January 2015

Budget Considerations

Larry Schnoor

Minnesota State University, Mankato

Follow this and additional works at: http://cornerstone.lib.mnsu.edu/speaker-gavel

Part of the Speech and Rhetorical Studies Commons

Recommended Citation


This Article is brought to you for free and open access by Cornerstone: A Collection of Scholarly and Creative Works for Minnesota State University, Mankato. It has been accepted for inclusion in Speaker & Gavel by an authorized administrator of Cornerstone: A Collection of Scholarly and Creative Works for Minnesota State University, Mankato.
Budget Considerations

Larry Schnoor

Introduction

There are many responsibilities and duties for the director of forensics. One such responsibility that every coach will have to give very careful consideration and attention is the budget necessary for a sound forensic program. Yes, the question of funds is very important when one considers beginning and maintaining a sound forensic program in any college or university. We only have to look at how the events of the past few years have provided us with the evidence that our administrators are under the gun to tighten financial expenditures and in doing so, have begun to look closely at departments and programs they may feel are of less value or have failed to defend their existence for whatever reasons.

The day may have existed when forensic activities were a traditional part of the education system and were accepted without question. However, that day no longer exists. In the past, one of the most common methods of assessment for a program and most certainly an individual events program, was the number of students participating in the activity. Many schools grant funds based on the number of students involved. Naturally, the size of the budget also affects just how many students may be involved, especially when it comes to tournament travel.

It is not uncommon for an administration to look at the expenses of a program and compare that to the number of individuals involved. Each forensic program should be able to justify the amount of money spent per person in the program as the “per participant” cost could be a factor in continuing our programs.

Many changes have occurred in forensic programs and activities during the past 20 years. These changes have been in the types of events, growing from programs that just participated in debate, to those that covered both debate and individual events, and finally to those programs that deal only with individual events. The growth in the number of national tournaments sponsored by various organizations has also had a great impact upon the forensic community.

These changes all have affected that important element – the forensic budget.

Recent economic woes have placed heavy burdens on all facets of higher education. When administrators are forced to make cuts, the areas most affected are those determined as being “less crucial” to a department’s or university’s survival.

Factors for Budget Consideration

Program Objectives

Every forensic program should develop a philosophy that will be made clear by the objective of the program. These objectives will have a direct relationship with any budget considerations for the program. Elements that should be considered should include the following:
1. Size of the program: Is the goal to have a small group of students or to have a large number of students?
2. Selection of program participants: Will the program be open to all students that are interested or will it be limited to those that pass an audition?
3. Location of the program: Will the program be an independent student organization or will it be housed in an academic department?
4. Educational objectives: What learning objectives will be developed for the program? Will academic credit be possible for participation in the program?

It is important for all of the above to be addressed and fully developed before it is possible to determine elements necessary in formulating a budget request for the program from sources at the university/college that could supply the funding needed for a program. Administrations are not in the position to grant funding to any unit without an understanding of what is expected to be achieved by the program.

In many colleges and universities, the forensic program is an established part of the school’s communication program, while in others, it is totally removed and may be a student run program. In both cases, however, there is a common link. In departments, the program grows out of a departmental curriculum program, parallels it and contributes significantly to the objectives which are identical and similar to those of the department itself. In programs and activities that are sponsored and promoted by non-departmental groups and organizations, the objectives may not be compatible with the objectives and desired outcomes of a department. In either case, the complaints directed toward forensics that may affect budget funding, are related to weaknesses of the program. Weaknesses that have been stated include the following:

1. Adoption of a forensic program without any real understanding by a department, director, and students of the function the program should perform.
2. Limiting the program to only a few so-called “star” students.
3. Emphasis on the competitive aspects of forensics.
4. Emphasis on “nationals” without sight of other objectives.
5. Failure to keep objectives of the program in line with educational objectives of the institution.
6. Over emphasis on the win-loss and rankings.

**Procedures Affecting Funding**

In a study of forensic budgets conducted in 1985, the results showed that there was no uniform method by which colleges and universities fund forensic programs. (Fiscal Affairs in AFA Land., 1985, The Forensic of Pi Kappa Delta, Larry Schnoor). This is still the case. Some institutions make provisions for a forensic budget as part of a line item in a department. Others allocate funds from a student activity account.

In those cases where funding comes from a departmental allocation, there needs to be a clear understanding of the total needs of a department. If it is a small
department, there may not be any funds available or the amount would be very small. Also, a link between the program and the department’s objectives would need to be clear. Exactly what will be covered by funds available to the forensic program will need to be determined.

In other cases, the forensic program, while being coached by a faculty member in a communication department (or in some other department, or in those cases where it is a student run program, funds may have to be requested from a student activities account, usually administered by a student activities board. In these cases, the director or student in charge of the program would need to have a clear understanding of the procedures that would need to be followed to get recognition and funding of the program. One of the most common methods in granting funds from a student activities account is the money spent (or requested) vs. the number of students served by the program.

