



# POETRY OUT LOUD

## ORGANIZER'S GUIDE 2018-2019

[www.poetryoutloud.org](http://www.poetryoutloud.org)

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# 1. National Contacts

## **Program Administration: National Endowment for the Arts**

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## 2. The Basics

### PROGRAM DEADLINES

#### September 1, 2018

POL online anthology live for 2018-19 school year

#### December 7, 2018

State finals date due to [poetryoutloud@arts.gov](mailto:poetryoutloud@arts.gov)

#### January 25, 2019

Participating schools list due to [poetryoutloud@arts.gov](mailto:poetryoutloud@arts.gov)

#### March 18, 2019

Deadline to hold State Final competition\*

#### March 21, 2019

Deadline for state champs and chaperones to register for National Finals\*\*

#### April 29 - May 1, 2019

Poetry Out Loud National Finals in Washington, DC

\*Each SAA should conduct a state final competition by **Monday, March 18, 2019**, to select a state champion and runner-up. If the state champion is unable to attend the National Finals in DC, then the first runner-up will take their place. If your state Poetry Out Loud finals take place after March 18, 2019, please note that you risk not having your state's champion listed in the National Finals program or printed on award certificates and plaques.

\*\*Need to build-in a backup snow date for your state final? Please schedule your original state finals date and snow date prior to March 18, 2019 in order to give your state champion sufficient time to register for the National Finals by March 21, 2019.

## **PROGRAM STRUCTURE**

Poetry Out Loud starts in the classroom, with participating teachers using the Poetry Out Loud teacher toolkit and online resources to conduct lessons on poetry recitations and run classroom competitions. Following a pyramid structure, classroom winners advance to a school-wide competition, then to a regional and/or state competition, and ultimately to the National Finals.

Only schools registered with their state Poetry Out Loud coordinator are eligible for the competition. Schools must hold a competition of at least two students to select their champion.

Regional competitions within a state are not mandated by Poetry Out Loud, but they can be a useful way to winnow down a large number of schools and avoid the cost of bringing every school champion to the state finals—particularly burdensome in large states.

## **POEM SELECTION/ELIGIBILITY**

Students must have three poems prepared for state and national finals, selected from the official Poetry Out Loud print or [online anthology](#). (You can view a list of print anthology poems in the [State Partners section of the website](#).) Students will decide the poem order they will use in competition, but they may not change the order after the contest organizer's deadline. The organizer may not prescribe the order of poems to be recited (for example, do not dictate poems be recited by category of pre-20<sup>th</sup> century first).

Students competing in the **state and national finals** must meet specific criteria with their poem selections.

- 1) One of the three poems selected must be pre-20th century.
- 2) One of the three poems selected must be 25 lines or shorter in length.

One poem may satisfy both criteria, and may be the student's third poem.

**For rules regarding student eligibility, please refer to the Poetry Out Loud website: <http://www.poetryoutloud.org/competition/rules-and-eligibility>**

## 3. Poetry Out Loud Resources

### TEACHER TOOLKIT

The Poetry Out Loud teacher toolkit is updated every summer for the upcoming school year. Copies may be ordered at no cost from our fulfillment house, Cadmus Communication (see page 3 for contact information). Send a copy to each teacher who participates in Poetry Out Loud and keep some on hand for the upcoming year—they are a great recruitment tool to hand out at conferences and other events.

The teacher toolkit contains:

- **Poetry Out Loud Teacher’s Guide 2018-19**  
Lesson plans, guidance on classroom contests, evaluation criteria
- **Poetry Out Loud Posters**

### ONLINE RESOURCES

There are many resources for students, teachers, judges, and state arts agencies on our website, [www.poetryoutloud.org](http://www.poetryoutloud.org). Highlights include:

- **Poems & Performance:** online anthology of more than 900 eligible poems and poet biographies, learning recitation videos, audio guide of sample recitations, and tips on reciting
- **Teaching Resources:** digital Teacher’s Guide, lesson plans, guides on how to make your Poetry Out Loud program accessible, NCTE and Common Core Standards
- **The Competition:** Judge’s Guide, Webinar for Judges, Contest Evaluation Sheet, Accuracy Score Sheet, Sample Tally Sheet, Scoring Rubric, official Poetry Out Loud logos

Another great resource is the [Poetry Out Loud YouTube page](#). Visit this page for videos from the National Finals, the Poetry Out Loud Tips & Examples series, and more.

**Remember:** The [State Partners password-protected section of poetryoutloud.org](#) has several more resources specifically for state arts agencies and their partners.

Username: **statearts**; Password: **SAA**

## 4. Sample State Program Timeline

Here is an example timeline on running the Poetry Out Loud program in your state. Feel free to adjust and customize based on the needs of your program.

