

On Being Area Director

The role of Area Director is often seen as the first step on the District leadership ladder. Each Area Director has the responsibility for 4 – 6 clubs. As Area Director, you are required to make a minimum of two visits to each. However, it is hoped you will visit your clubs more frequently than that, particularly to those that may have challenges. Clubs might ask you to attend a meeting to induct their officers or when they have a year-end gathering or a celebrating a special event. These would not be part of the two official visits but you make every attempt to attend these functions.

You are expected to attend the District officer training held in July, normally in Bangor. You are also expected to attend the fall and spring District conferences. You are also responsible for ensuring Area speech contests are held. You can delegate the organization of a contest to a club or an individual but it is up to you to ensure it is organized and the rules are followed. In addition to attending your Area contest, you should plan to attend the Division contest to support the representatives from your Area.

As Area Director, you should attend both Toastmasters Leadership Institutes during your term, even if you are not a club officer. You should maintain regular, preferably monthly, contact with your clubs, attend any Division Council meetings and be available for any conference calls organized by the District. You should consider holding regular Area Council meetings with your clubs.

There is reimbursement available for much of the travel done as Area Director. Full details on the expenses for which you can be reimbursed are included in the District procedures which can be found on the website.

You must be willing to commit time to being Area Director. It is work but there are many benefits to you as a member. You learn more about the program as a whole and you learn more about your style of leadership. Current Area Directors were asked to comment on what was best about being an Area Director, what their main challenge was and why they would encourage others to take on the role of Area Director. A summary of their responses follows.

The Best Thing About Being Area Director

Club visits and the opportunity to work with club members were seen as the best parts of being an Area Director. Comments included:

The best thing about being an Area Director is the Club visits. My Area has an interesting variety of Club options and every one of them is motivating to attend. I was inspired in different ways after every Club visit. I can honestly say that I would be happy to join any and all Clubs in my area and am confident I would be a better Toastmaster for it.

The best thing without a doubt, visiting other Clubs and learning from what they are doing so fantastically well to encourage their members to continue with their Toastmaster's passion to learn.

Each club has its own unique personality and energy. As Area Director, it's fun to be a welcomed guest that gets to participate and share their experience. It really broadens your perspective of Toastmasters as a whole. From Club to District, you really start to "get" that deep connection and emotion. It's very inspiring.

The opportunity to meet the officers and members in the Area clubs, therefore, stepping out from the regular club meetings that were and are so familiar.

Being an Area Director is a truly rewarding experience. Not only because we are given the opportunity to engage with our fellow Toastmasters in our Areas, but because we have the opportunity to extend our

experience and leverage our growth and learning in concert with other Area Directors, other leaders and the members within our District and beyond.

The best part about being an Area Director from my perspective is the dedicated people. Toastmasters in my area are striving to be the best they can be—for themselves and for their clubs. There is a strong sense of community and outreach to help each other grow and thrive through our Toastmasters club experience, as well as a high level of commitment to the greater community beyond the club. I have been extremely fortunate to have the support of each club and other Area Directors as I've moved through my journey this year at both the Director and personal level.

Perspective of how other Toastmasters meetings are run. Seeing that club challenges are not specific to home club - we are not alone and sharing ideas that work between clubs

As Area Director, I have a chance to brainstorm new ways to get the word out about our clubs and build memberships. We want to get out to people instead of waiting for them to come to us! We want to get out to people instead of waiting for them to come to us! Here in the NH seacoast, we are leveraging local media—radio and TV, as well as social media and we are making efforts to line up one or two demo meetings in the area.

Challenges

The main challenges noted were learning and meeting the individual needs of clubs and finding ways to help grow membership. Area Directors noted:

Ensuring that I took the time to learn what each Club needed from me, because they were all so different from each other and providing the support they needed to be a stronger Club. I learned a lot as Area Director and truly enjoy the role.

My biggest challenge is not being able to come up with the perfect solution to solve building our member strength for our Clubs in remote, rural areas despite their best efforts to increase membership.

I empathize deeply with the challenges that each club faces. As their Area Director, I'd like to have more ideas and make more contributions to their success. I constantly have the clubs on my mind...searching for solutions.

