

NSDA Announces One-Year Pilot for Alternative Qualification Methods

Please note: This pilot is for the August 2025 to June 2026 season and will not affect the 2025 National Tournament qualification process.

The National Speech & Debate Association (NSDA) is excited to announce a one-year pilot program for the 2025-2026 season, allowing up to 25% of districts to test alternative methods for qualifying students to the National Tournament. This initiative aims to address the evolving needs of our membership by exploring options beyond the traditional one-size-fits-all approach. Our goal is to empower District Committees to design qualification systems that better serve their schools and students while maintaining a rigorous review process to ensure the National Tournament continues to feature high-quality competition.

To be considered for this pilot, district chairs must submit a detailed application outlining their proposed alternative qualification system. These applications will go through a review process by the national office, with selections capped at 25% of districts. In 2026, we will assess the pilot's effectiveness to decide whether to extend, expand, or discontinue it, working closely with the participating districts throughout the evaluation.

Application Process and Timeline

The application window opens **August 1, 2025**, with a submission deadline of **September 15, 2025**. Approved districts will be notified by **October 1, 2025**, which is also when the district dates form for all districts will become available. Before submitting an application, district chairs must secure two-thirds approval from their District Committee and active schools and gather written feedback from local coaches. This feedback must be included in the application to ensure that the proposed qualification method reflects the needs and preferences of the district's coaches and schools. A minimum of two-thirds of committee members and two-thirds of active member schools must approve of the proposed alternative qualification method before an application can be submitted.

Applications will ask districts to provide a detailed description of their alternative qualification method, including eligibility standards, fees, and how alternates will be selected. We will also ask districts to explain why current NSDA qualification rules do not adequately serve their schools and students, as well as how the proposed alternative would improve the process. Additionally, districts must address potential challenges or drawbacks of their proposed method and outline strategies to overcome them, while also considering the impact on diversity and inclusion for schools and students who qualify for Nationals.

Frequently Asked Questions

What types of alternative qualification methods can districts propose?

Districts can propose any method that has local support and serves their schools' needs, such

as using state tournament results, implementing an application-based process, or running a tournament with modified pairing priorities.

Are there software requirements for running a pilot tournament?

No specific software is required. Districts may use any tournament software but will be limited to standard support options.

Will Tabroom.com licenses be provided for free?

Yes, approved districts will receive grants for Tabroom.com licenses, but NSDA Campus will not be available for free.

How will qualifiers be submitted to the NSDA?

Approved districts must manually submit qualifiers using a specified spreadsheet template, following verification of eligibility and confirmation of attendance.

By making this announcement before the 2025-2027 district leadership election, we aim to ensure that district leaders elected will have a clear mandate regarding participation in the pilot program. We are excited to explore new ways to make the National Tournament qualification process more flexible and responsive to the needs of our membership.