

Beginning Your Research and Conference Preparations

National Model United Nations (NMUN) conferences are held annually in New York City, Washington, DC, and in a rotating city outside the United States, strive to provide attending delegates with knowledge, skills, and experience that will be applicable both during and after their university experience. While NMUN prides itself on having a well-trained volunteer staff, superior resources, and assistance to delegates before and during each conference, the quality of these conferences is largely contingent on the preparation of the delegates.

The key to being a successful NMUN delegation is thorough preparation. There are six steps that should be taken before the Conference. It is our suggestion that the six main areas of study be addressed in the following order, as each area is progressively more in-depth than the one listed before:

- Research the structure and history of the United Nations
- Research your assigned Member State or non-governmental organization
- Research your committee
- Research your role in the committee
- Research the agenda topics beyond what is written in the background guides
- Prepare a position paper outlining your Member State's policies towards the agenda topics

Resources

NMUN provides two principal resources through the course of your preparation: the committee background guide (including annotated bibliographies) and the Topic Updates. All items will be posted on the NMUN Web site (www.nmun.org).

Both background guides and Updates should be only viewed as a stepping-stone to begin research. Individual research is indispensable. We recommend extensive use of academic books, scholarly journals, newspaper articles, and official documents or other literature provided by bodies associated with the United Nations. Access to many UN documents and resolutions is available on the UN treaty database via college or law school libraries or on the following Web sites:

United Nations: www.un.org

The Web site of the United Nations, which will allow delegates to access individual committee sites, links to specific issues on the UN's agenda and related information and data, links to missions of Member States to the UN, etc.

United Nations Bibliographic Information System: <http://unbisnet.un.org>

This source is one of the most basic and useful sources delegates should be using when preparing for the conference. It includes landmark UN documents, resolutions of UN bodies, meeting and voting records, and press releases. It provides a research guide to get acquainted with the UN documentation system; it allows delegates to research by organ or by main issues; in short, this is an excellent gateway to explore the work of the United Nations, the agenda items and individual Member States role in committee.

PLEASE NOTE: Delegates are expected to utilize these sources but still form their own ideas and suggestions and frame them in their own words. **Plagiarism will not be tolerated at any point.** Delegates should be aware that position papers and draft resolutions are read and evaluated by NMUN staff that has a profound knowledge of the topics and has prepared committee and agenda items for months. This enables our volunteers to identify and report incidences of plagiarism.

Understanding the History, Structure, and Operations of the United Nations

Thorough preparation must begin with an understanding of the United Nations itself. The following sections provide basic information on the bodies that are simulated at the NMUN Conference. Numerous sources detail the events leading up to the creation of the UN. In addition, make sure to review:

- *The Charter of the United Nations.*
- *United Nations Handbook*
- The UN Structure: how the various organs of the United Nations System (the Security Council, the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council, Specialized Agencies, and Secretariat) work together and the topic specialties of each.
- Past actions by the United Nations: the most significant resolutions and decisions by the UN and their impact. This list should include the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, the *Millennium Development Goals* and other UN conference documents.

The Structure of the United Nations System

The General Assembly (GA)

The General Assembly is the main deliberative organ of the UN system and is comprised of all Member States of the United Nations, each having one vote. The General Assembly addresses issues related to the maintenance of international peace and security (except when those issues are before the Security Council), the peaceful settlement of disputes, international law, and human rights. The GA also elects the non-permanent Members of the Security Council, elects the membership of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), appoints the Justices on the International Court of Justice, and chooses the Secretary-General of the United Nations.

The Security Council (SC)

The Security Council is the primary organ of the UN functioning to maintain international peace and security. It is comprised of fifteen Members: ten serve two-year terms and five are permanent Members with veto power (China, France, the Russian Federation, the United Kingdom, and the United States). The passage of any substantive decision by the Council requires an affirmative vote of any nine Member States, including affirmation or abstention by the permanent Members. If a permanent Member votes against a resolution before the Council, the resolution is vetoed. Unlike GA resolutions, which are recommendations, Security Council resolutions are binding on the Member States of the United Nations.

The Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)

The Economic and Social Council is the principal organ of the UN responsible for the economic and social work of the organization. ECOSOC has 54 Members, each elected by the GA to a three-year term (eighteen new Members are elected annually). ECOSOC also coordinates the efforts of various Specialized Agencies working concurrently with the United Nations.

The other principal organs of the UN are the Trusteeship Council (Chapter XIII, UN Charter), the International Court of Justice (Chapter XIV UN Charter), and the United Nations Secretariat (Chapter XV UN Charter). Delegates are strongly advised to research these organs. Though they are not as such part of the NMUN conference, these organs and their work are crucial to many of the agenda items under discussion.

Specialized Agencies, Programmes, and Funds

Specialized Agencies, Programmes, and Funds are a network of semi-autonomous organizations that are linked with the United Nations by special agreements through the coordinating machinery of ECOSOC. Programmes and Funds work on specific issues coordinated by the ECOSOC. Specialized Agencies are part of the UN system, but are autonomous organizations, with independent constitutions or charters, membership, and rules of procedure and budgets.

Inter-Governmental Organizations (IGOs)

Inter-Governmental Organizations are autonomous organizations, primarily regional in orientation and focus. Although IGOs function independently of the UN, they discuss many of the same issues, cooperate with UN organizations and implement UN policies. Chapter VIII of the *UN Charter* specifically addresses arrangements between the UN, Member States, and regional agencies.

Researching Your State or Non-Governmental Organization

Once you have familiarized yourself with the structure, history, and functions of the UN system, the next step should be researching your assigned country. Begin doing this immediately after receiving your assignment. If you have been assigned a country, you may wish to begin by researching its political structure, economic condition, religion(s), history, and culture. Since all of these factors shape a State's foreign policy, familiarity with these areas will assist you in forming a consistent foreign policy. Research the problems within your State regarding ethnic and religious minorities, suppression of dissent, division of wealth, freedom of the press, development, health care, education, poverty, the environment, human rights, etc. Also, do not overlook the more subtle aspects of your State's domestic and foreign policies.

Researching a non-governmental organization (NGO) is very similar to researching a state. If you have been assigned an NGO, you may wish to begin by researching its history, mission, structure, funding, values, purposes, and goals. Since all of these factors shape the way an NGO will interact with Member States, familiarity with these areas will assist you in forming a consistent approach to the issues in hand and a consistent style of interaction. Based on your research, you will decide how your assigned NGO will approach each topic, and the recommendations you will make for

potential solutions. This includes identifying blocs of countries and other NGOs that may share the same perspectives and priorities and collaborate with you in committee sessions.

You may choose to establish contact with the permanent mission to the UN of your assigned country or with your NGO. Obtaining information directly from these sources will often prove very useful in forming a cohesive policy and diplomatic style. Experience has shown that these offices are often very eager to assist you, however please bear in mind that many of these offices run on very limited budgets and have a limited number of staff members. Before contacting any permanent mission, you should have a prepared list of any documents you might need or the specific areas in which you are interested, and you should be prepared to offer to pay for any necessary photocopies and postage. NMUN provides a time slot at the beginning of the conference when delegations are invited to schedule these mission briefings.

As a representative of the NGO or State to which you have been assigned, you will be expected to work within the historical confines of your NGO or country's foreign policy at the UN.

Researching Your Committee

Each delegate should have a thorough understanding of his or her committee. Although the committee background guide provides a good introduction to your particular committee and its history, it represents only the basis for the rest of your research. Please also consult the Rules of Procedure in your background guide for a description of the working methods of your committee.

Be sure that you understand your committee thoroughly prior to arriving at NMUN, including its history, mandate and purpose, jurisdiction, goals for the future, function within the UN system, and voting procedures. Most of the committees simulated at NMUN operate their own Web sites that are regularly updated. Depending on your committee, you may find books or scholarly articles that describe its history in considerable depth. Important past decisions or resolutions of your committee often shed important light on its powers, the types of actions it takes, and the methods by which it acts.