<b>September</b>	Teacher recruitment; distribute educational materials; teacher workshops; implement media plan
<b>October</b>	Continue to distribute educational materials; teacher workshops; classroom competitions; school registration deadline; integrate guest teaching artists
<b>November</b>	Judges invited; confirm venues & dates for regional and state competitions; school competitions
<b>December</b>	Judges/prompter/event staff finalized for regional and state competitions; school competitions
<b>January</b>	School competitions; regional events; prep for finals; finalize state finals plan/prep judges and volunteers
<b>February</b>	Finish state finals event plan/prep judges by conference call and organize volunteers; state finals
<b>March</b>	State finals; issue final press release/newsletters; prep state champion for National Finals
<b>April</b>	National Finals; debrief; final evaluations; follow-up and thank partners
<b>May</b>	Groundwork for school recruitment—meet with key contacts, including principals and state superintendents; mailing to teachers for next season
<b>June-July</b>	Teacher recruitment; strategic planning; develop media plan; identify possible partners
<b>August</b>	Teacher recruitment; order toolkits; secure partnerships

## 5. School Recruitment & Supporting Teachers

Recruiting schools and engaging teachers are important steps in managing a state Poetry Out Loud program. While recruiting new schools, remember to you have much to offer teachers—free educational materials geared to NCTE and Common Core Standards are almost always welcome!

Consider contacting high schools at multiple levels—through the local school district offices, individual school’s administrators, and individual teachers (language arts, ESL, theater, and speech teachers as well as librarians are all good contacts to have).

You may want to try some of these recruitment methods suggested by experienced coordinators:

- Invite interested teachers to your state final. The drama of the competition and the student performances are a powerful recruiting tool.
- Invite enthusiastic teachers or previous state champions to speak at conferences and other teacher/education gatherings.
- Send information through Arts in Education partners and the Parent Teacher Association.
- Attend meetings of the state Teachers of English, Cooperative Educational Service Agencies, and the state High School Forensic Association to introduce teachers to the program and expand its geographic reach.
- Ask county school boards and the state Department of Education to recommend schools for participation. Ask to have an item in one of their newsletters.
- Connect with your State Superintendent of Education—make their office aware of the program and invite staff to attend the state finals as special guests.

### TIPS!

- Teachers often have busy schedules and may be hesitant to sign up for a program due to time commitments. Remind them that Poetry Out Loud is flexible and can easily be incorporated into a 2-3 week time period, and it can also complement other lessons such as creative writing and text analysis.
- Having an engaging Poetry Out Loud web page is a great way to easily disseminate information about your state’s program to teachers. Here are a few good examples from [California](#), [Missouri](#), and [Virginia](#).

“I think that when students get to know a poem intimately and perform it out loud for an audience, they reap some great benefits: courage, verbal skill, attention to detail, greater sense of their own identity and emotions, and more.”

—POL Teacher  
FY18 Arizona Poetry Out Loud  
Final Report

## **RETAINING SCHOOLS**

One of the most important strategies to ensure that all of your recruited schools make it to the state finals is to stay in frequent contact with participating teachers. Keep them apprised of plans for the regional and/or state competition—sending weekly or bi-weekly newsletters is a great way to keep teachers updated about the program and remind them of steps leading up to competitions. For new teachers, you may want to schedule individual calls or have a group phone orientation about Poetry Out Loud in your state— one-on-one interaction is key to retaining new schools!

## **SUPPORTING TEACHERS**

There are many affordable and manageable ways to support teachers involved in the Poetry Out Loud program. Some examples of teacher support include:

- Setting up workshop(s) for teachers that focuses on performance techniques and other related activities, conducted by a teaching artist or guest poet. An application process can also help identify committed teachers for workshop participation.
- Ask your previous state champion’s coach if they would be willing to serve as a “teacher liaison” for the following year—teachers can contact them to get advice on teaching poetry recitation, coaching students, etc.
- Work with school principals to identify ways of including Poetry Out Loud teachers and students in the larger school community, leading to better support for teachers and recognition of their work with the program.

## **GUEST TEACHING ARTISTS**

State arts agencies may provide support to Poetry Out Loud teachers who wish to welcome guest artists and coaches into the classroom. Having a guest teaching artist in the classroom is a wonderful way to engage students and teachers! Services from these individuals range from one-on-one coaching to leading classroom workshops on poem explication and interpretation. Guest artists may include local poets, college professors, professional actors, forensic coaches, former state Poetry Out Loud champions, state poets laureate, and specialists from literary centers.

If you utilize teaching artists, you should convene them early on to develop consistent curriculum plans. Share the Judge’s Guide, Teacher’s Guide, and other resources on [poetryoutloud.org](http://poetryoutloud.org). These tools will help them teach to the criteria and be aware of what judges are trained to look for in an outstanding recitation.

## 6. Developing Partnerships/Networks

Partnerships are essential to a successful Poetry Out Loud program. Partnerships establish the program in your community and enhance your state final event.

