

Division Superintendents' Handbook

National Model Railroad Association



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Executive Summary

Division Superintendents' Handbook

Even the most dedicated, organized, and conscientious, leader will not maximize his/her value if working in a vacuum. In order to help fill that vacuum, this Handbook will provide some tips on “what to do” for those serving on a Division’s Leadership Team. These tips are gathered from successful Division’s around the NMRA.

The National Model Railroad Association is a three tiered organization. The National Organization is sub-divided into Regions, and those Regions are in turn sub-divided into Divisions. It is at the Division level that interactions take place between an individual member and the entire NMRA organization. To utilize an often used term, it is at the Division level that the “tires meet the road”. This Handbook, with practices gleaned from many successful Divisions around the Organization, is designed to help those in leadership positions at the Division level as they do their jobs.

As a reader looks at the Handbook, it can look overwhelming. Keep in mind that there are some items in the document that are put there for future reference and will not immediately apply to all divisions. Running a Mini-Convention or organizing a Regional Convention are prime examples of that. It is also true that many Divisions will not have a large enough pool of volunteers to cover all the suggested appointed positions found in the Handbook. In that case, volunteers will often wear multiple hats. Finally, not every Division, when planning events for their members, will offer the full range of activities outlined in the Handbook. They are included for reference purposes and are examples of activities offered by many successful Divisions.

However, there is a core set of requirements and services that apply to every Division. Those will be outlined in this summary, and more detailed information on each will be found in the body of the Handbook.

Division By-laws

Every Division should operate under a set of by-laws. Those by-laws should be consistent with those of the Region to which the Division belongs, and to the rules and regulations of the NMRA. Finally those by-laws should be readily available for reading by the Division’s members.

Implementation of NMRA and Region Programs

Although the NMRA is multi-tiered, it is one organization. Therefore it is expected that Divisions will implement programs developed by their Region or by the National Organization. The Achievement Program is a good example of such a Program.

Communication

Every Division should have an effective method of communication with its members. Such communication should occur with enough frequency that the membership knows that the Division is 'alive and well'.

Every Division should also maintain communication with its Region and with the National Organization. One example is prompt responses by Divisions to requests for information by their Region or the NMRA.

Recruitment and Retention

Every Division should have a clear plan for recruiting new members and retaining those that they have. As was stated above, it is at the Division level that most interactions between an individual member and the NMRA occur. It is those local interactions that determine a members' view of the entire organization.

Programs for Members

Running programs for its members is a core responsibility for local Divisions. In any Division, only a few members will attend the National Convention, and only a few more will attend their Regional Convention. To many Division members, participation in programs run by their Division is how they remain active in the Organization. This handbook outlines a variety of programs to offer its members from which a Division can choose.

Hopefully this handbook will prove helpful to those in leadership positions at the Division level. The Handbook will be reviewed and revised as the need arises, and any revisions will be reported through the RAC Director and NMRA publications.

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I. Introduction

This sample Division Superintendents' Handbook has been created in an effort to assist people in leadership positions in the various NMRA Divisions. It reflects best practices from Divisions around the NMRA and incorporates current NMRA policies which impact upon operations of all Divisions.

Additional detailed examples of Division Superintendent Handbooks can be found on several Region websites, including those of the PNR and SER. Feel free to peruse those examples for further information on running a Division.

Many thanks to the PNR and SER for providing copies of their work as a resource in developing this sample Handbook.

Note: Around the NMRA, many Divisions call their head elected official “Superintendent” and others refer to that official as “President”. In this sample Handbook the term Superintendent is used.

Before getting into specific details, here are a few ‘broad strokes’ to help members thinking of entering leadership positions at the Division level and wondering what that involves.

Those running a Division should:

- Conduct all Division business consistent with NMRA and their Region’s rules and regulations and the Division’s by-laws.
- Implement NMRA and Region programs.
- Communicate effectively with all Division members
- Respond promptly when receiving requests for information from their Region or from the National Organization.
- Develop an effective recruitment and retention program
- Organize regularly scheduled events for Division members to attend.

This Guidebook includes “best practices” and “things to remember” that have been found to be successful for many activities, situations, and locations. It serves as a guide for a Division to work closely with their Region in a common effort to benefit the entire membership and to promote model railroading.

