

AREA DIRECTOR SURVIVAL GUIDE



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INTRODUCTION

Are you reading this because you have been appointed as an Area Director in Toastmasters? If so, congratulations for the appointment. You are going to embark on an interesting journey. I think you will have a good time. When I was an Area Director, I did.

Or, perhaps you feel that you have no idea what you have signed up for, and now you are panicking and do not know where to start? Do not worry either. You will do just fine.

JARGON

Toastmasters love jargon, the main ones you need to know are shown below.

Program Year / Toastmasters Year

A program year starts on July 1 of a calendar year and ends on June 30 of the next calendar year. For example, program year 2021–2022 starts on July 1, 2021 and ends on June 30, 2022.

Normally, as an Area Director, your term is exactly one program year. Sometimes, an Area Director starts later than July 1, but their term stills ends on June 30 of the following calendar year. At program year's end, some Area Directors get appointed again, for one additional program year.

Several other things in Toastmasters, such as DCP and re-alignment, use program year instead of calendar year. For example, DCP goals are accumulated from July 1 to the next June 30. Every July 1, the next program year starts and the DCP goals get reset.

Renewal Periods

For various reasons, Toastmasters wants the clubs to only deal with membership renewals twice a year. There are two renewal periods:

- 01 April to 30 September
- 01 October to 31 March (of the next calendar year)

New members pay prorated dues that cover their memberships from the date of joining to the end of the current renewal period. Existing members pays dues for a whole renewal period and their memberships are extended by that much. There is no way to pay for or extend a membership by any smaller amount or shorter period.

Distinguished Club Program (DCP)

DCP is one way to measure how clubs are doing. In fact, it is the most prominent metric that is endorsed by Toastmasters International.

There are 3 levels of recognition in DCP:

- Distinguished — 5 goals met
- Select Distinguished — 7 goals met
- President's Distinguished — 9 goals met

Your club's performances in DCP affects your area's performance in DAP, your division's Distinguished Division Program, and your district's Distinguished District Program.

DCP is only a metric. It has its flaws and arguably, some people game it. It is not a definitive of a club's current health, let alone future health. However, it is a good guide to Pathways engagement, club officer training, and new member metrics.

Distinguished Area Program (DAP)

Somewhat similar to DCP, DAP measures the strength of your area and its clubs. You are in charge of your area's performance in DAP, and one of your goals as an Area Director is to guide your area towards recognition in the program.

Distinguished Division Program and Distinguished District Program

They are somewhat similar to Distinguished Area Program, but for divisions and districts. They are primarily the responsibilities of your division and District Directors.

Paid Member

Paid members are those who have paid to join or renew their membership for their current renewal period. Only paid members are entitled to benefits of Toastmasters, i.e. participating in Toastmasters meetings as members, getting education credit for completing projects, access to Pathways, etc.

Membership Base

The number of paid members as of the latest July 1. It is used partly to determine if a club is eligible to be recognized in DCP.

Active Membership

The number of paid members as of today. It is used partly to determine if a club is eligible to be recognized in DCP.

Club Base

The club base of an area/division/district is the number of clubs that the area/division/district has on the first day of the program year, i.e. July 1.

Division Director

Your Division Director is your boss, your supervisor, so to speak. But they will also be your best friend. Their job is to support you when you need it, so do not be afraid or shy to ask. Not only accept their support, but support them, since you are on the same team and work together. You also make the most out of your Area Director experience when you do that.

Assistant Area Directors

You can ask other Toastmasters members to be your assistant Area Directors — Toastmasters International call them Area Assistants. Having your own assistants is not required by Toastmasters International, but is a great idea.

Your assistants can help lighten your workload. They can co-organise events, e.g. speech contests or Area Council meetings. They can work with you to keep the clubs engaged. They can even make additional visits to your clubs on your behalf, even though you should still be the one who carries out the required visits.

Be aware that Assistant Area Directors do not receive any credit for the roles, however, they can use the experience for appropriate Pathway's projects.