### Potential partnership ideas include:

Local chapters of National Council of Teachers of English  
County Superintendents Educational Services Association  
Local businesses: art galleries, bookstores, coffeehouses  
Parent Teacher Associations  
Community groups such as Girl or Boy Scouts of America  
State Humanities Councils  
Libraries  
Literary organizations and centers, writers groups  
Theater companies  
Museums  
VSA (to actively include students with disabilities)  
Newspapers  
Local public broadcasting companies  
Independent bookstores or local affiliates of chains  
Regional Educational Service Agencies  
State Alliance for Arts Education  
State Literacy Councils  
State Department of Education  
State Poets in the Schools programs  
State Poet Laureate  
State Poetry Society  
State Association of Language Arts Teachers  
State High School Speech Associations  
County Coordinators of English  
State Department of Elementary and Secondary Education  
Local colleges and universities  
School Board  
Local and state elected officials—mayors, state representatives, governor (and First Spouse)  
Federal Congressional representatives and senators

### **CONSISTENCY OF MESSAGE AND RULES**

As Poetry Out Loud continues to grow, many SAAs are partnering with arts organizations, writing centers, cultural organizations, etc. Please make sure you share official program materials with each partner to ensure consistency of language used for the program.

Each year you also may be working with more and more teachers and guest teaching artists. Make sure everyone in this group has access to official materials. Students should be coached by those who have read the Poetry Out Loud Teacher's Guide and Judge's Guide so that there is consistent understanding of the review criteria at any level of competition. All teachers, coaches, and students should know about [poetryoutloud.org](http://poetryoutloud.org) as a resource for poems and model recitations as well as rules.

## **PARTNERSHIP TIPS**

When you start thinking about which partnerships would be the most beneficial, define the major aspects of your program and decide what you would expand or change with the extra help:

- **Which potential partners would best help you reach your goals?** What would you be able to offer them in return (visibility; a way to help schools and the community)?
- **To open conversation, host an informal community committee meeting or issue a press announcement inviting potential partners to get involved.**
- **Follow up.** Be sure to stay in touch with your partners to keep them informed of your plans, make them aware of key dates and events, and ensure that they are engaged and energized about their role in making Poetry Out Loud a success in your community.
- **Acknowledge partners' involvement in your materials and press releases,** and remember to thank them at all public events. Afterwards, celebrate your successes with them by sharing photographs, news clippings, and other materials from your program.
- **Consider forming an advisory committee of representatives from partnering organizations and/or exceptional teachers that meets a few times a year**—so partners lend different types of support and are invested in the decision making of the program.
- **The key in working with elected officials is to consider the ways in which what you're asking for will benefit them.** Give them plenty of notice, expect last minute rescheduling, keep them informed, and make sure they're invited to all events and publicly acknowledged when they attend. Send your congressional representative a picture of himself or herself next to a Poetry Out Loud poster or sign, and ask for a blurb in the next constituent newsletter.

## 7. Selecting and Training Judges

Poets, educators, professors, arts journalists, writers, actors, poetry lovers, and public officials, among many others, may serve as judges at your state and/or regional competitions. Also consider representatives of partner organizations and state Department of Education or NCTE staff.

Each type of judge brings a unique viewpoint and experience to the process. The best panels have a balance of perspectives. Judges should have some general knowledge of poetry but need not be experts. Work to achieve diversity in your judging panel. A judging panel may seem off-kilter if too many judges are looking at recitations from the same point of view. For example, a poet may focus on the language of a recitation while an actor is very aware of stage presence and movement. We have found that the best judges are those who have committed to preparing in advance for their role as a judge.

Start recruiting judges in the fall so you have the best chance to get on their calendars. An ideal number of judges for a state final is four. Two judges is not sufficient.

Read the Judge's Guide carefully before contacting your judges. This is your best tool to prepare judges for the competition. The guide includes a detailed explanation of evaluation criteria, the scoring process, and the best way to prepare for judging Poetry Out Loud. Also consider potential conflicts of interest when selecting your panel (view this section in the Judge's Guide on page 13).

### **TRAINING JUDGES**

Providing materials in advance to the judges is essential. We recommend sending information to judges several weeks before the competition, including a copy of all poems to be recited, a detailed schedule, an explanation of the logistics, and the Judge's Guide.

It's also very useful for judges to see examples of excellent recitations beforehand—direct them to the Learning Recitation videos and footage from the National Finals on YouTube. They should also practice scoring with these video recitations. Encourage them to visit the "[Judge Preparation](#)" section of our website. Online, judges will find a variety of resources, including a webinar on judging, hosted by the Poetry Foundation and the National Endowment for the Arts.

## **JUDGE ORIENTATION**

Hold an orientation session after judges have had a chance to look over materials, but before the day of your competition. (Competition day is often too chaotic to hold a meaningful orientation.) A conference call may work best, perhaps two weeks out so judges have time to digest the information before the competition. This will also give judges an opportunity to ask questions.

