



# Team Recruitment Strategies: BUILDING YOUR PROGRAM

*While speech and debate activities provide an enormous potential benefit for every student who participates, many students do not realize it! For this reason, recruitment is necessary to build a successful program. Every school is different, so consider the culture of the school and decide how many students your team can accommodate (aim high!). Make that number your goal.*

## RECRUITMENT IDEAS

### *Create a Team Website*

If your school has a website, talk with the webmaster about creating a space for your team. The team site can include a membership roster, your mission, a tournament calendar, team/school forms, news/press releases on the success of the team, and most importantly, your contact information. This website will also be a great asset to keep all faculty and administrators abreast of the happenings of your team.

### *Social Media*

Another great opportunity to communicate with stakeholders is through social media. As always, check with your school for information on specific policies and procedures for using social media. A team Twitter, Facebook, or Instagram could be a great way to communicate important dates, provide live results, and engage your community in a platform they are more comfortable with these days.

### *Get Into Classrooms*

Work out your schedule so you or select students can enter every single English classroom for a 3-minute recruitment speech about speech and debate. This speech is designed to make the students interested in either you or the concept of speech and debate. You might do this over the course of a Tuesday and Wednesday so you can have an informational meeting for new members on Thursday after school. It is important that this occurs during the first week. In the spring, you or your students can visit feeder schools to pitch your program for participation in the fall.

### *Hang Recruitment Posters*

Spread the word around school with testimonial-style posters for *Hispanic Heritage Month*, *Black History Month*, and *Pride Month* or create posters featuring members of your team with our *free template*. Larger scale versions are available for purchase as a set through the *NSDA Store*.

### *Write a Letter*

Since effective oral and written verbal skills are necessary components in speech and debate competition, one idea for recruitment is to send a letter to all of your English classes. This is a way to recruit students who are already making good grades and have sufficient writing skills that are imperative in speech and debate competition. Also, many established teams send out letters the year prior for the upcoming season. In general, teachers in the humanities are great allies for your program. See Figure 1 a sample letter that could be formatted to use at your school.

— *Figure 1: Sample Recruitment Letter*

### *Recruitment Assistance from Teachers*

During the first few “teacher only” days, and at the beginning or end of each semester, email all of the English teachers and ask them for a list of students they feel ought to consider speech and debate. Describe for them the type of student you’re looking for. Encourage them to mention speech and debate to their students, as well—and don’t forget to go back to those teachers and tell them, “We owe a lot to you!” If teachers feel they were somehow responsible for the future success of a student who came into the program because of their encouragement, they will be yours for life.



### Recruitment from Kids

Great kids attract great kids. While peer pressure can be the major downfall for some students, it can also be their savior. Sit down with current kids at the beginning and end of each school year and have them list at least three students whom they feel would make wonderful additions to your program. Before they make their list, remind them of the type of student you are looking for and discuss potential problems with recruiting friends who will not be dedicated to the program. Make sure the students give you the correct spelling of the name, grade level, and area (speech or debate) in which they feel this person would excel.

### Public Showcase

A great way to recruit other students to join your team is by having them watch live presentations of speeches, debates, or performances. Showcasing your team is a great way to gain financial support from administrators—and it offers a chance for the community to see your team in action! Public performances can also be during the day for the student body of your school. When students see other students having fun, they are more inclined to join themselves. Additionally, your students can earn **service points** by participating in a showcase. If a public showcase isn't an option, consider sharing one of our recruitment videos or final round performances!

- **Will It Be You?**
- **Take Your Story to the Stage**
- **Find Your Voice: Join Debate!**
- **Josh Gad on Speech and Debate**
- **Informative Speaking Performance**
- **Original Oratory Performance**
- **Humorous Interpretation Performance**
- **Lincoln-Douglas Performance**
- **United States Extemp Performance**

### Other Ways to Spread the Word

- Publicize upcoming team meetings in school announcements
- Host tournaments. The activity surrounding a tournament will always arouse some interest. When students start asking, “What’s going on?” you have exposed them to some extent.

- Have your students dress up during the day prior to leaving for a major tournament or hosting a major tournament. Other students will inquire as to the reason for dressing up, which means that again you have informed and exposed them to the activity.
- Hang locker signs for good luck at tournaments. You don’t have cheerleaders, but you’ll be able to create community support within the school by advertising in this way.