A prerequisite to any successful Division is flexibility within overall policies and requirements. To the maximum extent possible, everything done should be informal in terms of events, structure, and general operations. While we need to function in a business-like manner for financial and liability reasons and some consistency, our overall objective is to enjoy model railroading. In addition to desired flexibility is the essential ability of every member of the Division to have an equal voice and to participate in Division leadership and in all Division activities.

The Division and the Division Superintendent play a significant role in the model railroad hobby and organization. The first contact with people who have an interest in model railroading usually occurs at the Division level. The officers of the Division should possess a sincere interest in promoting the hobby, encouraging any visitors to consider NMRA membership and to enjoy the challenges and fun the hobby has to offer. The Superintendent and all Division officers should read and become familiar with the NMRA Regulations, NMRA Executive Handbook, their Region by-laws and/or Policy Manual, and their

Division by-laws. A copy of those various documents may usually be obtained from the National/Region/Division websites

II. Division By-Laws

Each Division should have a set of by-laws that define the Division organizational structure and the major policies and procedures for Division operation. Your Division by-laws should be approved by the Division membership. They should be read and understood by all of the Division officers and maintained by the Division Secretary or other appropriate Division official.

Division by-laws must be maintained and followed. One of the major complaints of members is that “if we have rules and regulations, I don’t know what they are, so how do I know if we are following them.” To prevent that situation, Division by-laws must be up-to-date, readily available to all Division members, and reflect the manner in which the Division actually does business.

Divisions may be separately incorporated under the laws of their respective states, provinces, and/or countries. Divisions which are separate corporations, especially those incorporated as or officially recognized as “non-profit” or “not for profit” organizations, must ensure that their by laws are in compliance with the requirements of such designation.

Divisions looking for sample by-Laws can find many examples on other Division websites and in the appendices of the SER and PNR Superintendent Guidebooks referenced above. If additional guidance regarding by-laws is desired or required, Robert’s Rules of Order is the proper reference.

III. Officer Election and Responsibilities

Because Divisions within the NMRA may be separately incorporated under the laws of their respective states, provinces and/or countries a common set of duties and responsibilities is not practical. However, each Division, regardless of legal organizational basis is expected to conform to and be in compliance with the NMRA regulations and their Region’s By-Laws.

The NMRA Regulations require that Division officers **MUST** be members of the NMRA and the Division (physically reside within the Division’s geographic boundary).

A Division shall have no less than two elected officials and the division shall hold no less than one business meeting per year. Officers should be elected by the

division members. The same person may not hold both required elected offices simultaneously. To maintain continuity of administration, Divisions should stagger the terms of officers so that not all are elected at the same time.

The duties of Division officers are as follows:

Superintendent – the Superintendent's responsibility includes the following:

(The specific duties, responsibilities and authorities assigned to individual Division Superintendents should be set forth in the Division Bylaws.)

- Provide positive leadership and direction for the Division
- Serve as the Chief Executive Officer of the Division
- Schedule and preside over Division BOD and General Membership meetings.
- Vote on organizational business only in the event of a tie situation (or as dictated in Division by-laws).

- See that all orders and resolutions of the Board are carried into effect.
- Be responsible for the overall planning and coordination of the organization activities including publicity
- Sign all contracts or other instruments authorized by the BOD.
- Execute all legal documents requiring the signature of the person authorized to represent the membership except where the signing and execution thereof shall expressly be delegated to some other officer or agent by the Board of Directors.
- Keep Division members informed of the activities of the Region Board and NMRA Board of Directors actions and activities
- Maintain appropriate liaison with the Region Superintendent/President and Office Manager to include reporting new Division Officers as soon as they are elected or appointed.
- Respond promptly to all requests for information from their Region and the NMRA.
- Appoint various committee chairpersons and ad hoc committee members as needed. Be a member ex-officio of all committees he/she appoints. Typically the list of chairpersons will include, but not necessarily be limited to:
 - Newsletter Editor
 - Webmaster
 - Membership Chair (Recruiting & Retention)
 - Achievement Program Chair
 - Contest Program Chair
 - Education/Clinic Program Chair
 - Youth Program Chair
 - Nominations Committee Chair

Note: In smaller Divisions, some of these positions can be combined.

