

Chief Routesetting A USA Climbing Comp

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in [CWA Blog](#)



If you're pursuing your USAC Routesetter certifications, chances are, there will come a day where you are offered a chiefting position in a host facility you've not previously worked (or even climbed) at.

While some chiefs meet this opportunity with the excitement of the unknown, most also feel a sense of anxiety or dread at all of the possibilities of what can go wrong.

Article At A Glance

- **Writer:** Hayley Moran, who has written for the CWA on and off for the last three years. A routesetter by trade, HayMo also writes about management and women's issues.
- **Who Should Read:** This article is for routesetters and those curious about the chiefting process for USAC-sanctioned competitions.
- **What Will You Learn:** The pitfalls, potholes and clear pathways leading to a successful chiefting position with USAC.
- **Tie-Ins, Resources, or Further Reading:** For routesetters wanting to show off their skills, we [offer this Routesetting Resume, also from Hayley.](#)

Fortunately, the effort and thoughtfulness you put into your pre-planning with the host facility can directly impact the operational outcomes of the competition.

This year, with Siege Climbing, our team worked with two new facilities for our competition

series and one new host facility for USAC bouldering regionals. Experiences in all three gyms gave us building blocks to better tweak our planning and organization for the next. Here are four key takeaways to set up your event with as much success as possible on the forefront.

Know & Understand your Host Agreement

One of the most obvious, but often skimmed-over, pieces of information you can value is your host agreement.

While chief routesetters should understand the fine details of planning an event — this is often not the case with gym owners or general managers (whom you inevitably have to be aligned with).

For USAC, this agreement also ensures that all plans are aligned with USAC regulations and should give you a USAC point person to contact with any issues. For gyms hosting their very first USAC event - I cannot stress enough how important it is for you to go over every line with all stakeholders before the comp week starts.

This can, and will, avoid opportunities for miscommunication, expectations not being met, etc. This document also serves to protect you in case there is a problem while setting at the facility.

Set up a Meeting with Comp Personnel

The host facility staff likely already has a few internal meetings planned before comp week. See if you can join one of them virtually — especially if they are going over comp day work and time delegations

While in some regions regional coordinators (RCs) are responsible for things like registration tables, cameras, timers, etc., some gyms may be setting up the space themselves. Ensuring that the host facility has designated enough time for set-up and has the actual resources (chairs, speakers, etc.) is paramount.

READ ALSO: [So You Want To Host a USAC Comp?](#)

When climbers, parents, or coaches have questions about administrative or operational items, it's important to know who oversees the specific items instead of just sending participants to the front desk to ask again. When the host gym staff feels that you are an approachable chief - they are much more likely to come to you when something needs attention instead of letting the issue get bigger.

Set Expectations, but Be Comfortable with Pivoting

Setting for comps can be unpredictable and many things can impact the setting schedule. Someone can get hurt, something can happen to the gym, and frankly, things just take way longer than expected to achieve.

To keep a positive relationship with the host in the future, try your best to stick to the agreed-upon schedule and at the very least communicate with the owner or general manager as soon as something changes to keep them in the loop.

This also goes for budgeting resources and routesetters. Has the facility made a Gaff tape order? Fresh set screws? Will the gym be stripped already or do you need to add hold removal to the schedule? Is there someone on staff washing holds or will it need to be a routesetter? **These are just some of the planning questions that can easily be hammered out in a virtual call** to prevent any delays when the setting week begins.

But if you show up for comp week and these items are not done or something is wrong — know how to pivot to solve the issue efficiently and gracefully. As for routesetters, be realistic with the host facility about how many you need, what accommodations your team needs (lodging, travel, etc.), and how much this will cost the gym.

Some routesetters have likely inquired to the host facility directly about setting the event - make sure to have the general manager forward those inquiries to you before making final decisions. One advantage for the host facility in agreeing to an event is that their in-house routesetting crew gets more event experience. As chief, you have two primary roles with the in-house routesetting crew. Evaluate their experience in a very honest way, and communicate if the routesetter will be primarily in a mentee role or a full-time routesetter role for the week.

Request and Provide Feedback

The only way to get a clear understanding of how the performances of both you as chief and the gym as host went is to request a post-comp debrief.

While you will know almost immediately how the sets performed based on the USAC scoring, the results are a small fraction of what you should be reflecting on as your role of chief. How does the GM think the event went? The RCs? The parents? What could you have done differently, or better, to prepare the gym?

Want to Learn More About Chiefing?

Read our interview with IFSC Head Routesetter Jamie Cassidy with advice for commercial routesetters.

If there were problems, having a debrief allows everyone to state their perspective and be heard. When there is no debrief, you are missing an opportunity to give your perspective and you may not be asked to chief again simply due to a miscommunication that could have easily been discussed post-comp.

At the end of the day the only thing the chief routesetter is ultimately responsible for may be the setting on the wall. Anyone with experience in a competition setting knows that **when a comp goes poorly, everyone remembers who was chief.**

Even when something is out of your control (overcrowding, poorly trained judges, etc.) the blame always ends up falling on who was chief routesetter. While that blame is the risk that every chief routesetter is usually willing to take at this level, knowing how to better plan on the front end to prevent these issues plays in everyone's favor.

This may mean prioritizing organization over actual routesetting for the week. This might mean you as chief set fewer routes or maybe don't set at all. When you agree to chief, you are responsible for the environment of the event as a whole. If you have the mindset of "this is not my problem, I'm just here to routeset" - you should likely re-evaluate what the definition of chief is for USA Climbing.

📄 Download A Routesetting Resume Template

Hoping to show your skills to one-day chief, or just document your accomplishments for your trade? Download our free template, also inspired by Hayley.

About the Author



Hayley Moran is the Head Routesetter at [The Crag](#) in Nashville, Tennessee. She has a Master's Degree in Child and Family Studies and previously worked in the field of public health with a focus on health equity. She uses those experiences to help guide her work in the climbing industry by creating events and discussions that promote diversity, equity, and inclusion through the sport of rock climbing. When she is not on the wall, you can find Hayley baking in the kitchen, designing silly sweatshirts, or hanging out with her cat, Goblin.

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