

COACH TASKS & EXPECTATIONS

A GUIDE TO THE SCIENCE OLYMPIAD PROGRAM

Welcome to Science Olympiad! Whether or not you have decided to coach a Science Olympiad team or are still at the “just considering it” phase we are glad you have gotten to this point. With support from teachers and volunteers like yourself we have brought STEM challenges to over 300,000 students a year. We hope that this document will help answer any lingering questions about Science Olympiad you may have.

How does Science Olympiad work?

At the very basic level, Science Olympiad is a science tournament with multiple competitive events. Think of it like a track and field competition, but instead of long jump and hurdles, students compete with a partner in STEM knowledge events, building events, and lab events. The 23 competition events change each year, and the parameters of those events are outlined in the Rules Manuals for Division B (middle school) and Division C (high school). Invitational tournaments allow students to test their abilities against their peers for practice. Regional tournaments are organized by regional directors and take place at local colleges and universities. Teams that qualify can compete in the annual state tournament, and the team or teams that score best in the state tournament are invited to compete in a national tournament. The job of the team coach is to interpret the event parameters of Rules Manual (ex. health topics that can be tested in a competition) and help students prepare for competition.

What type of time commitment is required of a Science Olympiad coach?

The amount of time that a coach puts into his or her team varies depending upon your availability, the makeup of your team, and the goals that you set. That said, the Science Olympiad season runs from August through May. During that time, we find that a “typical” Science Olympiad team will meet from 90 minutes to two hours at least twice a week. Outside of the time together with the team a coach can expect to spend an additional one or two hours a week preparing for practices or handling team related paperwork (e.g.; field trip approvals, arranging transportation, tournament registration). The average amount of time a coach is likely to spend on Science Olympiad is between 160 and 200 hours for a season.

What am I really expected to do as a Science Olympiad coach?

The role of a Science Olympiad coach is really no different than the role a coach for a sports team. Your job is largely about preparing your team to compete in Science Olympiad tournaments but it also includes the responsibilities of recruiting the team and handling all the logistics associated with having a team (e.g.; permission slips, student travel, budget, supplies). Just like sports teams there are many approaches to handling and ensuring that these tasks get completed. Not everything has to be done by the coach, but the coach ensures they get done.

How many team members do I need to have for a Science Olympiad team?

Your Science Olympiad team can be as big or as small as you want, but only 15 members of your team can compete in the 23 events at a tournament. These 15 team competitors can change from tournament to tournament, but no more than 15 can compete at a single tournament. Schools with very high interest in Science Olympiad, approximately 30 to 40 team members, will often create a second team or build their budget to compete in several different Invitationals so that everyone on team gets a tournament experience. It is also possible to compete with fewer than 15 team members. Teams as small as 8 students have had success at Science Olympiad tournaments.



What does a Science Olympiad practice look like?

Just like a sports team, every Science Olympiad team approaches practice, but there are some common activities. Every Science Olympiad practice will involve members of the team either researching and learning new content for their events or evaluating and testing their knowledge for those events. In some cases, this evaluating and testing will occur through paper and pencil tests. In others, it may be through a series of hands-on or online activities. The other common trait that all Science Olympiad practices will have is that some members of the team will be working on designing, building, or fine-tuning whatever devices, structures, or vehicles are part of the competition in that given season. The role that the coach plays in making those types of activities can vary greatly. Many teams will be very constructivist about their practices and the coach is there to guide the practice along. Other teams operate in a more coach centered fashion. It is entirely up to you as the coach.

How much does Science Olympiad cost?

With almost 8,000 teams across all 50 states and the District of Columbia there is a lot of variability in Science Olympiad team budgets. There are essentially only three things that a Science Olympiad team has to spend money on: State Registration, Building Materials, and Tournament Transportation. The other costs that are typically associated with a Science Olympiad team, like team t-shirts, practice resources, snacks at practice, etc., are optional. If you exclude a coaching stipend, and make allowances for location, an estimated Science Olympiad team's budget could look like:

Fixed Costs

- State Registration: \$250
- Tournament Transportation: \$500 (one Saturday School Bus Rental)
- Building Materials: \$500

Optional Costs

- Team T-Shirts: \$200 (\$10/shirt x 20 team members)
- Practice Snacks: \$260 (\$10/week x 26 weeks)
- Tournament Food: \$200 (\$10/team member x 20 members)
- Resources: \$150 (Books, Test Materials, Coaches Workshops)
- Invitational Tournament Registration: \$120
- Invitational Transportation: \$500 (one Saturday School Bus Rental)
- Invitational Food: \$200 (\$10/team member x 20 members)

If you have additional questions check out the brochures & additional resources at soinc.org or fill out the Contact Sheet at soinc.org/info/contact-science-olympiad.