Assistant Superintendent - The duties, powers, and obligations of the Vice President shall include but are not limited to:

- Assist the Superintendent and preside at meetings in his/her absence.
- Perform such duties as assigned by the Superintendent

Secretary/Chief Clerk/Office Manager

The administrative requirements of a Division may be better served by the appointment of an Office Manager who is not term limited and who may provide proper administrative continuity for the Division. While the duties of the Secretary to be present at all meetings and to record and report accurate minutes should be reserved to that office, other functions may be assigned elsewhere.

- Maintain the written records and legal records of the Division
- Record and maintain official minutes of all Division Board Meetings and formal meeting of Division membership.
- Maintain the membership records of the Division
- Insure timely correspondence to Division members regarding division activities and matters.
- See that Division events are publicized locally and in both the Region's Newsletter and in the ***NMRA Magazine***.

Treasurer/Paymaster

- Maintain the financial records of the Division.
- Make disbursements of Division funds on behalf of the Division
- Collect and process funds receivable for the Division
- Provide a periodic (not less often than annual) financial report to the directors of the Division and the active Division membership.

Directors (optional) - as appropriate for each Division, one or more Directors may also be elected. The directors serve on the Board of Directors to represent the interests of the membership of the division, to assist in establishment of policies under which the Division will operate, to assist the officers of the Division in planning Division events, and assist in overall management of the Division.

IV. Membership and Dues

Each division has a geographical territory which is determined in accordance with NMRA and their Region's by-laws. Each NMRA member is automatically a member of the Division in whose geographic boundaries the member resides. By

definition and in compliance with NMRA Regulations, every member of a Division must be a member of their Region and the NMRA.

By policy, all NMRA members, regardless of parent region or division, are entitled to attend or participate in any activity of any other Division, except that they may not vote on matters of official Division business or hold an office in the Division. There is no restriction on the opportunity or ability of an NMRA member, not resident within a Division, to volunteer for service within that Division.

Guest attendance privileges may be granted to model railroaders to introduce them to Division, Region, and NMRA activities. However, no one may consistently attend Division activities without becoming an NMRA Member. This is an NMRA policy and is driven by insurance and liability concerns about nonmembers attending officially sanctioned events such as conventions and layout tours or other Division activities. It is also a matter of fairness since the activities of the Division are supported by funds raised by Division members. Currently, the NMRA policy limits a particular guest to three visits in their lifetime..

By NMRA policy, divisions may not charge “dues” for membership. However, the Division Board of Directors may choose to charge fees for specific activities, goods, and services such as:

- Sales of Division-branded items such as patches, pins, shirts, etc.
- Attendance at meets, conventions, tours, open houses
- The cost of production and mailing of a Division publication.

For such activities, the fees will be the same for all NMRA members, regardless of residence.

Divisions that sponsor clinics or other educational seminar type events on a periodic basis may assess a fee for attendees. Such fee would normally be intended to cover facility costs, material cost for the event, general admin costs for the event, and any refreshments that may be offered to attendees. The fee shall be the same for all attendees, except that guests, as defined above, may be admitted at no or reduced cost.

V. Finances and Administration

For divisions that are incorporated under the laws of a state, there may be specific requirements dealing with the maintenance and processing of corporate financial records. Refer to the Articles of Incorporation and the appropriate laws of the state when establishing the fiscal policies and procedures for the Division.

A checking account should be maintained in the name of the Division to hold and disburse Division funds. Two officers should be authorized to have check-signing privileges; however the Treasurer/Paymaster should be the primary keeper of the funds.

Divisions are encouraged to keep files on a yearly basis. Items to be included in the yearly file: the yearly schedule of activities, bank statements/deposit slips/canceled checks, Region reports, meeting minutes and attendance sheets.

Notification of new officers should be provided to the Region's Secretary and/or Office Manager, and the Region's Newsletter editor as quickly as possible after changes occur.

VI. Maintenance of Division Calendar

Across the NMRA, Divisions have events scheduled in many ways: monthly, bi-monthly, quarterly, etc. Whatever the schedule, a calendar showing those events should be created as far in advance as is feasible. At least one official Business Meeting should be scheduled and included on the Calendar. A schedule of meetings of the Division's Board of Directors should also be included. Running a successful Division requires planning, and the District Board should meet several times a year. The calendar should also contain Region and NMRA events such as the Regional and National Conventions.