Here is a sample agenda for a judge orientation call:

- Introductions
  - Staff
  - Judging Panel
- Review Event Logistics
  - Arrival Time
  - Run of Show
  - Contact List
- Walk through the Poetry Out Loud Evaluation Criteria (ask panel to have their Judge's Guide on hand)
  - Use language from the Judge's Guide to explain each category
  - Stop after each criteria and ask for questions
  - Offer veteran judges a chance to help answer questions and provide perspective
  - Consider watching a Poetry Out Loud recitation together & discussing it
- Reminders
  - Score each evaluation criteria individually
  - Score each recitation independently (don't debate scores with other judges)
  - Don't add up your scores, separate tabulators will do this
  - Watch the student, not your evaluation sheet, during recitations
  - Refrain from speaking with students or audience members until the competition concludes
- Conclusion
  - Thank panel
  - Address any follow-up or additional questions

## 8. Timeline for State Finals Planning

### PLANNING A STATE FINAL: GETTING STARTED

The following tasks should be handled as early as possible, perhaps even directly following the previous year's state finals competition.

- **Check statewide academic and community calendars for possible date conflicts**
- **Select venue.** Consider government auditoriums, libraries, theaters, college campuses, and museums. Some states have found a partner to donate the space and help host the event.
  - When selecting venues, consult the [POL Accessibility Checklist – Venue & Event Promotion](#).
- **Visit the venue.** Consider:
  - Signage – what and where
  - Where contestants will sit (onstage, side of stage, front row, etc.)
  - Where the judges and scorekeepers will sit (avoid proximity to audience)
  - Where prompter will sit (in field-of-vision of performers)
  - Where the VIPs and media will sit
  - Whether to use a podium and microphone for host
  - Stage lighting and sound
  - Accessibility for audience and for participants with disabilities
  - Place for media interviews before and/or after contest
  - Place for photos
  - Ticket and seating system, if applicable
- **Consider strategic partnerships** that may enhance your state finals or reduce costs.

### FALL 2018

These items should be coordinated by mid-fall at the latest, though of course you could get an earlier start!

- **Select judges**
- **Select host or emcee**
  - Local celebrities or news anchors are good choices, both for entertainment value and for media attention.

- **Consider special guests to give remarks**
- **Consider your award ceremony** – who will give the awards, what will be awarded, how they will be announced, etc.
  - Some states present certificates signed by the Governor—they likely request this far in advance. (Certificates are also available for download from [www.poetryoutloud.org](http://www.poetryoutloud.org))
  - If you wish to supplement the official cash awards, start looking for partners who might donate goods or funds. Books and gift certificates make nice prizes. If you have writers on your judging panel, perhaps one of their books might be included.
- **Consider hiring entertainment** (student musician, storyteller, dance company, etc.) for lulls during the tallying process or for intermission.
- **Make plans and find staffing for any other activities that may take place at your finals**, such as workshops or teacher feedback sessions.
- **Hire a photographer** (and videographer, if desired).
- **Develop media plan and community marketing plan** (see the [POL PR toolkit](#)).
- **Make plans for any post-contest reception** (may not be funded with NEA grant money, but often a local company or nonprofit will sponsor).
- **Clear permissions for poems**, if you plan to broadcast the event.
- **Make arrangements for student and participant travel and lodging**, if applicable.

## **AS SCHOOL COMPETITIONS CONCLUDE**

- **Gather information from schools on school-level winners.**
- **Send letter to schools and school winners outlining state final rules and details.**

Ask contestants to:

- Arrive at the venue at least an hour before curtain
- Confirm name spelling and pronunciation, grade, school (for program and certificates or plaques)

- Confirm their poems, the **final order** in which they wish to recite them, and provide a brief bio
  - Confirm that their poems meet the selection criteria (pre-20<sup>th</sup>, 25 lines or fewer, all from official POL anthology)
  - Follow your dress code (National Finals: no dress code – students should wear whatever makes them feel comfortable and confident – but no costumes allowed)
  - Make any travel arrangements
- **Design and print invitations**

### **ONE MONTH BEFORE THE EVENT**

- **Create draft order of show**
  - Consider length of show
  - Consider number of students to advance to third round
  - Consider speakers or partners that should be given a moment in the spotlight
- **Create program for final event**
- **Order plaques or certificates for participants and state champ**, if applicable. A few states have created a traveling trophy that goes to the school of the state champion each year.
- **Begin marketing event to community**
- **Send invitations** – both a wide email blast and personalized invitations to VIPs
- **Recruit staff or volunteers for event**
- **Finalize any reception plans**
- **Look at signage and banners from previous year and determine if they are current and in good condition.** If not, order new signage.

