

On Being a Division Director

The role of Division Director is often the next step in leadership after serving as Area Director. To serve as Division Director, you must have served at least six consecutive months as a member of a District council. This means you must have served as either Club President or VPE. While it is preferable for you to have served as an Area Director, it is not mandatory.

As Division Director, you provide motivation, guidance and supervision to Area Directors to help them fulfill their roles and responsibilities. This includes contacting Area Directors at least monthly to discuss progress in the Distinguished Area Program, club visits and the Distinguished Club Program. Each Division Director has between 3 and 5 Areas (most have 3).

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 Division 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 Division contest, you may want to attend the Area contests in your Division.

As Division Director, it is your responsibility to organize, *on behalf of the District*, both Toastmasters Leadership Institutes during your term (winter and spring). You should maintain regular, monthly contact with your Area Directors and be available for any conference calls organized by the District. You should hold regular Division Council meetings with your Area Directors.

There is reimbursement available for much of the travel done as Division 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 Division 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 Division Directors were asked to comment on what they liked best about being an Area Director, what their main challenge was and why they would encourage others to take on the role of Division Director. The response written by Jonathan Bohm summarizes being a Division Director well. It is included in its entirety. The comments in text boxes are from other Division Directors.

(from Jonathan Bohm, Division B Director)

Last fall at an Area Contest, the Contest Chair asked me “what do you get from being Division Director?” I had an immediate answer, assuring the questioner that I enjoyed the service, the social aspects of meeting fellow Toastmasters and the luxury of hearing so many fine speakers. I also mentioned that it was a tremendous pleasure to work with my five gung ho, superstar Area Directors. But over the months I felt there must be a larger magnet that kept me stuck to what was sometimes a difficult role.

One day just after New Year’s, it came to me: I like being Division Director because it really stretches me.

Being Division Director this year gave me the ability to really understand the structure and the roles in the District. I also learned that even though there are common challenges within a Division, there are very different challenges between the areas and even then between urban and rural clubs.

If you think about, isn't Toastmasters all about stretching ourselves? From that first wobbly kneed time you stood up to take on a Table Topics question, it's the thrill of pushing ourselves a little further that propels us.

The greatest challenge is to try to meet the expectations of these different clubs and make sure they get what they need through their Area director and me as the Division director.

Every role, every speech, every office has stretched me. But it was as Division Director that the elastic band really pulled taut with unimagined challenges. When you run hard, when you spend that extra fifteen minutes on the treadmill, the delicious momentary ache shifts to an even more exhilarating endorphin rush. That frisson of going way beyond my realm has been an unexpected but very enlightening gift.

Training Club Officers at regular and make-up TLIs builds more teams, develops more impromptu speaking skills and causes a lot of laughter while learning. Competing in contests brings out the best Speakers in our clubs and our Division finalists are placing in District competitions.

I'd run for the role because I'd liked being an Area Director. Indeed, the role of Division Director increased the opportunities to meet more eager Toastmasters, to gain a broader perspective on the various ways individuals and clubs can mold the basics of Toastmasters to meet their own needs. It gave me new opportunities to speak beyond the familiar friendly faces of my own club. And frankly, I like Toastmasters so much that I gobble up any chance to expand our visibility and bring the program to new people.

I've learned that delegating leadership empowers members to become leaders. . Having a mentor has given me more confidence to lead. Teaming up with the other Area Directors is a sincere pleasure; we are working so well together.

The biggest challenge is achieving membership growth in clubs due to TIME factors in people's lives today. I am hopeful when the new Toastmasters Pathways becomes available, it will help us adapt to our changing world. The benefits will include a learning experience tailored to members' professional and personal goals and the development of communication and leadership goals that are transferable.

Yet serving as Division Director brought far greater gains. As I met more members, as I noticed the innovative and creative ways individuals make Toastmasters their own, I also saw the tremendous diversity of thinking that exists even among like-minded people. Observing this broader sample of the membership stretched my awareness of the power of words. How important to be careful with just the right words, the right tone of voice. And to get there, I had to grow bigger, broader ears to listen more deeply to nurture my understanding. By stretching to listen harder, I gained immeasurable respect for others' opinions, opening my own mind to greater possibilities.

Just as I find myself always invigorated by the motivational presentations and the keynote speakers at our semiannual conferences, the day-to-day interactions as Division Director stretched my enthusiasm to help and serve my fellow Toastmasters. Anyone who takes on this opportunity will stretch and surge to undreamt realms, proving the sage words of Ralph Waldo Emerson: "It is one of the most beautiful compensations of this life that no man can sincerely try to help another without helping himself."

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I would encourage others to get an understanding of the toastmasters structure and anyone who would like to step outside their comfort zone for a leadership role to run for Division Director.