In establishing the dates for the various Division activities, careful consideration should be given to avoiding conflicts with holidays, Regional and National Conventions, regularly scheduled meetings of other railroad interest groups (such as NRHS), and local train show/sales.

Optional events to be included on the calendar could be nearby OpSig meets, Prototype Modeler Meets, open houses of clubs in the Division, and even events sponsored by adjoining Divisions.

The Division's Calendar of Events should be included in the Division's Newsletter, on the Division's Website, and distributed to their Region's leadership team.

VII. Communication with Membership

A. Website

In this day and age, an organization without an active website almost does not exist. Finding a low cost or no cost location to host a website is much easier now than in the past, particularly for a non-profit organization. Some Regions are now hosting the websites for their Divisions. If you need help finding a host location, contact some fellow Division Superintendents or reach out to the NMRA's IT Department for suggestions.

To get some ideas of what to post to your Division's website, spend some time looking at samples from around the NMRA. Typical Division websites include:

- Welcome to the NMRA!
- Division Name
- Information on Geographical Area served
- Meeting location(s)
- Division Calendar
- Upcoming Event Descriptions
- Names and contact e-mail addresses of the Division's leadership team
- Division By-Laws and Constitution
- Division Newsletter – current and past
- Recent Events
- Past Events
- Photos of members' models/layouts
- Names of Division MMRs and those who earn AP Certificates
- Required Annual Business Meeting Reports
- Achievement Program and contest models of members

Finally, members will only return to visit the Division website if updates are fairly frequent.

B. Newsletter

Not only is a Division newsletter a good means of communicating with the membership, it is a very visible answer to 'what do I get for my membership dollars?' . The newsletter is the primary conveyance of Division information as well as an educational vehicle via its informative articles.

Most Divisions now publish and distribute their newsletters electronically. Some still provide a 'hard copy' alternative. Division Superintendents should take the time to visit other Division websites to view their newsletter to get ideas for their own.

Newsletter content is also important to attract new members and retain existing members. Not only try to keep members informed of upcoming or past events, updates on the Achievement Program, and editorials from the superintendent

and editor, but also try to include items that are not related to NMRA business, such as a modeling article, a regular photo theme, or a prototype article. Otherwise, you risk having the reader disregard the newsletter and never revisit them in the future.

C. E-Mail Communication

A Division that does not have and maintain an up-to-date e-mail list of all of its members is missing a great opportunity for clear and easy communication. Typically, every Division will receive from the NMRA, through their Regions, a current membership roster that includes all of the e-mail addresses that the NMRA has on record. Additionally, Divisions should develop a sign-in sheet for every event that contains a column for e-mail addresses.

Help in using e-mail to communicate with Division membership can be obtained from the NMRA's IT Department.

Many Divisions still have a few members who do not have an e-mail address, so plans for communicating with those members need to be developed at the Division level.

D. Social Media

Although not as prevalent as Division websites and e-mail lists, more and more Divisions are maintaining a Facebook or Twitter account. These are used to post meeting announcements, photos from layout tours, etc. In the future, this may be an approach to communicating with a Division's membership that will grow.

VIII. Recruitment and Retention Program

Many Division Superintendents do not fully understand their roll in the recruitment and retention of members in the NMRA. To many new NMRA members, their local Divisions are the NMRA. If they feel welcomed and participate in exciting activities at the Division level, they are very likely to renew their membership in the NMRA. If that is not the case, they are very likely to drop out after a year or two.

A. Recruitment

Although the NMRA is an International Organization, the recruiting of new membership depends heavily on local Divisions. Successful Divisions

encourage their members to bring guests to Division events and then encourage those guests to join the NMRA. Some Divisions even pay for Rail Pass Memberships for those guests wanting to join (if they qualify for the Rail Pass Membership.)

Other Divisions arrange to have recruiting booths at local train shows and exhibits. (WGH, Greenberg Shows, etc.) Some Divisions have developed recruiting brochures that they distribute to local hobby shops, and still others have utilized local newspapers and cable channels to promote membership in the NMRA.

Division Superintendents should contact their Region's Membership Chairs, visit the NMRA's website, and contact the NMRA's headquarters for additional ideas and help in developing effective recruiting programs. The NMRA can also provide material to hand out at booths that Divisions set up at train shows.

