



A Storytelling Competition
Presented By
The National Speakers Association

Last Story Standing™ 2026 Manual

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Overview & Objectives.

Last Story Standing™ (“LSS”) is a storytelling competition owned and operated by the National Speakers Association and is intended to meet the following objectives:

- To raise awareness and heighten the importance and power of storytelling for professional speakers. In every profession there are specific unique skills that qualify an individual as a “Professional.” In the speaking world, one of those critical skills is Storytelling.
- To increase membership for all National Speakers Association (“NSA”) Chapters. The Chapters can use this event to draw aspiring and professional speakers to participate in this event either as a contestant or a spectator.
- To increase membership for NSA National. NSA will use this event to draw aspiring and professional speakers to enroll in membership at the National level.
- To increase event attendance for NSA National events (in-person/virtual).

NSA will use this event to drive ticket sales for in-person and virtual events. This adds a new, exciting, and anticipated yearly aspect to the conference.

- To create a sustainable and recurring revenue source for NSA Chapters.
- To create a sustainable and profitable revenue source for NSA National.

Structure & Format.

NSA National will oversee and manage the competition in its entirety. All official competition communications will be managed by NSA National, *except* those specific to local Chapter events.

NSA National provides Chapters with this annual *LSS Manual* to assist in effectively creating and managing their Chapter-Level Competition in accordance with established policies and procedures, but does *not* manage the planning, coordination, production, and/or execution of the Chapter competitions.

The *LSS National Competition Committee* consists of four (4) volunteers, including the Chair. Committee members will serve a one (1) year term. After one year of service, the participation of each Committee Member is at the discretion of the Event Director. The Committee Chair will serve a two (2) year term. After two years of service, continued participation on the LSS Committee is at the discretion of the Event Director.

LSS National Committee members are required to meet the following criteria:

- A Competition Committee member must be an active NSA National member in good standing and either a member of a local Chapter and/or an NSA Community Group.
- A Committee member cannot compete during their term of service.
- Select Regional Judges (in collaboration with NSA National)
- Serve as a Regional Mentor (if selected)

- Attend Influence and serve as a *Panelist* during the National Competition.

Rules & Regulations.

The Competition will operate by three (3) levels of competition: Chapter, Regional, National.

Contestants will be judged at each level on three (3) tracks: *Purpose, Impact & Delivery*.

ELIGIBILITY

This competition is designed for professional-level storytellers. To ensure the competition's integrity, the following designations/ individuals are **not eligible** to compete in this Last Story Standing™ competition.

- **Council of Peers Award for Excellence (CPAE) Recipients.**
- **Million Dollar Speakers Club (MDSG) members.**
- **Last Story Standing™ National Champions.**
- **Chapter Executives and/or Competition Planning/Committee Members.**
- **NSA National Board of Directors.**
- **Chapter membership is required to participate.**
- A ***Chapter Finalist Fee*** paid to each contestant's respective Chapter is required to advance to the Chapter Final competitions. *Fund allocation is subject to Chapter Leaders' discretion and should not exceed \$250.*
- A **one-time \$500 Regional Entry Fee** paid to NSA National is required to participate at the Regional and National levels. This fee covers event-related expenses (virtual and live) for Regional and National-Level Competitions.
- **Story Time Limit: 5 Minutes** – The first word to the last is the timed window. (For more detailed information, please see *the Judging Criteria* below.)
- If a Contestant is *disqualified* for any reason, a reimbursement will not be issued.
- The National Champion is not eligible to compete in the competition in subsequent years - You can only WIN once.
- **All Due Dates and Deadlines, Chapter, Regional and National, are non-negotiable and firm. No exception. Failure to comply with it could result in disqualification.**

- **A contestant can only compete once per year** (one Chapter event only – not multiple Chapter competitions). *This rule is applicable for anyone who is a member of multiple Chapters.*
- **Final scores and Champion selections made by the selected Judging Panel at all levels, including the final vote at the National competition, are conclusive and indisputable.** Regional and National scores will not be revealed following the competitions.
- **A contestant cannot change their primary storyline.** The story used at Chapter-Entry Level must be used at Regional and National Level. *The general story can be enhanced based on feedback/coaching received during Mentor Sessions, but the story at large must remain the same.*

Code of Conduct.