Member States

Each committee, aside from judicial or expert bodies, is made up of a number of Member States. These are the full members of the organization. All Member States may sponsor working papers and have full voting rights within the organization.¹ Member States act through their representatives within a body's meetings in order to discuss the matters on the agenda and make progress toward solving them on a cooperative international level. The majority of delegates will be serving as representatives of their State's government or political participants. These delegates are expected to understand the foreign policies of their individual governments and to act within those policies during the Conference. The most critical part of having a successful delegate experience

¹ In case the membership rights of a country have been partly or fully withdrawn in reality, please contact the Directors-General. These situations will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis.

at the NMUN Conference is active participation in committee sessions. This includes utilizing the rules of procedure, speaking in formal debate, and most importantly, contributing during caucus sessions.

Observers

Most committees within the UN system maintain observers. Observers are States or international bodies that participate in the negotiations but may not vote on substantive organization matters, such as the approval of reports or resolutions. Observers are afforded public speaking time and caucus participation, and may serve as signatories on working papers but may not sponsor them. Observers often provide valuable insight from organizations that are not political in nature or from States in other areas of the world and often prove vital to the final work of the organization. Observers are expected to fully contribute to the committee's substantive development and are eligible for awards on the same basis as Member States or experts.

Independent Experts

In judicial committees, delegates serve as independent experts in the field, not political representatives of their Member State. Experts are often needed to properly address complex problems and make informed recommendations to UN organs and Member States. It is critical that delegates representing experts understand the complex nature of their role.

Experts are expected to act primarily as individual experts in the field, and their country designation only provides the context of their background. The background of each expert will vary with the country they are from, and as in most cases the nomination of experts is left to States; experts' positions may often correspond, but not necessarily be identical to the position of their nominating States. Additionally, experts are usually quite familiar with the relevant problems faced by their country of origin. As the role of experts varies slightly from committee to committee, delegates assigned as experts should read the relevant portions of their committee background guide and should study both the nominating process for members of their committee and the past actions of experts in their committee in order to understand the degree of freedom they possess from their nominating States.

Non-Governmental Organizations

NMUN has occasionally integrated the presence of NGOs into committees at the Conference. It is an ongoing project that improves the educational quality of the simulation and mirrors developments in the UN itself, where NGOs are gaining both visibility and respect as a resource for program design and implementation. NGO delegations maintain all of the privileges accorded to traditional observer delegations, and are required to exhibit the same level of preparedness. NGO delegations are eligible for awards, based on the same criteria as other delegations, and may select head delegates to attend the Head Delegate Meetings each night. NGO representatives are also required to submit position papers reflecting the perspectives and priorities of their assigned NGO on the agenda topics at hand.

NGOs are recognized in Article 71 of the *UN Charter* as consultative bodies in relationship to ECOSOC. These organizations also maintain a close working relationship with almost all ECOSOC Funds and Programs, as well as many of the

Specialized Agencies. In this role, NGOs are an invaluable resource to the UN system providing information on political, economic, social, humanitarian, and cultural developments in all parts of the world, and introducing different voices to debate among Member States. Their recommendations may address potential solutions to far-reaching global issues, speak to specific country or regional needs, or call attention to an emerging crisis. The sweeping mandate of ECOSOC is reflected in the exhaustive activities of NGOs. NGO delegates maintain the following privileges in each committee to which they are assigned:

- the right to make any procedural motion;
- the right to vote on all procedural motions;
- the right to speak before all assigned committees; and
- the right to act as a signatory on working papers.

In order to ensure a positive educational experience for all delegates, these rights and privileges may not exactly reflect those granted by ECOSOC or by the body in which the NGO is being represented. Any alterations made by the Directors-General gave due consideration to existing realities and the need to provide a learning environment that encourages active participation.

State delegates are fully expected to work with NGO delegates in the spirit of collaboration upon which the UN was founded. The recommendations of NGO delegates maintain the same validity as those of Member States, and it is incumbent upon country delegates to ensure that those perspectives are recognized. The exclusion of NGOs from committee work simply because they do not have substantive voting rights is both unrealistic and unprofessional. In almost all cases, actions denigrating the participation of NGOs will be considered extraordinarily out of character.