B. Retention

Once a model railroader makes the decision to join the NMRA, the decision to renew his/her membership relies heavily on the efforts of their local Division. Too many times, a new member reports that not a single person ever contacted them during their first year of membership to welcome them to the organization and invite them to a local event. If this is to happen, it must happen at the Division level.

As mentioned above, Division Superintendents should appoint a Membership Chair, one of whose responsibilities is to personally welcome new members to the Division and invite them to the next Division event. Who doesn't respond positively to a personal greeting and invitation?

IX. Division Events - General

The more successful Divisions in NMRA have been those which have tried to extend as many services and benefits as possible to the greatest number of their members.

One way to help accomplish that is to move Division events around the Division geographically in order to help bring the program to the members rather than have members always drive long distances to a 'central' location.

As Division leadership plans, promotes, and finally presents its events, there are several ways to approach it. One way is to have a 'central' Division Event Chair. That Chair and his/her committee plan all the Division's events no matter where

they are held around the Division. Another way to approach the event planning process is to have it decentralized. For instance, the Spring Event might be held in the north-central part of the Division. A member who lives in that area volunteers to organize the event locally. That person can develop a local event committee, or utilize one maintained by the Division. That local chair knows of local establishments that might be available to house the event, local layouts that might be willing to open for layout tours, and local members who might be willing to give a clinic. Centralized or Decentralized planning – both are being used by successful Divisions around the NMRA.

A list of “to do’s” should be maintained with assigned responsibilities for each event. These include providing:

- a computer or slide projector
- a projector screen
- a computer
- extension cords
- coffee
- coffee maker
- Cream and sugar
- snacks
- cups, napkins, and utensils
- a membership roster
- sign-in sheets
- a brief slide show of the agenda
- Materials for “hands-on” clinics
- Layout tour maps
- List of local restaurants
- Door prizes
- Raffle tickets

Regular Division membership activities should be scheduled at least once per quarter during the active Division year. More frequent gatherings, even if the attendance numbers are down, serve to better meld the division into a solid group. Each Division needs to determine its own policy concerning type of activities, frequency, operational year, etc. Some Divisions may operate throughout the entire year, while others may “take the summer off” because of competition from other activities.

Some Divisions have been successful in planning ‘family friendly’ events during the summer. These range from a few members bringing grills to a park or other suitable location for a ‘cook out’ followed by a local prototype tour in the afternoon, to meeting in the ‘back room’ of a local eatery for lunch, followed by an afternoon of layout tours. Spouses and children welcome!

Joint events with neighboring Divisions are a great way to foster new friendships, share the work of planning an event, and boost attendance. It can also be a great way to serve the needs of remote members of your Division who actually live close to the border of another Division. Division Superintendents who develop working relationships with the Superintendents of adjoining Divisions reap great rewards.

Appropriate starting times for meetings, layout open houses, etc. should be determined on the basis of local conditions (e.g., traffic, availability of facilities, member preferences). Similarly, the duration of a clinic should be such as to permit the “scheduled” activities without undue waste of time.

The following is a sample “agenda” for a Division ‘Event’:

- Meet and greet – Social time (Coffee and...)
- Call to order and introduction of guests
- Short business period for announcements, presentation of awards, etc.
- Introduction and presentation of educational program (Clinic(s))
- “Bring and Brag” discussion (Show and Tell)
- Door Prizes and raffle drawings
- Good of the order
- Closure and announcement of next meeting date, location, content
- AP Evaluation/Judging if needed
- (Lunch on your own)
- Afternoon self-guided layout tour (optional)
- Highlights of the next meet

X. Division Events – Content Suggestions

A. Traditional Clinics/Seminar Presentations

Education is a primary purpose of NMRA and the development of educational programs within a Division is instrumental in meeting that purpose. Traditional clinics remain at the center of the NMRA’s Education Program. The education program offers a direct benefit that all can gain from and that all can participate in.

Allotting one to two hours for clinics is appropriate for most ordinary division meets, depending on other items on the schedule. Typically, each clinic should be limited to about 40 - 50 minutes, leaving 10 minutes transition time between clinics. The clinic program should offer a range of subjects to provide something of interest for everyone. Clinics can be of a historical nature, consist of a photo

essay on a given topic, or teach a modeling skill. Each clinic should cover a manageable subject, i.e., not too complex for the time available. Organizers need to ensure that requisite electrical outlets are available for projectors, power tools, etc. to be used by the clinician, and that any special requirements are met (e.g., ventilation if painting or gluing is done).