Contestants must adhere to our [Code of Ethics & Professional Behavior](#) throughout the entire LSS competition, including but not limited to: the story topic, language, delivery, and behavior during all forms of participation or representation at any level (Chapter, Regional, National) and on any platform (social media, virtual, interviews, in-person events or other media). Any violation of these policies may result in disqualification from the competition. Participation in the Last Story Standing™ competition at any level confirms agreement and compliance with these policies.

IP Agreement.

By participating in the LSS Competition, each contestant grants and releases to NSA, its successors, assigns, and licensees the right to photograph and record a contestant's story submission at any level (Chapter, Regional and National), including likeness, voice, and verbal statements, on film, videotape, and audiotape (collectively, the "Recording"). Each contestant also grants NSA the right to edit, distribute and/or highlight the Recording in the NSA Digital Vault, alone or as part of a compilation, at its discretion without additional approval. This Agreement does not constitute an affirmative obligation on the part of NSA to distribute the Recording. NSA and its agents are permitted the right to use the Recording, name, likeness, voice, and biographical information and any other information about contestant in connection with the advertising, promotion and public relation efforts relating to the specific presentation dated herein, in all media, now known or hereafter created without any compensation.

Competition Levels & Structure.

Chapter-Level Competitions.

- Chapter participation in this competition is optional. However, **Chapter Membership is required** to compete if a Chapter opts in to participate.
- Chapter Finalists must pay a *Chapter Finalist Fee* to their respective Chapter (\$250 or less; *Actual fee is subject to Chapter Leaders discretion but cannot exceed \$250*).
- Chapters who opt-in to participate must host their event according to the *Rules & Guidelines* and the *Judging Criteria* provided herein to ensure a consistent and cohesive progression to the Regional and National competitions. There are competition format options available below for planning convenience.
- Submission/Entry to Regional Competitions is the responsibility of the Chapter Leader(s) and/or the Chapter Champion. **Notification of Chapter Champion selection must be submitted to LSSadmin@nsaspeaker.org by March 31.**

Chapter Competition: Format Options

Advanced Format

The Advanced format is a live, in-person event.

Phase 1: After membership is vetted, the contestant must upload an (up to) 5-minute short story video via the platform used by the respective Chapter (e.g., Vimeo, Dropbox, etc.).

Phase 2: A small Chapter Competition Committee selects up to 10 contestants from the total submissions to compete. (This is a “best practice” policy. It is not required to limit contestants to 10 at the Chapter level.

Phase 3: Competition Day

Day 3 Logistics:

- Each contestant will have 5 minutes to share their story.
- No visuals, instruments, costumes, props, or presentation materials are allowed. There is a title slide only for each contestant.
- Three Elite-level speakers should be selected as the competition judges. Judges will review each contestant's submission and provide coaching feedback and a score using the official LSS Scoring Sheet provided.
- At the end of each contestant's story, the judges will have 5 minutes to finalize their vote and feedback.

NOTE: The *Scoring Sheet* is an excel spreadsheet that is not networked (i.e., there is no “leaderboard” function). Each judge will have their own scoring sheet. The Chapter's LSS Committee will need to assign a committee member to tabulate the scores from each

judge to determine the Chapter Champion. In a tie, the judges will deliberate and determine the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd place winners.

- 1st place winners only will advance to Regional Competition. If the 1st place Winner cannot attend Regionals or chooses not to participate, the open slot defers to the 2nd place Winner, etc.
- Submission/Entry to Regional Competition is the responsibility of the Chapter Leader. (Detailed submission instructions will be sent from NSA National after all Chapter competitions are complete. *Please note: There will be no auditing/vetting by NSA National to mitigate any issues with the finalist selection of each Chapter Champion.*

Essential Format

The Essential format allows a chapter to hold a simple virtual event

- Three (3) Elite-Level speakers will be selected as Judges by Chapter Leadership.
- Contestant video submissions will be sent to the selected Judges for review and ranking. Each contestant will receive valuable feedback from the judges via the provided *Scoring Sheet*.
- 1st place winners only will advance to Regional Competition. If the 1st place Winner cannot attend Regionals or chooses not to participate, the open slot defers to the 2nd place Winner, etc.
- Submission/Entry to Regional Competition is the responsibility of the Chapter Leader. (Detailed submission instructions will be sent from NSA National after all Chapter competitions are complete. *Please note: There will be no auditing/vetting by NSA National to mitigate any issues with the finalist selection of each Chapter Champion.*

Regional Competitions.