Researching Your Agenda Topics

The majority of your preparation time for the Conference will be spent researching your actual committee topics.

Each delegate should understand the topics on his or her committee's agenda. The first resource to consult is the committee background guide (including the footnotes and bibliography); however, this guide should not be the sole source of research. Search for speeches made by your country on the topic and also important resolutions discussed and passed in your committee. Also, you may contact the headquarters of your committee and request information on your specific topics.

While reading the background guide, develop answers to the following basic questions:

- When considering each topic, what essential questions are being raised?
- In your opinion as a diplomat, why are these issues important?
- Give specific reasons why you believe these issues remain unresolved.
- What important documents are essential to your research?
- What actions have various international bodies taken in the past regarding these

issues?

- What actions are they currently taking, or what committees exist to address them?
- What should be done from the perspective of your State to resolve the issues?

Researching a topic is a complex process which calls for determining what various bodies within and related to the UN system have done previously to address the matter, what is currently in place, and what is planned for the future. It is also important to examine the successes and the failures, and to attempt to determine why those approaches have succeeded or failed.

Preparing for committee session at the NMUN also includes identifying blocs of States that may share the same perspectives and priorities and collaborate with you in committee sessions (this is also an important task for NGOs). You should try to answer the following questions:

- Are there other States or other organizations that share your view?
- What States or other organizations are opposed to your view?
- Which Member States are in the same voting bloc as your assigned State?
- Is your assigned State affiliated with any regional organizations?

Position Papers

Please pay careful attention to the following guidelines when drafting and submitting your position papers. **Only those delegations that follow the outlined guidelines will be eligible for position paper awards.** Please follow these guidelines carefully when submitting your work to the Secretariat. Each topic should be addressed briefly in a succinct policy statement representing the relevant views of your assigned country, NGO, or expert role. You should also include recommendations for action to be taken by your committee. All delegations meeting the following criteria will be judged by the same method and equally considered for position paper awards.

All papers must be typed and formatted according to the specifications below will ensure this:

- Length must **not** exceed one double-sided page. Margins on the sides, top and bottom are to be 1 inch.
- The text of the body **must** be between 10 pt. and 12 pt. font, Times New Roman.
- Country/NGO name, School name and committee name clearly labeled on the first page.
- Agenda topics clearly labeled in separate sections.
- National symbols (headers, flags, etc.) are deemed inappropriate for NMUN.

Please see the attached Appendices to learn about the requirements for submission for each NMUN conference.

Learning the Rules of Procedure

Familiarizing yourself with the NMUN Rules of Procedure is another vital part of your preparation. NMUN has developed a set of comprehensive rules for committee proceedings, which resemble those used by the United Nations or other appropriate international bodies as closely as possible in the context of a simulation. Please be aware that the NMUN rules of procedure may differ drastically from the rules used by other conferences, and NMUN rules vary between committees within the same conference. The NMUN Rules of Procedure are discussed in a narrative fashion and short guide later in this manual. The official NMUN Rules of Procedure for your committee are presented in the background guide for your committee.

Please make sure to carefully read both the rules of procedure in the background guide as well as the committee information in the background guide update as rules between committees do vary substantially.

Practicing Public Speaking

You should practice public speaking and presentation of policy statements prior to your arrival at the conference. Your school should organize several practice simulations to improve speaking ability and to practice the rules of procedure. Please consult the rules of procedure section of this manual for a simulation script, which has been designed to provide an introduction to the rules of procedure and the rhetoric of committee proceedings.

Practicing Diplomacy

Delegates to the United Nations and other international bodies treat one another with the utmost objectivity and respect. While two States may have political difficulties with one another at any given time, the meeting of your NMUN committee is not a time to carry these out unless that conflict is specifically relevant to the topic at hand. Even then, delegates are expected to act with the utmost of decorum and in a professional manner befitting their status as a diplomat. You may not wish to work with delegations with whom you have conflicts while in committee, but you must maintain the proper level respect for your fellow diplomats. Be sure that you understand this distinction prior to arriving at the Conference.