A **handout sheet** and visual aids are suggested for each clinic. The handout has two purposes. First, it facilitates note taking and gives the attendees a record of the clinic to take home. Second, it usually ensures that the clinic presenter is better prepared. Remind each presenter that a clinic **with a handout** is worth Author points in the NMRA Achievement Program. Clinic presenters can also earn credit towards their Volunteer Certificate in the AP Program.

The NMRA offers a tremendous resource for Regions and Division looking for clinics to offer their members. It is called the EduTRAIN® Program and is found in the Members-Only side of the NMRA website. It contains clinics in PowerPoint format, with detailed presenter notes. All it requires is a person who is comfortable speaking in public to download the PowerPoint Presentation, familiarize themselves with the notes, and then present the clinic.

B. 'Works in Progress' Clinics

If space allows, the 'Works in Progress' (WIP) format is a nice alternative to the 'presenter standing in front of the audience' format. The WIP format has the presenter sitting at a table working on a project while explaining what he/she is doing to the attendees sitting around the table. The subjects of a WIP approach should be techniques that can be demonstrated in 20-25 minutes. After that time period, attendees are given 5 minutes to switch to another table, while the presenters are given a few minutes to set up their material to make the presentation to a new group of attendees.

The number of presenters (tables) needed depends on the expected attendance at the event. If you get 20-30 members attending, 3-4 tables would suffice. If you expect 60 members, you would need 6-7 setups. Two tables can be pushed together to accommodate up to 10-12 viewers. After that, the 'audience' gets too large for everyone to see and have time to interact with the presenter.

Often, it is easier to get clinicians to present a topic in this format than it is to get them to stand alone in front of a group.

There are many topics that lend themselves to a WIP format. If it is a modeling technique that can be demonstrated in 20-25 minutes, it should work. Examples included weathering models (in all of its forms), applying decals or dry transfers, carving plaster walls, coloring plaster walls, and many, many more.

C. 'Make and Take' Clinics

'Make and Take' clinics are a nice change of pace. In this type of clinic, attendees actually work on a model or modeling technique and get to bring the end product home with them.

Prior communication for this type of clinic is a must. Attendees often are asked to bring their own tools/supplies to the event. Even so, the presenter should have extra tools and supplies on hand in case some attendees forget to bring their own. A fee might be charged to purchase a small kit or supplies.

One way this type of clinic is offered is as an alternative to layout tours in an afternoon session. After the morning schedule and lunch, attendees can choose to attend the Make and Take Clinic, while others opt to take the layout tour.

Examples of this type of clinic might include figure painting, making signs, constructing modular framework, building simple structures, weathering rolling stock, and similar activities.

D. 'Bring and Brag' Discussion

There are many members who will not get involved in either contests or the Achievement Program. However, they do build models, weather models, or add details to models, etc. And, they are willing to share their work with fellow Division members in an informal setting. Adding a 'Bring and Brag' segment to a Division event capitalizes on this idea.

Simply invite members to bring a model along to the next meet and have them stand and discuss the model for a few minutes. Provide a table for members to display their model(s) through out the event. You will be surprised how quickly this idea catches on and becomes an integral part of every Division event.

Until it catches on, the Division's leadership team might have to bring their own models for a few meets and/or directly encourage a member to bring a model or two. An empty 'Bring and Brag' table will not grow the program.

E. AP Program Presentations and Evaluations

Participation in the NMRA Achievement Program (AP) is a primary benefit of membership and the health of the AP within a Division depends upon the support and promotion of the Division's leadership team.

Whenever possible, Division events should include a short reminder about AP and perhaps review the requirements for a particular certificate. When possible AP judges should be available at the meet to complete judging on models brought to the meet for that purpose. AP awards, including both Merit Awards and AP Certificates should be presented at the appropriate event and whenever possible by the Division Superintendent and/or AP Chair. AP activity and AP progress of members should be prominently presented in the Division newsletter. In short, the Achievement Program is a primary benefit of membership and a key part of the NMRA Education Program. It should be a highly visible and an active part of the Division's operations.