- Regional Competitions are a virtual process managed by NSA National.
- Regions are defined as follows:

Region One: NSA Northwest; NSA Mountain West; NSA Northern California; NSA SoCal; NSA Oregon; NSA Las Vegas; NSA Colorado; NSA Arizona; NSA New Mexico, NSA Hawaii, BNSA

Region Two: NSA Minnesota; NSA Kansas City; NSA Illinois; NSA Michigan; NSA Wisconsin; NSA St. Louis; NSA North Texas; NSA Houston; NSA Austin; NSA Kentucky; NSA New Orleans

Region Three: NSA New England; NSA New York; NSA Philadelphia; NSA Pittsburgh; NSA Carolinas; NSA Virginia; NSA DC; NSA Ohio; NSA Georgia; NSA FSA; NSA Central Florida

- Chapter Champions wanting to participate at the Regional-level competition will be required to pay a one-time \$500 Regional Entry Fee and submit their winning video to NSA National. **Note: It is the Chapter and Chapter Champion's responsibility to notify NSA National after a Chapter Champion is identified. Notification must be sent to LSSadmin@nsaspeaker.org by March 31st. The Regional Entry Fee and Video must be received no later than April 11th. Failure to submit by the deadline may result in disqualification. See FAQs below for more details.**
- After a Regional Contestant pays their entry fee and submits their entry video, they will be assigned a Regional Mentor. The Regional Mentor will provide the Contestant with constructive feedback and instructions on how to improve their story. The Contestant may then re-record their video submission if they choose to submit to National no later than May 16, 5pm CST. If they choose to use their initial submission, it will need to be submitted a 2nd time.
- Each Region, comprised of three (3) Regional Judges, will review their assigned Contestants' video submissions, and submit their scores via the official *LSS Scoring Sheet* provided by the LSS Admin Team. *The identities of the Regional Judges are confidential and will not be released.*
- The Top 3 Finalists will then advance to the National-Level Competition.

National Competition.

- The National Competition will be LIVE on the main stage at Influence! **National Finalists must physically be in attendance for the National Competition at Influence.** If not present as a paid attendee, one Guest Pass for the Finalist will be provided for the day of the Competition only. *Virtual participation at the National Competition is not permitted. (I.e., "zooming/streaming in" is not allowed).* **Note:** If a Regional Contestant purchases an Influence ticket and then does not advance to Nationals *and* chooses not to attend, a full refund for purchase will be provided.
- The National Panelists will provide constructive & positive feedback on the stage. The AUDIENCE will then vote for their Top Finalist via a digital voting poll. A break will commence deliberations. The National Champion will be announced upon return to the General Session.
- All National Finalists will receive: A National Runner-Up Trophy, NSA Website mentions, Elite-Level Mentor sessions, Main Stage Recording & Photos, NSA email & social media recognition, and Main Stage exposure.

- The National Champion will receive a LSS National Champion Trophy in addition to the above prizes.

Judging Criteria.

Please strictly adhere to these criteria while evaluating each contestant. *There can only be one Champion per Chapter and one Champion per Region.* Thus, your evaluations and scoring must be as accurate as possible.

The *Judging Criteria* herein applies to any level of the competition (Chapter, Regional & National). Please provide guidance and feedback to contestants with these criteria in mind. *Advice in other areas is permitted, but feedback specific to these criteria will be crucial to their success in the competition.*

Scoring Categories.

Purpose: The story's ability to reveal, and communicate a clear lesson, point, or action step that an audience member could leverage.

Impact: How well the story was crafted and structured to entertain, educate, and motivate.

Delivery: The contestant's ability to deliver the story and employ professional techniques including eye contact, vocal tone, and body language.

Rules & General Assumptions.

Story Time Limit: 5 Minutes – The first word to the last is the timed window.