### **THREE WEEKS BEFORE THE EVENT**

- **Create ordered list of poems for judges**, indicating which poems each student will recite.

- **Create large-print copies of the poems for the prompter and accuracy judge.** Place them in a binder, with the poems in the order of competition. If you will have ASL translators, they will need large-print copies of the poems as well.
- **Send judges a hard copy or electronic briefing binder** with the poems that will be recited at the competition, Judge's Guide, links to sample student videos, event schedule, etc.
- **Draft script for show;** send copy to host
- **Send press releases**

### TWO WEEKS BEFORE THE EVENT

- **Create contest evaluation sheets and accuracy score sheets for judges.** Individualize them with student names and poem titles.
- **Prepare a database to enter and calculate scores. A sample can be found at [poetryoutloud.org](http://poetryoutloud.org).** Do several test runs with the database to ensure that calculations work as they should.
- **Convene judges** via a phone conference to review criteria, rules, event details, and answer questions.
- **Finalize script.** Print out and put in notebooks, with a copy for host and any staff working on production.

### ONE OR TWO DAYS BEFORE THE EVENT

- **Follow-up calls to key media**
- **Double check that all contest evaluation sheets and accuracy score sheets are prepared and in the proper order of competition**
- **Ensure that poem binders are ready for accuracy judge, prompter, and ASL interpreters**
- **Do one last trial run of the scoring system** with staff that will be working the database
- **Pack and double-check all event supplies** (see checklist on pg. 19)

## **HOURS BEFORE THE COMPETITION**

- **Install signage and set stage**
- **Check all lighting and sound**, as needed
- **Reserve seating for the competitors** if they will be seated in the audience
- **Rope off a seating area for the judges** where they will not be disturbed by competitors or other attendees.
- **Final run-through of script and order-of-show with host**
- **Media opportunities**

## **IMMEDIATELY AFTER THE COMPETITION**

- **Give award forms to champion and runner-up or to his or her parents/guardians and representatives from winning schools; give National Finals registration information to champion or his or her parents/guardians** (Award forms available under the password-protected state partners section at [poetryoutloud.org](http://poetryoutloud.org).)
- **Media opportunities**

## **AFTER THE COMPETITION**

- **Follow up with state champion and parent to ensure they are registered for the National Finals by March 21, 2019**, resending web link for registration and reminding them of the deadline
- **Follow-up media outreach and monitoring**
- **Send thanks to judges and host and speakers**
- **Send thanks and follow-up info to schools** (e.g., photos of contestants)
- **Send champion's name, school, three poems, and phone and email contact information for the state champion and champion's legal guardian to [poetryoutloud@arts.gov](mailto:poetryoutloud@arts.gov)**. Include hi-resolution photos of your champion from the competition.
- **Prepare required Final Descriptive Report for NEA by June 28, 2019.**

## 9. Event Checklist

- Large-font copies of poems in order of recitation for prompter, accuracy judge, and ASL translator (bring an extra copy, just in case)
- Contest evaluation sheets for each judge, preprinted with contestant name and poem, and placed in order of recitation
- Accuracy score sheets for accuracy judge, preprinted with contestant name and poem, and placed in order of recitation
- Laptops with computerized tallying system. Or tally sheets for each round, preprinted with contestant names to match judges' score sheets
- Calculators for scorekeepers, just in case
- Reading lights for the judges (consider small book lights), with extra batteries
- Clipboards and pencils for judges
- Paper, markers, scissors, and tape, or other materials, to designate judges' and students' seating areas
- Copy of final script for host and production staff
- Water for judges and contestants
- Programs
- Signage
- Marketing materials, may include POL brochure or flyer about next year's program
- VIP and media list, press kits for media

It's also very important to make sure your competition is properly staffed and everyone is trained before the event.

Ask yourself, do you have: a host? Judges? Accuracy Judge? Prompter? Scorekeepers? Score collector? Handlers for judges, VIPs, and/or host? Ushers? Contestant wranglers? Entertainment? Photographer/videographer? Press liaison?

## 10. Sample State Final Schedule

Though the format of school, regional, and state competitions may vary somewhat, Poetry Out Loud is standardized to ensure a fair playing field for students in each state and to prepare students to compete nationally. The following schedule represents a typical state competition structure with 15 students.

1:00 pm	Welcoming remarks and introduction Brief review of the evaluation criteria for audience
1:10-2:25 pm	Round One of Recitations
2:25-3:40 pm	Round Two of Recitations
3:40 pm	Intermission
3:55 pm	Announcement of Semifinalists
3:55-4:25 pm	Round Three of Recitations (for smaller number of top qualifiers)
4:25-4:30 pm	Scoring Break (or consider filling this time with a guest poet or musician)
4:30 pm	Announcement of State Champion and First Runner-Up Award Presentation/Closing Remarks/Media Interviews

We recommend that state finals last between two and three and a half hours—any longer, and students as well as audience members may get restless. If you have a full day of recitations with semifinals beforehand, make sure to build in breaks for meals and down time for students and families as well as judges.