Club Visits

As an Area Director, one of your main responsibilities is to visit the clubs in your Area at least twice a year, and to do an Area Visit report on them which is submitted through District Central on the Toastmaster International website.

Area Council Meetings

One of the position's main jobs, in addition to club visits, is to hold Area Council meetings at least twice a year with your Area's Club Presidents, Vice Presidents Education, and/or Vice Presidents Membership.

MAIN DUTIES

Contact your Clubs and Introduce Yourself

Your District Director should have already assigned you to an area with 3 to 6 clubs. Find out from your Division Director what clubs are in your area.

More details on the clubs can be found by using Find a Club on the Toastmasters International or District 17 website and visiting their webpages, or by doing a Facebook or google search for the club.

If you can, touch base with the outgoing Area Director for background or pertinent information.

Once you find out their phone number or e-mail, call or e-mail them. It does not have to be super-formal. The primary purposes of your first contact is simply to touch base and ensure it's the current President you are speaking to.

Introduce yourself and let them know that you are their incoming Area Director.

Let them know that you are happy and excited to work with them in the upcoming year.

Let them know that you look forward to visiting and meeting them.

Relax. You might be nervous about contacting the club, especially if you do not know anyone in the club. You have no reasons to worry. Almost certainly, the response would be friendly. Also, there is a good chance that the club contact person already knows about your role, or even you. They might even be a former Area Director themselves.

Ensure the Club Officer List is submitted

Among your first goals that have deadlines is the club officer list.

More specifically, your job is to remind all of your clubs to submit their club officer list by **June 30**. Even though it is before you officially take office, it is a task (and the only goal) in the Distinguished Club Program that clubs need to do before the current program year in order to get credit for the current program year.

Visit Your Clubs

In order to be eligible for the Distinguished Area Program (i.e. for your area to be Distinguished or better), you need to visit each of your club and submit a club visit report at least twice: Once between July 1 and November 31, and once more between January 1 and May 31. In District 17, we ask that you complete your first visit by mid-October and your second by mid-April. This gives the District Trio time to read your visit reports and provide any required assistance to the clubs.

In addition to these two required visits, if you can attend the clubs at other times it can help build the relationship. Try and attend their club contests. It's polite to advise the Presidents that you're coming to visit, rather than just turning up.

Conduct Area Council Meetings

An Area Council meeting should be held at least twice a year with your Area's Club Presidents, Vice Presidents Education, and/or Vice Presidents Membership. Contact them early in the year to set up a joint meeting with as many attendees as possible. This can be in person, however, if it's hard to get everyone together consider Zoom. This is a great opportunity for networking, for the clubs to help each other out with their club contests and to discuss and plan your area contest.

Conduct the Area Speech Contests

As an Area Director, you oversee your Area's speech contests. It is highly recommend that you appoint other Toastmasters members to be contest chairs. Even in this case, you still oversee the contests and work closely with the contest chairs to ensure their success.

In practice, though, there is a chance that you might need to chair these contests. Be sure to start planning early and recruit a lot of volunteers to help you. You can also ask the members of your clubs if they want to organise the contest as a Pathway's Project. If you do this, ensure that you're checking in with them regularly to make sure everything is on track.

District 17 runs two contest seasons each year – the Area Contests are normally in September for the Table Topics and Humorous; and March for the International and Evaluation. Please confirm the dates that your contests need to be finished by with your Division Director.

Attend DECM and DCM Meetings and Submit Reports

As an Area Director you are a member of the District Executive Council, and therefore you have an obligation to attend the four DECM (District Executive Council Meetings) each year. In preparation for these meetings you will need to complete a report. A template for the report will be sent to you. I find it's best to fill the first one in from scratch, and then just copy and update it for the subsequent ones.

As you visit your clubs, look for success stories to include in this report.

In addition to the DECM there are two DCM – District Council Meetings – each year. These are similar to the DECMs but include the Presidents and Vice Presidents of Education as well. You will also be required to provide reports for these meetings.