- This does *not* include their introduction. Introductions should not exceed 30 sec.
- Contestants cannot ask for time to restart and/or start over.
- Stories that exceed the 5-minute time limit will be disqualified.
- The contestant must tell ONE story with a beginning, middle, and end.
- The story should have ONE theme and ONE outcome.
- It should provide a purpose for telling the story with a call to action.
- This should not be a TED-style talk - it must be ONE STORY.
- The contestant must use their voice only- *no Instruments, no props, no costumes, physical examples, or additional elements are allowed.* These will be considered distractions and negatively impact the score.
- The contestant can use their voice in any way, but the story cannot be a SONG in its entirety.

How To Score.

Each judge will have access to the official *LSS Scoring Sheet* (either Excel or Google Sheet) that will list the name of the contestant and scoring menus that range from **0 to 10** (0 = Poor; 10 = Excellent). Judges will score the contestant and their story by the categories provided in the *Scoring Sheet*.

Note: There is a field for each judge to provide constructive feedback to each contestant. This feedback is important because it is a major expectation that they paid for as a Finalist. It is also invaluable to the contestant for improvement and development, so please be *tactfully honest and fair*. This feedback should not be shared with the contestant until *after* the competition.

Judging Etiquette

The Chapter and Regional Judges are encouraged to deliberate privately, separate from contestants whenever possible. While immediate feedback is appreciated by contestants and audiences, it can create timing and fairness issues for future contestants who might benefit from hearing that feedback. We recommend withholding all feedback until the champion is selected. Judges should take detailed notes for each contestant, which will be shared privately after the event. This feedback is a valuable reward for participating in the competition.

Backup Judge

A backup judge should be designated in case of an emergency where a selected judge cannot attend. Ensure that the backup judge is included in all communications regarding judging. Since the need for a replacement may arise quickly, the backup judge must be fully prepared to step in before the event.

FAQs.

Regional Finalists: Entry Process & Submission.

- Instructions will be provided to the Regional Finalist upon confirmed entry to the Regional Competition. *That is, a Chapter Champion who submits their Regional Entry Fee and Video to NSA National by the predetermined due date will then become a "Regional Finalist" and will then be provided instructions for the next steps.* Regional video submissions and entry fees must be received by the predetermined due date, or the contestant will be subject to disqualification. (See *LSS Timeline* for exact dates.

Mentors.

- Mentors are assigned by the LSS Admin Team on a first-come/first-serve basis. Note: *The sooner a Regional Entry (incl. payment) is submitted, the sooner the assignment.*
- Special requests for assignments to specific Mentors are not permitted. "Reassignment" to a different Mentor will only be permitted if a significant and ethical reason exists and is at the discretion of the LSS Admin Team.

Can we use a timing device for the speaker to stay on time?

Yes

How much time over the five minutes limit disqualifies a contestant? Zero. From the contestant's FIRST WORD to LAST WORD – the time allotted is 5 minutes. (Introductions, VOGs/Standing Ovations, etc. do not count toward the time allotment and do not disqualify).
NOTE: Contestants need to be notified they cannot ask for time to restart and/or to start over.

What is the date for videos to be submitted for the regional levels?

The Regional Competition process begins April 1st each year. Regional Contestants must submit their entries/pay the fee *no later than April 11, 5:00pm CST.*

Note: Regional entries are allowed as soon as identified by their respective Chapters. *For example*, if a Chapter determines their Champion on March 10th, they can submit their Regional Entry then, but no later than April 11th, 5:00pm CST.

Who pays the \$250 Chapter Fee and the \$500 Regional Entry Fee, the member, or the chapter?

A Chapter Finalist should pay a Chapter Finalist Fee *no greater than* \$250 Fee to the Chapter. The purpose of this fee is to cover all costs related to the chapter's competition, including trophies and awards. It is also intended to help subsidize the *Regional Entry Fee*.

The *Regional Entry Fee* can be paid by any person or entity. Thus, the suggestion for Chapters to allocate some of the "Chapter Finalist Fee" funds toward their Champion's *Regional Entry Fee*. However, NSA National will not mitigate or manage who pays the Fee.

Fundraising any expenses related to a Chapter's Last Story Standing™ contest and/or Regional Contestant's entry fee is permitted and is the responsibility of the Chapter.

In the case of a tie between two contestants, how is the tie broken? Can we have a tie-breaking judge?

In the event of a tie, the Judges will deliberate *in private* to determine which contestant advances to 1st place and which contestant remains in 2nd place. (That is why there should be 3 judges. If the scores end up the same, a 2 to 1 vote will break the tie.