F. Local Model Contests

Model contests come in several versions and it is important to understand the differences and the impact on the conduct of a contest. A formal full up contest under NMRA Contest regulations requires a great deal of planning and positive control for correct execution. Inherent in a NMRA contest is the requirement to complete judging by those qualified as NMRA contest judges and the use of NMRA standards for the judging process. The NMRA contest also identifies categories in which models may be entered and judged. The NMRA contest has no outside or public input on determination of contest standing. This type of formal NMRA Model Contest is not commonly held at a one-day Division event. Instead there is another alternative.

A more relaxed contest type is the People's Choice contest in which each attendee or authorized visitor receives a ballot and may vote for one model in each category offered as well as any special recognition such as "Best of Show", "Best Paint Job", "Most Unique" or other such qualifier. People's Choice contests are not limited in categories for entrants and may even include "special" categories established by the Division. For example some Divisions have a standing "module" contest in which an entry must fit on (or in) the module dimensions specified for that year or must represent a specific theme for that contest. Other Divisions chose a different focus for a People's Choice Contest for each event – this event it will be Steam Locomotives, next event 'On-Line Structures', etc. People's Choice contests are very popular for shows open to the public. Such a contest is enhanced if the winner(s) receive at least a framed computer generated certificate or a gift certificate from a local hobby shop.

G. Layout Tours

Layout tours, of either club layouts or privately owned layouts, are popular activities at all levels of the NMRA. A layout tour can be the entire focus of a Division event, or be an afternoon activity after a morning of clinics, AP evaluation, etc. On occasion, it might be possible to arrange an operating

session at a home or club layout which will be of interest to many Division members.

Some layouts can be a great draw for attendance at a Division event. The key is to promote the inclusion of layouts in all announcements of the event. Although a list of the layouts on the tour and some teaser photos is good advertising, the actual layout tour maps and/or layout addresses should not be distributed until a member attends the Division event.

The Division should provide standard recognizable signs such as cross bucks or other highly visible markers to assist division members in finding the layout location. Maps depicting the layout location and driving directions from a common start point should be available. The host should clearly indicate where visitors should park (and not park if that is a neighborhood issue) and he/she would like visitors to enter the house. It is also helpful if the host could provide a handout that could be passed out at the door. The handout might include a layout plan, plus a brief description of the layout and the thinking that went into its design.

Other support that the Division might lend a layout owner is to provide help in operating the layout while the host greets the visitors, or personnel to help monitor how many visitors are in the layout area at a given time, if space is limited.

Within two weeks of the layout tour's completion, the Superintendent should send a thank-you letter or a note of appreciation to the layout tour host. A write-up of the tour and pictures of the open house and the layout should be featured in the Division newsletter. If the layout is appropriate for award of a Golden Spike Award and one has not been issued, the Division AP Chair and/or Superintendent should initiate the application and make sure the award is issued and presented to the host. In addition, the AP Chair should make sure that credit is assigned to all those who supported the layout tour as Association Volunteer credit. If the tour includes an operating session, the AP Chair should make sure that appropriate instructions and forms are provided to permit the recording of tasks and time spent in support of the Chief Dispatcher AP certificate.

H. Prototype Tours

If a Division has an appropriate tour destination within their boundaries or reasonably close to their boundaries, it might be possible to schedule a prototype tour as either the focus of a Division meet or as an afternoon component of a meet. If the destination is just outside your Division's boundaries and resides in

the neighboring Division, it would be nice to contact that Division Superintendent and extend an invitation for that Division to join in the event.

Examples of tour destinations might be railroad yards and facilities, rapid rail facilities, trolley museums, railroad museums, tourist railroads, research facilities, manufacturer's facilities, industries with rail service, etc.

One or more of the following challenges may have to be addressed:

- Admission fees.
- Bus transportation and, therefore, some sort of fee.
- Limits on the number of attendees or physical requirements for attendees
- Nature of activities at the site to be visited.
- Possibilities for combining the tour with other activities.

It is usually necessary to make arrangements well in advance (months to a year is most common). Be sure to find out all the requirements, such as age limits, liability releases, hard hats, sturdy shoes, photography restrictions, parking arrangements, etc. Of necessity, some tours limit the number of attendees. If this is the case, make sure you have a clear process for determining who gets to attend and make that process clear from the start. (First come, first served, etc.) In some cases, several groups spread over different periods of time on the same day can be arranged to accommodate the largest number of people. Ensure that attendees are impressed with safety and the need to stay together.

