

Div.2 Remote Model Evaluation

This guideline is based on an Email from Frank Koch, NMRA AP Manager on remote model judging.

Judging is certainly more challenging during COVID, but most NMRA Divisions are using some form of Distant Evaluation that has historically been used to serve our members who geographically live far away from a population center and find it difficult to have in person evaluations. The NMRA has been doing this for about five years in some of our more remote areas like the far reaches of Canada, Alaska, Montana, Nebraska, and Mexico.

The approach takes one of several forms:

1. A team visits the home and, while practicing social distancing and other safe processes, does an in person evaluation either in the home or on a patio or on a car hood or some other safer environment. Even in the home, limit the number of people and stay apart. (Ex: Anchorage from Seattle, Dallas to Mexico City, and the Maritime Provinces of Canada to New York).
2. Teams of evaluators will assemble in a large open central space and evaluate a whole bunch of models at once like in a contest. Frank has done this successfully as he has access to a very large hall where it can be done while maintaining safe conditions.
3. Using video or photographs and a virtual evaluation. This works well for eight of the certificates. Four certificates - Prototype Models, Motive Power, Cars, and Structures - can be evaluated via videos or ZOOM/GoToMeeting or other interactive means with several caveats. All the documentation needs to be prepared by the modeler and forwarded to the evaluators before the evaluation. The "video" is VERY subject to the skill and quality of the submitter's videography. We have drawn several conclusions after about five years of testing:

The procedure is fairly consistent if the model scores very high or very low - clearly Merit or clearly not Merit. It lacks consistency in the range of 80-95 points, the critical area for determining a Merit Award. For models in this range, we typically require some sort of in person evaluation to quantify the score and determine if the model is of Merit quality. The reality is that most folks do not have the skills or equipment (lighting, focus, general appearance) to allow a good evaluation via video alone.

There have been models go both ways in the MCR Region. Some scored much higher in person and some went the other way. There is no substitute for in person evaluations in most cases. If you see a model that is clearly over 95 points or one that is clearly under 80 points, the answer is clear. The middle ground is more difficult.

For Civil, Scenery, and Electrical, video or photographs plus the documentation works fine. for Civil, a video showing a powered locomotive traversing the routes is sufficient with the other documentation. Since Scenery requires photos anyway, and the evaluation is more qualitative and not really quantitative, it can be done virtually.

The most interesting example so far of "distant evaluation" was an event in a large hall (and one in a parking lot) where everyone signed up in advance, put their models in a specific area, then backed off to be safely away. The evaluators had previewed the documentation, the evaluations took place, and the evaluators could ask questions of the distant modelers. It worked well.

Please contact the AP Committee if there is an interest in remote Judging.

Dennis Vaccaro - Chair MCR Div.2 AP