Start a Club in your Area

To receive a President's Distinguished in the Distinguished Area Program you need a net growth of 1 club (as well as meeting the other goals). Therefore, as an Area Director be on the lookout for any opportunities to start a new club, or to support other members in your area to start a club.

Find a Successor

As you work throughout the year and build up relationships with your clubs and especially the Presidents, look for those who might like to be the next Area Director. Ensure that you speak about the benefits of your role and be encouraging to those who have leadership aspirations.

FORMAL CLUB VISITS

Before Your Visit

Set up a visit to each club as early as possible. It works the best if the clubs know about and plan for your visits a couple of weeks or meetings in advance.

Forward a copy of the single page Club Success Plan (from the District 17 website) and ask the President to have it completed for you to collect at your visit.

While you have five months to visit your clubs and submit your club visit reports in each of the reporting periods, visits are the most beneficial when they are done in the first two months, i.e. July/August and January/February.

One of the benefits of doing this is that you can help install the club officers while you are there. Installation ceremonies tend to be meaningful only if done near the beginning of the officers' terms.

You can recruit for your Area speech contests while you are there.

You can gather information, set goals, and address issues with the club early on.

Check if the club is celebrating a major anniversary. You can look up the club's charter date on the DCP Dashboard.

Offer to present any awards or Pathways certificates while you are there.

Arrange time to talk to the Club's officers before or after the meeting if possible.

Be very mindful of the club's time, especially their time during their meeting. You are not entitled to speaking time during their meeting. If the club offers it, it is a courtesy, and do not abuse it. Every minute that you speak is a minute that one of the club's members could have spoken. If you take (for example) ten minutes out of your meeting, that means one of their members could have given a speech and another member could have given an evaluation.

Always be prepared to help with the meeting as a functionary. The club might ask you for help. If they need a role right before the meeting starts, you might want to offer to (but not insist on) take a role. That means you should be familiar with all functionary roles. If not, review them ahead of the meeting.

At Your Visit

Do not be late. It is rude to show up late on an official club visit. In fact, be early. I find that it works the best for me to plan to arrive at the venue 20 minutes early and be at the meeting place 10 minutes early. That leaves some buffer room for unexpected delays (e.g. extra-heavy traffic). I have some time to talk to club officers and members, while avoiding the awkward situation where nobody else is there.

If asked to speak (e.g. table topics), accept and speak with confidence. You are an Area Director. You can do it. Set up a good example.

If possible, stay the whole meeting. Since, chances are that you can only observe during the meeting, stay behind to talk to members and guests afterwards.

Area Directors are not superstars. In fact, most members and guests would not know what an Area Director is. That is okay. If asked to introduce yourself, do mention that you are the club's Area Director representing the District. During casual chatting, though, I find it useful to focus on that I am also a Toastmasters member from another club.

Things to talk about

Encourage members to contribute to the Black Swan, and use the District 17 Members Facebook page.

Encourage members to attend Club Officer Training

Encourage members to participate any upcoming contests.

Officer Installation

You might be asked by your clubs to install the club's officers during your visit. It is an optional ceremony where you, as a district officer:

Thank the outgoing club officers for their work and discharge them from further duties.

Install the incoming club incoming officers.

If there is one, it is usually done at the beginning or the end of the meeting. Not all clubs want the ceremony. You can suggest, but do not be offended if the club turns it down.

The Club Leadership Handbook mentions this and even has a script for the ceremony. The Handbook suggests 12 to 15 minutes, but in my experience, that is way too long for almost any clubs. Trim down the script and aim for about 5 to 10 minutes.

The script asks for a gavel to be passed onto the officer being installed. If possible, bring a gavel with you to the meeting. The club might or might not have one ready, and the ceremony looks ten times better with a gavel than without.

After Your Visit

Thank the club for the opportunity to visit them. If they have any questions that you were not able to answer during your visit, research the answers and get back to them.