I find the biggest challenge has been being able to foster the success of emerging clubs as much as I would like. Seasoned Toastmaster leaders understand that it takes time and tenacity to build a club and keep it thriving year after year, and know that the process never stops...it is a constant. I am fortunate that all the clubs I serve have committed, engaging Toastmasters. However, since our area (with one exception) is mainly rural, clubs need to attract members from a larger geographic radius, it is challenging for clubs to grow a membership stream given those parameters. Club leaders work very hard to achieve membership goals year after year and are creative in this process.

Lack of interest in contests, conferences, meeting participation and low commitment level of some club officers

Our members and officers lead busy lives outside of Toastmasters and also spend a lot of time preparing for roles in order to conduct quality meetings. Despite that, I have had little trouble lining up volunteers for the media efforts so far. The biggest challenges are to get going with videotaping club meetings due to some residual member/officer resistance, difficulties with scheduling, and finding venues with built-in audiences like Rotary and Lions clubs, corporations or churches that would like to have us conduct demo meetings. Once something gets scheduled, we are off and running!

Understanding the Area Director Report. Especially two points. How can the District help the club after each question. And the second, going back to the club and asking who will complete educational goals and by what date. An introduction at the beginning of the questionnaire for each category would have been helpful.

Why You Should Serve as Area Director

The main reason given for encouraging others to serve as Area Director was the learning that takes place. The comments from the Area Directors best summarize the benefits of committing the time and effort to serving.

The role of Area Director is very rewarding. I met a lot of talented Toastmasters, visited a lot of interesting and inspiring clubs and learned more than I could have anticipated. My goal at the beginning of this journey was to help my clubs thrive and succeed. In return, I feel the Clubs in my area inspired me to be a better Toastmaster and helped me to be a better leader. I appreciate the fact that this journey gave me more than I realized in return. I would recommend that anyone with leadership aspirations take this journey.

I encourage others to take on this role because it is a fantastic opportunity to learn from other Clubs in a fun, friendly, supportive atmosphere. More importantly, it is great to be a minor part of an organization which believes in our core values of integrity respect, service and excellence for all activities with all members - outstanding!

I feel that doing a stint as Area Director is a necessary part of the maturation process within Toastmasters. It pulls you out of your self-absorption, peels away the curtain and lets you observe the entire process. Once you've experienced that, you're changed and it's unlikely that you'll return to the single focus of only your home club. You feel larger and more expansive. Also, you tend to bring your experiences home and I feel you're able to help more knowledgeably at local club level.

The surprise of how informative the club visits can be. Meeting the club members, learning each clubs individual differences-always something to discover as the Area Director.

The Area Director opportunity is a fun, and rewarding experience which provides an opportunity to learn, grow and develop as a Toastmaster, coach, and advocate for building a thriving region at the area, club, and individual level. I am growing through this experience.

I have gleaned much from seasoned, learned officers and members of the clubs I serve, and am energized by new members and leaders by their creative/innovative approaches to building Toastmasters going forward. I am humbled by this experience, and truly proud of the clubs in my area. I am grateful for all the help from members, officers, and seasoned Area Directors, DTM's etc. that have supported my path. I am grateful for having the opportunity to engage with other Areas and Regions has also added to my experience.

I highly recommend the Area Directory opportunity to any Toastmaster that wishes to grow their experience as a leader in support of our clubs, region and at the great TI level.

Broaden awareness of how other clubs operate, test ability to motivate/lead others, build confidence in leadership style, challenge of motivating different types of personalities, promote interaction between unfamiliar clubs, and greater involvement in TLI

Serving as AD provides a whole different perspective on Toastmasters and what it can do for its members, as well as an inside view of clubs in the area and how they can best work together for success. Cross-club friendships and partnerships are helpful and long-lasting. They bring us a step closer to truly grasping that Toastmasters is a world-wide organization that offers almost unlimited potential for personal and collective growth. By taking on the role of AD and focusing wider than the home club, members can spread their leadership wings. The Toastmasters educational journey is not one that we fly alone!