### Share Tournament Results

After a tournament, publicize tournament results from your team. This is a great way to get your team’s success in the public eye. Find out what procedures exist to submit morning or end of the school day announcements. Submit announcements that highlight team and individual student success. Kids love hearing their name, and they get a kick out of the positive attention they may gain from their peers and teachers. Often, at the beginning, a team doesn’t have many trophies to report. Don’t let this deter you from writing a compelling press release. You could write “Jayna Beal received a perfect score at the McLeod HS Invitational on Saturday for her performance in Dramatic Interp.” Then, when a student wins their first tournament, treat it like the Academy Awards. Send your typed results everywhere you can, and send them every time you compete:

- to the public relations/communications director for your school/district
- to the faculty and staff at your school, including your website staff
- to your Board members, Superintendent, or Head of School
- to the person who makes the daily announcements at your school and to your local paper.

### Figure 2: Sample Press Release

### Constant Recruiting

Once the school year begins, it is easy to resign yourself to the fact that you now have your team and this is the team you will have to live with the rest of the season. This is just not true. Some champion students join teams late. Keep your eye out for students who may have “slipped through the cracks” earlier.

### End of the Year Barbeque

Bring your grill from home and set it up on the school grounds (get permission first, of course). Announce on the PA that you will be hosting a cookout for new recruits. Create a list of prospective students from teachers and current members and send them special invites to the cookout. At the BBQ, tell a little bit about the program and what they need to do in the fall or spring if they are interested. Then, showcase the team!



**DO YOU HAVE RECRUITMENT IDEAS?**  
**We’d love to hear them!** Email Annie Reisener at [annie.reisener@speechanddebate.org](mailto:annie.reisener@speechanddebate.org).

## APPENDIX: FIGURE 1: SAMPLE RECRUITMENT LETTER

Dear (Student Name):

Congratulations on receiving this letter! You have been nominated by one or more of your teachers for the 20XX-20XX Anytown High School Speech and Debate Team. I hope that you consider this outstanding academic opportunity.

On the AHS Speech and Debate Team, our success is a direct result of our character, integrity, and hard work. Our students have achieved rare honors and top accolades for their achievement. You too can be one of our next success stories. Consider students like Devin Smith—a 9th grader at AHS who won the Washburn Rural High School Novice Tournament. Or, think about LaTosha Seals, who went undefeated in three tournaments this year. You might know Matt Lang or Anish Patel—they earned top honors at our National Speech & Debate Association District Debate Tournament. These and so many other 9th and 10th grade students began their debate career last year and soon became some of the best competitors in the state. You can, too!

The medals, the trophies, the overnight hotel trips, the team socials—they are just part of the reason our students work hard and have fun. Our program is centered on producing the best and brightest students in the state. Imagine your potential as a graduate of Anytown High School with a background in speech and debate. You think faster, you argue better, and you speak more clearly and with a sense of purpose and style. This is what your teachers see in you, and it's what I want to see from you, too.

Speech and debate is even more fun and enjoyable when we put in the necessary work to continually improve—both individually and as a team. Much like a competitive sport, the AHS Speech and Debate Team has a number of contests that you will be eligible to attend. The sooner you start, the better! Together we can help you build lifelong skills that will propel you to greater success in high school and beyond.

If you are interested—and I hope you are—I want you to talk with your parents. When your family has decided to become a part of our family, please visit with your AHS counselor and asked to be enrolled in the speech or debate classes. I hope to see you in class this August!

During the first week of August, we will be hosting a pre-season workshop at school. This is a great opportunity for you to enhance your speech and debate skills, or get introduced to speech and debate for the first time, without the stresses of schoolwork. It's optional, but will be critical for those speech and debate students who want to be among the very best in the state!

Best Wishes,

(I. M. Coach) or (I. M. Captain and A. Co-Captain)

APPENDIX: FIGURE 2: SAMPLE PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### Specific and Concise Title Describing the Accomplishment

ANYTOWN, Wis. (Today's Date) – Anytown High School placed third of 20 schools at the Metropolis Invitational on Saturday, November 20. The team won seven awards at the meet. Senior Meredith Abernath led the team with first place in Poetry and sixth in Storytelling. Merryville West High took first at the tournament, followed by Ashton Falls, Anytown, Eldorado, Mayberry, and Valley Forge rounding out the top six schools.

Anytown will next compete at the Crest City Holiday Classic Invitational on December 4. Full team results are listed below.

Jane Eyre: 2nd, Prose; Agnes Corum: 6th, Dramatic Interpretation and 2nd, Improv Duo; K. C. Outfielder: 1st, Poetry and 6th, Storytelling; Ebenezer Scrooge: 3rd, Prose; Walt Whitman: 2nd, Improv Duo.

Anytown High School's speech and debate program is coached by Mitch Jacob, a two-diamond National Speech & Debate Association coach and treasurer of the Anystate League.

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#### CONTACT

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