# 11. Competition Structure

Organizers are able to tailor the state finals event as they see fit, but the competition structure itself should generally reflect the format of the National Finals. Here is an overview of the structure of a state Poetry Out Loud competition:

**State finals must include three rounds of competition.** Each student will recite one poem in the first two rounds. Unless you have a very large number of competitors, we would recommend going straight from the first round into the second round. The third round should include at least three competitors, but generally less than half of the contestants from the first two rounds. Be thoughtful about the number of students who advance so it is not only a few that are excluded.

You will need a break after the second round of recitation to finish tallying the scores and determine the students who will be moving on to the third round of competition. Once these students have been determined, you will need to provide the names to the prompter, accuracy judge, and ASL interpreters so they can clear their notebooks of the third poems for the students who will not be advancing. You will also need to give the judges the score sheets of only the students who are competing in the third round. Consider when you will announce the names of the students advancing to the third round: after an intermission? After a presentation of plaques to all competitors?

## **ORDER OF RECITATION AND JUDGE CALIBRATION**

Some states randomize the student order, while others will order the students alphabetically by school or some other system. There is a perceived disadvantage to being the first to recite, before the judges are fully warmed up. You may want to consider having a **calibration round**: a non-competitor who will do the first recitation of the competition. Judges will practice scoring on this person and be better prepared for the first actual competitor. When using this method, be sure the calibration recitation is of similar caliber to the competitors so the judges' expectations are not set too high or too low.

Another method of calibrating the judges is to have them watch video footage of a student reciting. Bring the judges backstage 30 minutes before the competition begins. Select a few recitations from a previous year (ones that reflect both average and excellent performances, and definitely not including students who will be competing) and play them on a TV or laptop computer. Have the judges practice scoring the recitations, using contest evaluation sheets, giving them about 45 seconds between videos so they can get a sense of the competition pacing.

## **AS STUDENTS ARRIVE**

Brief the contestants together on the structure of the competition and the process by which they'll come and go from the stage. Let them know the order of recitations, and have them seated in that order so it is always clear whose turn it is. Let them walk on stage and try out the microphone before the audience arrives. (Students should stand behind the microphone and not hold it.) If you have a guest artist or actor on staff who could share some breathing or warm-up techniques, that might be a helpful exercise for the students.

Run a final check on the pronunciation of student and school names, and give the details on any tricky pronunciations to the host. Keep the students separate from the judges.

## **AS JUDGES ARRIVE**

Have a knowledgeable staff member watching for their arrival. Assigned staff should be prepared to answer any questions the judges have about the process, but will also be charged with making sure the judges are not approached by students or audience members. Bring the judges to a green room or show them to their assigned seating, but make sure they can relax and prepare away from students and other event guests.

Once the judges are seated in the auditorium, hand out clipboards with the contest evaluation sheets for the first two rounds, already personalized with student names and poems. (For the accuracy judge, provide them with the prepared accuracy score sheets.) Also hand out the Judge's Quick Reference to Criteria (available as a PDF at [poetryoutloud.org](http://poetryoutloud.org)) as a reminder of what is critical for each of the evaluation criteria. Provide pencils or pens, as well as a book light for their clipboard if the auditorium lights will be dimmed. No judge other than the accuracy judge should be looking at the text of poems while the competition is taking place.

## **DURING THE COMPETITION**

**Scoring:** Judges will need up to a minute between recitations to mark their scores on their contest evaluation sheets. Work these transitions into the run of show with music or have a savvy emcee to fill these breaks. Often, the scoring process will speed up somewhat as the judges settle in to a rhythm, but you may need to encourage them to make decisions and move on if it seems to be dragging.

Have a couple of volunteers stationed to collect and enter the judges' scores into the tallying spreadsheet as the competition is happening—this will give you a running total and alleviate the need for long scoring breaks. Judges must have a number circled for each category; check sheets for completion as they are collected. The accuracy judge's score will be added to each individual judge's evaluation sheet, so that the maximum score per judge totals 41 points. (Look at the structure of the Contest Evaluation Sheet if this is unclear.)

[Poetryoutloud.org](http://Poetryoutloud.org) has a [modifiable spreadsheet](#) you may use to tally the results. We recommend using two computers to duplicate the data entry. That way if something goes wrong with one computer you will have a backup. It also allows you to cross check that all scores have been input correctly.

Arrange a cue so the host knows when judges are ready for the next recitation. (At the National Finals, we use radio headsets to let the host handler know that the score sheets have all been collected, but at smaller venues a wave or other signal may do.)

**Awards Ceremony:** Bring in VIPs to help hand out the awards and take lots of pictures. These photo ops will be perfect for agency newsletters, press releases, and other program promotion. You may want to hand out certificates or plaques to each participant and then something extra to the champion and first runner-up.