XI. Mini-Conventions

Some geographically large Divisions have difficulty arranging several events a year that can draw members from around their Division. Although they may offer several events at different locations that will draw members who live locally, they offer one large 'Mini-Convention' or 'Mini-Meet' during the year that attempts to draw attendance from their entire Division.

Mini-Meets or Mini-conventions held by a Division are generally scheduled on a Saturday or a Friday Night and the following Saturday. They may feature, a number of clinics, modular displays, contests and the like, and will normally be better attended than the regular monthly activities.

Planning - The mini-convention schedule should be completed at least six months prior to the event date. That will allow clinic presenters adequate time to prepare their presentations and to allow sufficient time for publicizing the events in Division and Region publications and through local hobby shops and local media.

Meeting Location - The meeting location for mini-conventions should be large enough to accommodate a substantial number of attendees and be near to hotels/motels for those who will travel a distance and have to stay overnight. It should have areas or rooms for clinics/films, layout displays, model contests/displays, refreshments/general discussion, and registration. Optional space may be provided for modular operations, vendor literature, vendor sales, etc. depending upon policies for the use of the facility. Churches and school buildings can often be used for nominal rental or donations. There should be adequate parking, clearly posted signs and, if possible, an intercom/public address system or bulletin board available to keep attendees informed of activities within the mini-convention. Remember to verify the planned availability, use and access to the meeting location several days prior to the meet. The facility should be open for set-up at least two hours before the beginning of the meet.

Registration Fee - A registration fee may be charged to cover the cost of the facilities, prizes, and other expenses. The Division Board should try to determine a break-even point well in advance to establish this fee. Clinic presenters may be exempt from paying registration but that is up to the discretion of the Division.

Refreshments - This area may be handled by the Division or by a group from the host facility, with any profits in the latter situation going to that group

Supplies for a Division Mini-Meet/Mini- Convention

Registration support - The supplies necessary to successfully complete efficient registration of attendees include:

- A table(s)
- Completed pre-registration list
- Registration forms (name and address)
- Name badges (not necessary for those having NMRA, region or club badges)
- Door prize tickets
- Agenda packet with event information for each registrant
- Paper, pens, and masking tape; money box; and tape or tacks (if allowed) for posting signs
- NMRA membership forms and RAIL PASS Forms
- Current Division roster of members (alphabetical order)

Clinic support - Supplies required to support clinic presentations may include: (this list should be verified by direct contact with each presenter)

- Slide projector, overhead projector, and/or computer projector;
- Projection screens
- Laptop computer for projectors
- Spare projector bulbs; projector table;
- Extension cords and power strips;

- Set-up tables for clinic materials

Displays and contests - Supplies required for putting on successful displays and contests include:

- Tables (covered with paper or a cloth);
- Good lighting;
- Contest forms;
- Contest category signs;
- Slips of paper for ballots (if a popular vote method is used) and a ballot box.
- “Warning, Do not touch models” and other appropriate signs

Greeting and identification - The Officers of the Division should have prominent name tags, be positioned **near** the Registration area, and make it a point to greet as many attendees as possible, particularly new members or those attending a first event. Nothing discourages a new member faster than seeing a number of cliques formed around him from which he or she is excluded. It is the job of Division Officers to make every attendee feel welcome and important to the organization.

XII. Hosting Regional Conventions

Most Regions depend on their Divisions to host the Regional Convention – either alone, or in partnership with another Division. Any Division Superintendent should consult with the Regional leadership to see the practice in their Region.

Most Regions have a Convention Chair who is available to assist Divisions with information, advice, and guidance for the planning, procedures, and steps required for a successful regional convention. Most Regions also have a Convention Handbook which spells out the responsibilities of the host Division, and the responsibilities of the Region. This handbook is normally available through a link on the Region Website.

Conventions are designed for the betterment of the hobby through clinics, tours, and general fellowship, and can serve as a showcase for local layouts, prototype facilities, and clinics. There are, to be sure, certain challenges in hosting a convention, such as affordable lodging and meeting facilities, availability of high-quality model railroad clubs and home layouts, possible lack of prototype sites, and overall manpower requirements. Many of these can be overcome through assistance of the Region and neighboring Divisions as long as there are local model railroaders who will provide a nucleus for planning.