**WHERE DO I START?**

There are different ways to put together a team: some teams are selected by tryouts, some accept all students who show an interest at a general meeting and go from there, and some create teams on a first come, first serve basis. Some coaches have one team; some have two or more. It's what you are comfortable doing. All of this will vary from membership to membership. How you put together your team(s) will depend upon what you think you can do as well as what your district allows.

Teams consist of a maximum of seven (7) students. You should have a minimum of five (5) students. Be sure before you start that each potential team member is committed to the **time** and **effort** which will be needed. Teams should consist of students who offer a diversity of skills and talents. Mixing and matching them can help cover as many different areas as possible in the solution and presentation of the problem. Be upfront about the commitment that participation will take and your expectations.

Have a parent meeting with the team members present to set the tone of what you expect from the team members. Be absolutely clear with the team members and parents about outside assistance, emphasizing the solution belongs to the team. Set rules for the meetings and the team's general behavior. Make these clear to the team members and the parents.

Remember, this is a HANDS-ON PROGRAM FOR THE KIDS and a HANDS-OFF PROGRAM FOR THE ADULTS. The team does ALL the work. The coach is the GUIDE.

**FOR THE SOLUTION AND PRESENTATION:**

All team members actively participate in creating their own solutions to the long-term problem. Up to seven (7) team members can participate in the presentation of the problem at the tournament. Only five (5) team members participate in the spontaneous portion of the competition. The remaining one or two team members can be in the room during the solution of the spontaneous problem, but are not allowed to participate or offer any assistance to the team. Reminder: Have team members do what they do best and encourage others to try something they perceive as difficult.

**HOW DO WE CHOOSE A PROBLEM?**

This varies within your limitations (number of teams competing, skills of team members and coach, areas of interest). The general suggestion is share all the problems with the team, and then have the team members discuss the pros and cons of each. This is a good starting point for teaching how a team listens, makes decisions, and solves problems. The team has the option to change its mind and work on a different problem, but there has to be enough time to solve the problem in time for the competition.

**ONCE I HAVE A TEAM AND A PROBLEM, WHERE DO I START?**

It seems the most logical place to start is to show the team the problems and let them go. For experienced team participants, that may be possible. For new or limited experienced participants, the best place to start is to train them in how to solve problems before letting them jump in. The side benefit to this is if you lose a team member during this process, before they have begun working on the solution to the long-term problem, then you can replace that member without a penalty. Remember, once the problem solution is started, then the team becomes limited to a maximum of seven (7). An Outside Assistance penalty is taken when a team starts with seven members, the team begins to solve the problem, someone drops out and a replacement is added. If a replacement is not added, then there is no penalty.

Teach and review brainstorming. Practice this by presenting an idea and then let them give solutions. Give examples of what would be creative. It's OK here to do because they are not solving the problem.

Do spontaneous problems to get the idea across.

If you have access to video tapes of teams competing in a competition, use them. Show the team the tape, and have them offer suggestions and ideas on what the team could have done differently. Point out what was successful for the team and why.

Continue to prepare them until you think they are ready and they are begging for the problem.

Discuss with the team what constitutes style.

Once the team is ready to address the problem, have the team prepare a folder for each team member and you to insert the following as needed:
Copy of the long-term problem
Calendar of practices
Team notes
Other information pertinent to the solution of the problem


**HOW IS A PROBLEM SET UP?**

The Odyssey of the Mind problems have basic formats which vary slightly between each problem. The basic problem parts are: Introduction, The Problem, Limitations, Site & Set-up & Competition, Scoring, Penalties, Style, Tournament Director..., Team Must Provide, and a Glossary.

**HOW DO I RUN A PRACTICE SESSION?**

The number and length of practice sessions is not set.  It relies upon a number of factors specific to coaches and their teams.  The minimum suggestion is to start with one or two sessions a week for one-and-a-half to two hours.  Add more practice sessions as the team progresses and the need becomes apparent.  Honestly, to expect the teams to work on their own away from the watchful eye of a coach does not happen very often...get to know your team.

Start a practice session with some spontaneous problems.  Have all team members participate.  You can also practice a spontaneous problem at the end of a session.  The point is you should practice spontaneous problems all the time.

You should think about allowing the team members to have a snack break at some point in the session.  How you accomplish this is up to you.

Always read with the team and reread.  Be sure the team is clear on what is expected.

Organize with the team the approach to the problem.  Guide them to work on parts rather than the whole problem.  Small groups can work on the parts rather than the whole team working on every part.  If there are things to work on away from the practice, get the team to be specific on who and what will be done; get a commitment.  Notes should be taken and used as reminders as to what has been discussed and agreed upon.  You can have all team members take notes or have them choose someone and they can either give everyone a copy or have that person read it at the end of the session and at the start of the next session.

**IS THERE A MINIMUM COMPETENCY TO PARTICIPATE IN A TOURNAMENT?**

Short of not having a solution, there is not any specific requirements on the quality of what a team will be presenting.  Of course, it helps a team to be prepared.  It is important to gain experience and sometimes participants need to get to a tournament for this to be accomplished.  Basically, the team's efforts and work should not be put aside just because the solution which has been developed may not be a "winner".  First of all, you never can count on what a team can accomplish on the day of the tournament.  Second, there should be some reward for the work.  Third, how else will they learn?  Fourth, who knows what makes for a well-thought-of-solution until it is presented at the competition.  Fifth, you should reward the effort.