams for the State Tournament by the registration deadline (Jan 17<sup>th</sup>).

## What else can I do?

Not in the basic job description, but you could:

- 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.
- 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.

## Registration

1. Register your school with Creative Competitions, Inc. The cost of \$135 allows your school to have one team for each Long-Term Problem in each division housed within your school.
2. Once you receive the membership packet, photocopy the Program Guide and current problems for each coach and yourself.
3. Information for Team Tournament Registration is available at the <http://vt.odysseyofthemind.org>. See the Tournament Registration link.
4. Determine how tournament 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.

# Costs of Odyssey of the Mind

## What does Odyssey cost?

Membership from Creative Competitions - \$135

Tournament fee - \$40 per team, \$80 per team for late registration (after January 17).

Coaches' training - no cost, see [Calendar](#) for schedule and location.

Materials and supplies – approximately \$125 per team or less, recycled materials may be used.

Cost for a team that advances to World Finals - up to approximately \$8,000 depending on the location of World Finals.

## Who Pays?

The school, the PTA, or fundraisers usually pay the membership fee to the national organization and the Tournament fees. The individual team members and parents are usually responsible for the remaining costs of team supplies. 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):

Any building use fees and custodial fees at judges' & coaches' trainings, coordinators meetings

Postage for mailings (newsletters, registrations)

Printing (coaches' manuals, newsletters, judges' handbooks, tournament forms, etc.)

Meals for tournament officials

Radio contact for tournament; building balsa testers, etc.

Spontaneous supplies for the tournament

Trophies and medals

Tournament entertainment

## **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, and Creative Competitions, Inc.

Games:

Toys-R-Us, The Gamekeeper

Internet sites:

[vt.odysseyofthemind.org](http://vt.odysseyofthemind.org)

<http://www.odysseyofthemind.com> (Creative Competitions)

[www.odyssey-world.org](http://www.odyssey-world.org)

Raw Materials:

Home Depot, local hardware stores, Michael's, local hobby stores, mail-order suppliers, Jo-Ann Fabrics, recycling centers, 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.

## Questions and Answers

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

A: Ask students to put their birth date and grade on the sign-up form when you first start organizing teams. That way, you will be certain 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. 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 each have a role, whether coach, judge, volunteer, spontaneous problem provider, or whatever. Then, start early to recruit judges. Talk to teachers, co-workers, team parents, or team parents' relatives (must be 18 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 Tournament!

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

A: If a team has discussed solving the Long-Term Problem AT ALL among the seven people, those seven 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. If, however, the team has not begun to discuss the long-term problem, the member may be replaced.

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 they send 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 State Directors.

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. Maybe the parent could attend the meetings. 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 3rd and 4th graders, for example, and still have a Division I team. The Division is determined by the age and grade of the oldest team member.

Q: How do we find enough coaches???

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

Q: Who can answer any questions I have later?

A: Your State or Tournament Directors 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 (see Program Guide).

## It's Tournament Day!

What does a coordinator do at the Tournament?

Come to the tournament 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.

Watch as many of your school's teams as possible. We try to schedule them so you can get to their performances ... this of course will depend upon how many teams your schools has.

If you have time, go cheer for other teams also.

Attend 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, you are welcome to come to the meeting for winning teams after the awards to hear details about the next level of competition. The school coordinators make the Odyssey of the Mind possible for students. Without you, teams would not be organized, coaches would not be informed, the State Board would not be aware of teams' and coaches' needs, and creativity would not be flourishing through the Odyssey of the Mind. You make it all happen, and have the thanks of all our team members.