Do your club visit reports as soon after your visit as you can, while it's still fresh in your memory.

CLUB VISIT REPORTS

DAP recognition requires not only visiting the clubs but submitting your club visit reports on time.

Read the form ahead of time. Bring it to the meeting and if possible, discuss the questions on it with the club's President / Vice President of Education. If there is not enough time to do that during your visit you can always ask follow-up questions via e-mail or phone later.

Try not to bother the club with requests for information that you can find yourself. For example, Club number, area, division, district, number of members, current goals can all be found on the DCP dashboard.

My opinion is that you have not signed up just so that you can fill more paperwork. Spending tons of time and filling in every last detail does not help with your goals, your club's goals, or your district's goals. Just get the reports done and submit them so that you can complete this requirement, but definitely do not spend too much time on them.

When you submit your reports online, in addition to you, each of these people receive a copy:

- Club President
- Your Division Director
- Your District Director club
- Your Program Quality Director
- Your Club Growth Director

Therefore, be mindful and careful about what you put into the report. If you have something that you want to share with the district leadership but not the club (or vice versa), leave it out of the reports, and communicate it in another way.

INTERACTING WITH CLUBS

You cannot make clubs do anything. They are under no obligation to listen to you or do anything that you ask/tell them. Only Toastmasters International can make them do something.

Be courteous to your clubs. You are their guest. Visiting them is a privilege, and likely an eye-opening experience for you too.

As an Area Director, you are super-enthusiastic about Toastmasters. It might even be the number one priority in your life right now. It is okay. Just keep in mind that you are not the norm. You are, as our District Director called it, "super-archivers", at least in Toastmasters. Remember that Toastmasters is most likely not the most important thing to the club officers and members. Corporate clubs where employees meet at workplaces during their work days are going to cancel meetings when work gets really busy or deadlines approach. It is normal, and insisting that they meet for Toastmasters does nobody any good.

You can persuade them and ask nicely. Down the road, they might even do you a small favour. Do know the limits, though. For example, among my clubs, most officers of corporate clubs would not attend any events outside their office or outside office hours (e.g. training), even I encouraged them to. Do not take it personally. It is not about you. It is not that you are not a persuasive person or that they do not like you. It is just that people have different goals and priorities.

STRUGGLING CLUBS

We all would like all our clubs to be strong and thriving, but that is not always the case. Even clubs that are healthy now can struggle later now, sometimes suddenly.

A club with less than 12 members are eligible for a club coach and also might be eligible for funding to help with marketing. If you need information or advice on this, talk to your Division Director, the Club Growth Director or the Club Coach Co-ordinator.

OPPORTUNITIES WHILE YOU ARE AN AREA DIRECTOR

An Area Director is a great role to use as a basis for the Level 5 Pathways Projects / Electives – *Leading in your Volunteer Organisation* or *Lead in Any Situation*. Both of these require you to have a leadership role for 6 months and then to do a speech on the experience.

MAIN DATES FOR 2021/22 TOASTMASTERS YEAR

Date	Event
Sat - 14/08/2021	DECM #1
Sat - 18/09/2021	Virtual DCM
End September	Area Contests should be completed
Mid October	Ensure you've done your first round of club visit reports and submitted them on District Central
Sat - 4/12/2021	DECM #2
Sat - 12/03/2022	DECM #3
End March	Area Contests should be completed
Mid April	Ensure you've done your second round of club visit reports and submitted them on District Central
Sat - 9/04/2022	DECM #4
Sat - 14/05/2022	DCM

USEFUL WEBSITE LINKS

District 17 Calendar	https://toastmastersd17.org/resource/district-calendar/
Online Contest Resources	https://toastmastersd17.org/resource/online-contest-resources/
Contest Resources	https://toastmastersd17.org/resource/help-for-contests/
Club Success Plan	https://toastmastersd17.org/resource/club-success-plan/
Leadership Handbook	https://www.toastmasters.org/resources/district-leadership-handbook