In some cases students involved with the program may have to pay for their meals while on a forensic trip, whereas in other schools, they may be covered or partly covered by the team’s budget. This will also relate to what type of transportation can be used to attend tournaments. Some schools will be able to use school cars/van – but a mileage charge may be required that will come from the budget for the team. Regulations as to the drivers of vehicles also need to be understood. In cases where a team may have to rent cars/vans the cost may increase. The question of where a team may stay affects the budget. You will need to know many can you put in one room and how many rooms will be needed and the number of nights. In considering which tournaments to attend, the entry fees and hired judge fees also need to be considered. Thus, careful consideration needs to be given to developing what may be needed in preparing any budget request.

In budget considerations, it must be made clear as to things that a student in the program may need to have to cover and which costs will be paid for from the program’s budget. As stated earlier, there are programs that will cover all the costs for travel, equipment, meals, and motels while in other programs, restrictions may be present that will indicate just what will be covered by the budget and what will need to be paid by student. It is very important that this is made clear to everyone involved in the program.

Because entry fees and judging fees need to be considered in attending tournaments, so too does it need to be clear as to what happens when a student has signed up for a tournament, but then does not show/attend the tournament. If this happens without any notice to the director of the program, the school may have to pay drop fees as well as covering the cost of any hired judge that may have been required because of the student’s entry. It is a practice in many programs that a student that does not show to attend a tournament will be asked to pay all the appropriate fees that were required before they can attend another tournament. Dropping an event at a tournament without letting the coach of the program know in advance may also result in a charge.

Each institution will have its own requirements on such things as the amount that may be spent on meals. This per diem allowance will vary from school to school and may also vary depending upon where the team may be traveling. The
same difference could also apply to the amount that may be spent on lodging arrangements. Schools may have a cap limit on the cost of a room as well as to how many students may be in a room. Also, there may be restrictions that students cannot be in the same room as a coach/faculty member. Funds should also cover the contingency of what happens in cases of bad weather, delay of trips, and any extra lodging expenses.

**Accounting Procedures**

The director of the forensic program will need to develop a method to make sure all of the necessary receipts are collected. There will be a receipt for the fees paid for a tournament, for lodging, for meals, and for materials. Find out what the school’s requirements are for obtaining or receiving the funds – and then returning any funds remaining from the weekend and what will need to be turned into the accounting office or administrator of the institution. Tracking of what is spent in all respects for a program is very important. Most institutions will also have a policy on how soon funds will need to be requested, and then after the event, when the accounting of what was spent must be turned in with any unused funds.

The director of the program should also develop a method of maintaining a complete accounting of the budget for the program. This should show what the budget was at the beginning, what was actually spent and on what, and always makes clear the current balance available to the program. This is very important in order to make sure that one does not over extend the budget which could result in a penalty to the program. This will also be useful to establish evidence of what may be needed in a request for a budget increase as the forensic program grows in size and in achievement.

**Forensic Organizations**

An additional element to be consider in the over-all forensic budget is the question of membership and fees related to forensic organizations that a program may choose to join. There are numerous such organizations and each will have a yearly membership fee that allows a team to take part in the national tournament sponsored by the respective organization. A program does not have to pay this fee if they have no intention in attending a national tournament. Regular season tournaments that a program may elect to attend do not require any type of membership fee in order to participate. It is recommended that the director of the forensic program should research the national forensic organizations to determine which would best meet the objectives of the program before making a choice.

**Forensic Budget Checklist**

This article has presented numerous examples and procedures that will affect any forensic budget. The important thing to remember is that a program will cost money and careful attention will be necessary to make sure the program will have a solid financial support in order to be successful in maintaining its presence on any campus. The following is a basic check list of items that should be considered in the overall development of a forensic budget.
Tournament entry fees: Each forensic tournament will establish its own entry fees. It will vary from tournament to tournament. Generally, the fees are affected by the following:

1. Fee for each individual entry for each slot entered.
2. Fee for hired judges necessary to cover a school’s entry.
3. Fee for drops of entries/judges after the tournament deadline date for entry.
4. Fee for any special items that a tournament may require.

Tournament travel: The budget will need to cover a variety of items related to attending a tournament.

1. Fee for using a school vehicle. This may be based on the number of miles driven and the number of days for the trip.
2. Fee for motel/hotel costs, number of rooms needed.
3. Fee for food costs while on a tournament.
   a. Will it be covered by the budget and if so, to what amount?
   b. Will the students have to contribute to the cost and if so, to what amount?

Program operational costs: Every program will have numerous costs associated with its running and maintenance.

1. Funds for staffing the program.
   a. Will this be covered by an administrative line item, departmental line item or by donations or fund raising activities?
   b. If funding is by the administration or departmental funds, will there be any release time for the director or coaches of the program?
   c. If the school has a graduate program, will there be any provisions for funding graduate assistants to help with the program?

2. Funds for service costs.
   a. If the program is in a department, what costs will be covered by the department for phone service, copying and printing, paper, portfolios, source books, easels, internet service, computers and other materials necessary for running a program?

Larry Schnoor is Professor Emeritus at Minnesota State University, Mankato; President of the National Forensic Association; Tournament Director of American Forensic Association—National Individual Events Tournament; and Executive Secretary of the Interstate Oratorical Association.