We do not recommend sharing contest evaluation sheets directly with students after the competition. Although some students may ask for evaluation sheets, it's best to provide contextualized, non-attributed comments a couple days after the competition.

## **AWARDS AT STATE FINALS**

Each state champion will receive \$200 and an all-expenses-paid trip to Washington, DC, to compete at the National Finals. The state champion's school will receive a \$500 stipend for the purchase of poetry materials. The first runner-up in each state will receive \$100; his or her school will receive \$200 for the purchase of poetry materials.

Prize payment forms for the winner, runner-up, and their schools will be made available on the Poetry Out Loud (POL) website in the [password-protected "State Partners" section of poetryoutloud.org](#). Students and representatives of their schools should be given the prize payment form immediately after the state competition. They will need to email or fax the completed form to the Poetry Foundation to claim their award.

*All awards are paid directly by the Poetry Foundation. Awards from the Poetry Foundation will be made in the form of lump sum cash payouts, reportable to the IRS. Tax liabilities are the sole responsibility of the winners and their families.*

## 12. Strategies for a Successful State Final

A successful state final event capitalizes on the drama of the competition. The main event—the student recitations themselves—provides an afternoon or evening spent with wonderful poems as well as some amazing performances. Don't worry if two students recite the same poem—it gives the audience an opportunity to hear two unique interpretations of the same work.

As with a poetry reading, audiences need a break in the rhythm of the event to absorb performances. Judges need time to score the recitations. Don't spend too much time on introductions, but have a lively emcee to keep the audience engaged. An intermission or time between recitations is also a wonderful opportunity to introduce local musical talent.

We've collected many great ideas from Poetry Out Loud organizers about their state finals. Here are a few highlights:

- The state poet laureate serves as emcee, lead judge and/or recites his or her own poems during scoring breaks.
- Regional and state finals include an original poetry competition in addition to the Poetry Out Loud recitation competition.
- The competition is held in partnership with a local university, with a full day of poetry-related activities on campus.
- At the state finals, school champions will be given a tour of the presidential library and will be invited to attend the state literary festival.
- State final features student performances by youth arts groups.
- A partner theater company, state poet laureate, and/or former state champion will provide coaching to the new state champion before the National Finals.
- Advanced student photographer is hired to capture state finals to fulfill a class requirement.
- A local artist designs state champion and runner-up trophies in addition to a "traveling trophy" that resides at the state champion's school until next year's state finals.
- Students and chaperones are provided free tickets to see a ballet, a concert, or any other local, cultural event taking place during the regional and/or state finals.

## **PROMOTING POETRY OUT LOUD**

Your state finals competition provides a great opportunity to reach out not only to media, but also to potential partners, teachers, local and state politicians, and the community. Nothing draws people in like watching student performances at the state finals. Create a broad invitation list, and personalize invitations when possible. Advertise your event through listservs and other forms of communication that target your desired audiences.

### **PR TOOLKIT**

We have developed [an online public relations toolkit](#) to help you promote your Poetry Out Loud program. Be sure to consult this toolkit when thinking about promoting your program from recruitment through your state finals. This toolkit includes:

- Tips on media outreach for every phase of the program
- Sample press materials for school-level to state-level contests
- Social media tactics for schools and state arts agencies
- Media FAQs
- Talking points about Poetry Out Loud

## **FAQs—STATE FINAL**

### **Some state competitions use microphones, some do not. Is this fair to competitors?**

Since competitions take place in a wide array of venues, in some cases there is a need for amplification at state final competitions, but at others there isn't. The National Finals will always be held at a large venue and students will always be standing behind a floor microphone. Students should be aware that there will be a microphone at the National Finals—we mention it in the materials we send out to them beforehand. We also give students a chance to try out the microphone at the National Finals venue before the competition begins.

### **We'd like to partner with a TV station to broadcast our finals. Do we have permission to broadcast the poems through our participation in Poetry Out Loud?**

The Poetry Foundation has negotiated rights for all poems to appear on the Poetry Out Loud website and anthology. No blanket permission has been negotiated for the poems to appear elsewhere; however, Poetry Foundation has obtained one time (not archival) broadcast rights for many of the poems in the current anthology. You may have your broadcast partner contact the Poetry Foundation for contacts to seek permission to broadcast poems or to check if your student's poem already has broadcast rights secured. Remember, all poems published before 1923 are in the public domain and you are free to broadcast those. At the state and national competition, Poetry Out Loud requires that at least one poem each student recites was written before the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

# 13. Inclusivity & Accessibility

The National Endowment for the Arts and the Poetry Foundation are committed to the inclusivity of Poetry Out Loud. Accessibility is considered at all levels, from the development of program materials to the planning of competitions.

Poetry Out Loud must not exclude or limit student participation based on race, color, religion, national origin, sex, or disability in compliance with federal law and regulations, in terms of both facilities and programs. For more information, please contact the NEA and see the NEA website: <http://arts.gov/civil-rights-office/what-we-do>.

## **ACCESSIBILITY AWARENESS**

Each state arts agency also has an accessibility coordinator who may be helpful. They can be a great resource and can also point you in the direction of other experts in the field, as needed. A list of SAA accessibility coordinators can be found on the NEA website: <http://arts.gov/accessibility/accessibility-resources/state-arts-agency-and-regional-arts-organizations>

Other useful resources include: [Design for Accessibility: A Cultural Administrator's Handbook](#): (esp. chapters 7 and 9) provides specific guidance on how to make cultural events accessible; [VSA](#) staff at state and national offices work with arts and accessibility issues every day; your [State Vocational Rehabilitation Agency](#) might also be helpful in providing insight about appropriate accommodations if a student or their advocate is unclear about what is needed; and make sure you carefully review the [Poetry Out Loud Accessibility Checklist – Venue & Event Promotion](#).

## **MAKING YOUR POETRY OUT LOUD PROGRAM ACCESSIBLE**

To ensure that a student's needs are considered for Poetry Out Loud, we recommend the following process at all levels of competition:

- **Engage in an interactive process.** Don't assume that you know what a student may or may not need in terms of accessibility—instead, start a conversation with the student and/or his or her advocate. Their input will ensure that everyone is comfortable with the process and its outcome.
- **Level the playing field.** Use the information you gleaned from the interactive process to make accommodations that will enable each student to deliver their best performance. Provide accommodations that seem appropriate and

reasonable. Accommodations might include a microphone for a student whose voice may be unclear or quiet, or the opportunity to sit during the recitation for a student who cannot comfortably stand for a length of time.

- **Brief your judges by providing general guidance on accessibility.** The interactive process involving students and their parents/guardians/advocates may also provide valuable insight with respect to educating the judges on accessibility and disability. There may be instances in which students would like their disability disclosed to the judges and other instances in which they would not. Please disclose only what the students and his/her parent/guardian would like the judges to know, if anything. In some cases, a judge might request additional information about how a student's disability may impact his/her recitation. Before discussing this with the judges, please confer with the student and his/her parent/guardian to determine the best approach to this inquiry.
- **Set high expectations for every student.** Remind your judges that lowering their expectations for a student with a disability does a disservice to that student and his or her competitors. All students should be judged fairly against the POL evaluation criteria.

## **AMERICAN SIGN LANGUAGE (ASL) AND POETRY OUT LOUD**

Poetry Out Loud was piloted at a school for the deaf during the 2008-09 school year, providing us the framework to create a national model for including deaf and hard-of-hearing students in Poetry Out Loud. You can find an ASL supplement to the POL Teacher's Guide, Judge's Guide, and Organizer's Guide on poetryoutloud.org here: <https://www.poetryoutloud.org/teaching-resources/accessibility>

## **ACCESSIBILITY ACCOMMODATIONS AT STATE AND NATIONAL FINALS**

A school champion who requires any accommodations in order to compete at the regional or state finals should notify the state Poetry Out Loud coordinator immediately upon being selected as school champion.

A state champion who requires any accommodations in order to compete in the National Finals should notify the NEA Poetry Out Loud Program Manager immediately upon being selected as state champion.

## 14. Credits and Acknowledgments

We gratefully acknowledge all state arts agencies, students, and teachers for their assistance in helping us shape this guide. We also acknowledge NEA's Accessibility and Public Affairs staff for their recommendations and revisions.

We appreciate your feedback to improve this guide. Please send comments to [poetryoutloud@arts.gov](mailto:poetryoutloud@arts.gov).



Established by Congress in 1965, the **National Endowment for the Arts** (NEA) is the independent federal agency whose funding and support gives Americans the opportunity to participate in the arts,

exercise their imaginations, and develop their creative capacities. Through partnerships with state arts agencies, local leaders, other federal agencies, and the philanthropic sector, the NEA supports arts learning, affirms and celebrates America's rich and diverse cultural heritage, and extends its work to promote equal access to the arts in every community across America. Visit [arts.gov](http://arts.gov) to learn more about the NEA.



The **Poetry Foundation**, publisher of *Poetry* magazine, is an independent literary organization committed to a vigorous presence for poetry in our culture. It exists to discover and celebrate the best poetry and to place it before the largest possible audience. The Poetry Foundation seeks to be a leader in shaping a receptive climate for poetry by developing new audiences, creating new avenues for delivery, and encouraging new kinds of poetry through innovative partnerships, prizes, and programs.

*Poetry Out Loud: National Recitation Contest is a partnership of the National Endowment for the Arts, the Poetry Foundation, and the State and Jurisdictional Arts Agencies of the United States.*